



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Sylvia Spalding (808) 522-5341 or 522-8220

Fishery Managers Recommend Emergency Seasonal Closure of Main Hawaiian Islands Bottomfish

HONOLULU (16 March 2007) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council yesterday in Honolulu agreed to a five-month seasonal closure from May 1 through September 30, 2007, in federal and state waters for onaga, ehu, gindai, opakapaka, kalekale, lehi and hapuupuu (seven deepwater bottomfish species) harvested around the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI). The seasonal closure will be implemented by Federal emergency rulemaking and State of Hawaii expedited rulemaking. The closure will apply to both recreational and commercial fishermen.

The seasonal closure replaces the Council's recommendations made last year that would have closed bottomfish grounds in federal waters (beyond 3 miles) at Penguin and Middle Banks in order to reduce fishing related mortality of bottomfish by 15 percent. A new stock assessment by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) says that the local stock is now at risk unless fishing-related mortality is reduced by 24 percent. The five-month closure is expected to reach this goal, based on commercial catch records.

The Council also voted on a set of additional management measures, which will be analyzed by the Council staff for final Council consideration in June 2007. These additional measures would be implemented partially in 2007 and partially in 2008 and beyond.

The additional management measures that would be implemented in 2007 include the following:

For commercial bottomfish fisheries:

- A total allowable catch (TAC) limit based on commercial catch data (with the fishing year to start on Oct. 1, 2007) based on reducing commercial fishing mortality by 24% relative to 2004 commercial fishing mortality. The TAC would apply to MHI deep-7 bottomfish species.
- The existing DAR commercial marine license and reporting system modified so that harvest locations are reported by longitude and latitude to the nearest minute or one (1) nautical mile and catch reports are submitted on a per trip basis. Currently, catch locations are referenced to large grids and reports are submitted on a monthly basis.
- The DAR seek implementation of a seafood dealer licensing program to supplement the seafood dealer reporting program and modification of the dealer reporting program to allow for tracking bottomfish from origin/source to retailer.

--- more ---

Overfishing of Main Hawaiian Islands Bottomfish 2-2-2-2-2

For recreational bottomfish fisheries:

- A Federal recreational permit program to be implemented by NMFS.
- The State of Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) to seek modification of its recreational bag limits to include all of the deep 7 species (currently only for onaga and ehu).

For recreational and commercial bottomfish fisheries:

- Closure of both sectors of the fisheries once the TAC based on the catch reports by the commercial sector is reached.
- Reconvening of the Council's bottomfish working group to facilitate coordination of the new bottomfish management measures and related scientific monitoring and enforcement activities.
- The Council, State, NMFS and US Coast Guard to conduct a comprehensive education and outreach program in coordination with the implementation of the new permit and reporting programs, fishing restrictions and TAC.

The management measures that would be implemented in 2008 and beyond would include the following:

- A Federal recreational trip reporting program no later than Feb. 15, 2008. Recreational trip report forms would be consistent with commercial catch reporting forms (lat/long, per trip basis) and filed after each trip.
- The five-month emergency seasonal closure to be replaced by a four-month seasonal closure in federal and state waters for onaga, ehu, gindai, opakapaka, kalekale, lehi and hapuupuu harvested around the MHI from May 1 through Aug. 31 in 2008.
- A revised TAC limit (based on both commercial and recreational catch data) established annually beginning in 2008 (with the fishing year to start on September 1 annually). The NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, in consultation with Council advisory bodies, will calculate a TAC for consideration by May 30 each year for Council consideration. The TAC will apply to MHI deep-7 bottomfish species. Once the TAC is reached, all fishing for deep-7 bottomfish species will cease.
- Once the recreational bottomfish fishery is managed under a TAC, the recreational catch limits will be removed.

--- more ---

Overfishing of Main Hawaiian Islands Bottomfish 3-3-3-3-3

- A separate recreational TAC will be developed in the future based on information collected through the new recreational permit and reporting program.

The Council yesterday also voted to reduce the geographic boundary of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) bottomfish fishery limited access programs from 200 miles offshore to 50 miles offshore to be consistent with the outer boundary of the NWHI Marine National Monument.

The Council reconvenes today to consider pelagic fishing issues, including modifying the Hawaii swordfish effort limit, the Guam longline area closure and a framework for a pelagic TAC. The public is invited to participate and provide public comment.

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) is the policy-making organization for fisheries management in federal waters (generally 3-200 miles offshore) of Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and other U.S. Pacific Islands. Recommendations approved by the Council are forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for approval. For more information and full agendas of the meetings, visit www.wpcouncil.org or contact the Council at (808) 522-8220 or at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov.

WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Appointed by Secretary of Commerce

- AMERICAN SAMOA: VICE CHAIR Frank W. McCoy Sr. (longline operator) and Stephen Haleck (Samoa High Talking Chief)
- GUAM: VICE CHAIR Manuel Duenas (Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association)
- HAWAII: CHAIR Sean Martin (Pacific Ocean Producers), VICE CHAIR Edwin Ebisui (recreational fishermen), Rick Gaffney (yacht broker), Frederick Duerr (resort and hotel consultant)
- CNMI: Benigno Sablan (cultural practitioner)

Designated State Officials

- Ray Tulafono (American Samoa Dept. of Marine & Wildlife Resources)
- VICE CHAIR Ignacio Dela Cruz (CNMI Dept. of Land & Natural Resources)
- Adrienne Loerzel (Office of the Governor of Guam)
- Peter Young (Hawaii Dept. of Land & Natural Resources)

National Marine Fisheries Service Regional Administrator

- Bill Robinson (Pacific Islands Regional Office)

NON-VOTING COUNCIL MEMBERS

- Bill Gibbons-Fly (US Dept. of State)
- Jerry Leinecke (US Fish & Wildlife Services)
- RAdm. Sally Brice-O'Hara (US Coast Guard 14th District)