



Federal Fishery Managers Reaffirm Purse Seine Closures for US Pacific Islands

HONOLULU (15 April 2008) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council yesterday in Honolulu upheld its vote made last month to close federal waters around American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands (CNMI) to purse seine fishing. This fishery method uses large nets to target skipjack tuna to be processed as canned tuna. Skipjack tuna is also caught by subsistence fishermen who troll using hook and line. The closure addresses potential user conflicts of this resource. The closure around American Samoa would span 3 to 75 miles offshore. The closure around Guam and CNMI would include all federal waters out to 200 miles offshore. The Council also voted to ban longline fishing in federal waters out to 30 miles from shore surrounding CNMI. Longline fishing is already banned out to 50 miles or more around Guam and Hawaii, and pelagic fishing by vessels larger than 50 feet is banned out to 50 miles from shore around American Samoa. Manny Duenas, Council member from Guam, recused himself from the longline vote. Decisions made by the Council are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval.

The Council also reviewed and upheld its prior vote to reopen the permit application period for the limited entry American Samoa longline fishery for one year. The decision was based primarily on the low number of eligible fishermen who applied during the initial enrollment period and the high number of small boat fishermen who will lose their permits due to existing minimum landing requirements. Also considered were a handful of fishermen who missed the initial application period deadline and the current economic concerns in American Samoa. Stephen Haleck, Council member from American Samoa, voluntarily recused himself from the vote.

The Council additionally reviewed and recast ballots on management of the Hawaii longline fishery for swordfish. In making its decision, the Council considered the healthy status of the Pacific swordfish stock. The Council upheld its March decision to remove the current annual effort limit on number of allowable sets and to modify the allowable annual sea turtle interactions to 46 loggerheads and 19 leatherbacks. Interactions refer to entanglement or hooking and not to mortality. Removal of the effort limit would also discontinue the current set certificate regime by which the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) keeps track of the cumulative effort total in the fishery to ensure that the current set limit is not exceeded. As with the current management regime the fishery would continue to be subject to 100 percent observer coverage and would close for the remainder of the calendar year if the sea turtle cap is met for either species. The recommended sea turtle interaction caps will be subject to further Council, agency, scientific and public review, and potential modification, before being finalized. Council Chair Sean Martin recused himself from the vote.

The Council also reviewed but did not revote on non-regulatory action items including squid permits, main Hawaiian Islands bottomfish risk analysis, annual catch limits and the Community Development Program.

Yesterday's meeting was held to ensure that the public had adequate notice and opportunity to comment on the regulatory items due to a bureaucratic error by NMFS resulting in the late appearance of the March meeting notice in the *Federal Register*. For more information on the Council meeting including a complete agenda and synopsis of the action items, please go to www.wpcouncil.org/meetings or contact the Council by telephone at 808 522-8220, fax 808 522-8226 or email info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov.

The Council is the policy-making agency for fisheries management in federal waters surrounding the State of Hawaii, Territory of American Samoa, Territory of Guam, Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands and the US Pacific remote island areas. Current Council members include Designated state officials: Ignacio Dela Cruz, CNMI Department of Land & Natural Resources; Alberto Lamorena, Guam Bureau of Statistics and Plans; Laura Thielen, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; and Ray Tulafono, American Samoa Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources. Designated federal officials: Bill Robinson, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Jerry Leinecke, U.S. Fish and Wildlife; RAdm Sally Brice-O'Hara, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; and Bill Gibbons-Fly, U.S. Department of State. Appointed by the Secretary of Commerce from nominees selected by Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa and CNMI governors: William Sword, recreational fisherman/civil engineer/manager (American Samoa); Stephen Haleck, business owner (hotel and gas station) (American Samoa) (Vice Chair); Manuel Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (Vice Chair); Frederick Duerr, resort & hotel consultant (Hawaii) (Vice Chair); Peter Young, environmental consultant (Hawaii); Rick Gaffney, boat dealer and ocean recreation consultant (Hawaii); Sean Martin, Pacific Ocean Producers (Hawaii) (Chair); and Benigno Sablan, cultural practitioner (CNMI) (Vice Chair).

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