

Annual Catch Limits to Be Implemented in the US Pacific Islands

HONOLULU (12 October 2007) The Western Pacific Regional Management Council yesterday in Honolulu voted to proceed with a variety of actions regarding its overall program and the Western Pacific Community Development Program (CDP), which facilitates participation of indigenous communities in US Pacific island fisheries.

One major programmatic change regards the implementation of annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures for resources under the Council's authority and in accordance with any US international obligations that may apply. The change is mandated by the recently reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council noted that consistent management across local and federal waters is desirable where local authorities share management of a resource. It was noted that the State of Hawaii currently does not have authority to set ACLs or quotas in state waters but is developing proposed legislation to allow the State to mirror federal ACLs as they are established.

The Council recommended that all species it manages be ranked by a risk assessment process and the highest-risk species be prioritized for earliest ACL development. The Council further recommended that the risk assessment process be initiated by the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center as soon as possible in cooperation with the Council's Scientific and Statistics Committee and that striped marlin be assessed first.

In prioritizing species to be assessed, the Council recommended that economic considerations be taken into account, but cautioned against assuming that low value necessarily equates to reduced vulnerability. The cultural and economic importance of the species to local and/or regional markets and non-market fish distribution channels should also be considered.

Other programmatic initiatives recommended by the Council include the following, among others:

- To explore video monitoring as a potentially inexpensive alternative to observers for some fisheries. For example, observers for the Hawaii and American Samoa-based longline fishery cost approximately \$400 per day per vessel, excluding costs associated with training and reimbursing vessels for meals. The observer programs for fisheries in the US Pacific Islands, including the cost for staff to analyze data, account for about \$6.6 million annually.
- To develop a Western Pacific Recreational Fishery Data Collection Plan that includes a Hawaii-based statistician; a project that collects data from fishermen dockside during the night, evening and/or sunrise (times that are not sampled under the existing survey program); the use of existing registry systems where feasible to address the nationally required registration of saltwater anglers; improved creel survey for American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands; an improved random digit dialing telephone survey, e.g., conducting it from Hawaii instead of the US mainland; and a project to study the accuracy of fishermen estimating the weight of their catches, especially for large species.

Regarding the Western Pacific CDP, the Council recommended that staff draft a regulatory framework amendment, for Council review and approval at its next meeting in March 2008, which considers options for receiving, reviewing, approving and monitoring CDP proposals.

The Council concludes its four-day meeting today and will address items regarding pelagic and international fisheries, program planning and administrative and budget matters.

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. For more information, contact the Council at www.wpcouncil.org, info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or 808 522-8220.