



New Measures Proposed for Longline, Purse Seine and Other US Pacific Pelagic Fisheries

HONOLULU (11 October 2007) The Western Pacific Regional Management Council yesterday in Honolulu voted on a suite of measures regarding the management of fisheries targeting swordfish, tuna and other pelagic (open-ocean) species in offshore waters surrounding Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). Council decisions follow a two-meeting process. Final decisions are forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for approval.

Regarding the Hawaii-based longline fishery, the Council voted to develop a draft supplemental environmental impact statement and fishery management plan amendment that will analyze and possibly modify measures regulating the use of shallow sets to target swordfish. The Council plans to take full action on this topic when it meets in March 2008. Issues to be fully analyzed include

- The effort limit for this fishery, which is currently 2,120 sets annually for the entire fleet;
- The current measure that requires permit holders in this limited entry fishery to apply each year for certificates to allow them to catch swordfish. Each certificate is equal to one set, and the 2,120 total sets are equally divided among the applicants; and
- Time and/or area closures for the fishery.

The Council recommends continuance of measures requiring observers on all swordfish vessels and also caps on interactions between the fishery and loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles. However, it recommends that the caps be based on a multi-year incidental take statement, as an annual take statement does not account for annual variations in turtle interactions.

According to the Hawaii Longline Association, effort limits and certificates are unnecessary and redundant because the North Pacific swordfish stock is healthy and sea turtles that are incidentally caught by the fishery are protected through regulations that cap the number of turtles that the fishery can hook, tangle or otherwise interact with each year. These caps are 16 leatherback or 17 loggerhead turtles, whichever comes first. Interactions in this Hawaii-based fishery infrequently result in sea turtle mortality.

In related matters, the Council recommended that Council staff and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) jointly conduct a workshop of sea turtle experts to consider nesting beach conservation, interaction rates, post hooking mortality rates, genetics, population modeling and other related information to facilitate discussion and information exchange on sea turtle populations that interact with the Hawaii-based shallow-set longline fishery. The Council also recommended that its Turtle Advisory Committee consider a comprehensive genetics study of the nesting population structure of the Japanese loggerhead stock. Loggerhead turtles that are born in Japan migrate to the Pacific coast of the Americas. Juvenile loggerheads interact with the Hawaii-based fisheries in the open ocean during these migrations.

The Council also voted yesterday on the following pelagic fishery management issues:

Mariana Archipelago

- To establish a 30-nautical mile longline closed area around the CNMI. While different than the existing 50-nm longline closure around neighboring Guam, the decision takes into account an ongoing initiative to establish a domestic longline fishery in CNMI.

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- To prohibit purse seine fishing in the entire US exclusive economic zone, extending to 200 miles from shore, around the Mariana Archipelago (CNMI and Guam). While this fishery has no recorded history in the Mariana Archipelago, the fishery has been expanding in the Pacific. It was noted that it would take a longline vessel 10 years to take the amount of fish that a purse seine vessel takes in one landing.

American Samoa Archipelago

- To revitalize the American Samoa limited entry longline fishery, which has been experiencing a decline, by
 - Developing a framework amendment to reopen the permit application process. Currently less than half of the 60 permits are being utilized;
 - Eliminating the minimum landing requirements for all vessel size classes. Under current requirements, about 80 percent of the permits would expire in 2008;
 - Studying the legality of transferring American Samoa longline limited entry permits to Samoan nationals; and
 - Studying seasonal movement patterns and residence times of managed pelagic species in the American Samoa longline fishery.
- To address gear conflicts, the Council
 - Reiterated its previous recommendation that American Samoa deploy new fish aggregation devices (FADs) for the exclusive use of non longline pelagic vessels. It was noted that each FAD costs about \$7,000 and that funding in American Samoa is limited; and
 - Recommended that Council staff prepare a draft amendment for a purse seine closure in American Samoa that considers retention of the current 50 nm closure for any vessel more than 50 feet in length and a purse seine closure that extends to 75 nm from shore.

Hawaii Archipelago

- The Council recommended that Council staff begin developing a limited entry program for Hawaii's commercial offshore pelagic fishery employing handlines and other hook and line gear.

The Council reconvened today to address issues regarding insular fisheries (e.g., coral reef, bottomfish, precious coral and crustacean) and indigenous fishery rights in offshore waters of the US Pacific islands. The Council will conclude its four-day meeting tomorrow.

The Council manages fisheries in offshore waters surrounding Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and the US Pacific remote island areas. The Council consists of eight members recommended by their respective governors and appointed by the Secretary of Commerce, four designated State officials and four designated federal officials. They include Stephen Haleck, William Sword and Ray Tulafono of American Samoa; Manuel Duenas and Alberto Lamorena of Guam; Frederick Duerr, Myrick Rick Gaffney, Sean Martin, Peter Young and Laura Thielen of Hawaii; and Benigno Sablan and Dr. Ignacio Dela Cruz of CNMI; Bill Robinson of NMFS; Bill Gibbons-Fly (US Department of State), Jerry Leinecke (US Fish & Wildlife Service), and RADM Sally Brice-O'Hara (US Coast Guard). For more information, contact the Council at www.wpcouncil.org, 808 522-8220 or info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov.