



Scientists' Recommendations for US Pacific Island Offshore Fisheries Ready for Management Review

HONOLULU (13 June 2008) The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), which advises the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, concluded its three-day meeting in Honolulu yesterday with a variety of recommendations for commercial and non-commercial fisheries in offshore waters of the U.S. Pacific Islands. These recommendations will be considered by the Council when it convenes June 16 to 19, 2008, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu. Decisions made by the Council are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval. Among the key recommendations made by the SSC are the following:

Establishment of annual catch limits (ACLs) to prevent overfishing as mandated by the 2007 reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

- Implement ACLs immediately for all species/species groups with estimated maximum sustainable yield (MSY) values except for those species/species groups managed under international regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs). Currently, only bottomfish falls within this category. MSY is also known for tuna, but it along with billfish, mahimahi, ono and other tuna-like species are managed by RFMOs.
- For all other species/species groups, establish ACLs on a priority basis according to their risk of overfishing.
- Implement federal permitting and reporting requirements for all managed fisheries in order to reduce scientific and management uncertainty.
- The SSC noted that ACLs are an expensive approach as each catch limit must be determined annually and catches must be monitored on a near real-time basis. The scientists also expressed concern that needed biomass estimates are lacking for many managed species. Moreover, stock assessments are conducted annually at best, and one year is insufficient to evaluate the biological response of most fish stocks. The scientists noted that limiting fishing capacity may therefore be a more effective approach.

Ongoing efforts to determine the annual total allowable catch (TAC) for seven deepwater species of Hawaii bottomfish that are experiencing overfishing

- Continue to request that NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) complete a new comprehensive stock assessment for Hawaii bottomfish species and that it also refine historical bottomfish data so it is suitable for use in future stock assessments.

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- The SSC did not support continuation of the risk assessment model being developed by PIFSC as it does not include Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and main Hawaiian Islands components and other needed features.

Hawaii Longline Swordfish Effort

- Concurred with the Council's preferred alternative to modify management measures for the Hawaii longline fishery for swordfish by removing the current set effort for the fleet; setting annual hard caps for turtle interactions at 46 loggerhead and 19 leatherback turtles; and discontinuing the set certificate program.
- The SSC noted that, based on PIFSC analyses, the proposed turtle interaction caps do not appear to have significant adverse impacts on the loggerhead and leatherback populations.

Hawaii Offshore Non-longline Pelagic Fishery

- Establish a federal permit and reporting system to improve data collection and understanding of the fishery, to document any future management needs and to provide the basis for establishing a limited entry program. The SSC did not oppose establishing a limited entry program for this fishery.

Fishery Aggregation Devices (FADs)

- Classify all floating objects that have been purposefully deployed or enhanced and used as FADs.
- Limit all FAD associated fishing to registered FADs only.
- Restrict use of FAD sets by purse seiners in US exclusive economic zone waters around American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and Hawaii.

When the Council meets next week, it is scheduled to take action on all the above items as well as on an implementation framework for the Community Development Program (CDP), which promotes involvement of indigenous communities in fisheries; management options for small-scale fisheries, which are facing increasing economic and bureaucratic constraints; and control dates for the CNMI longline and Hawaii charter vessel fisheries. A control date is frequently established when the Council begins considering a new limited entry program or the revision of an existing program. A control date tells the public that the Council may recommend that activities occurring after that date not count toward qualification for the limited entry program (or modification) being considered.

Public comments will be taken at the Council meeting prior to decision-making on these issues. For more information including a complete agenda, please go to www.wpcouncil.org or contact the Council in Hawaii at 808 522-8220 or info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov.

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The Council is the policy-making agency for fisheries management in offshore 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.

Council Members (2008)

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
- 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 Manson K. Brown, District Commander, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District
- 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)
- Benigno Sablan, cultural practitioner (CNMI) (Vice Chair)

SSC members: Dr. Stewart Allen (NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center), Dr. Judith Amesbury (Micronesian Archeological Research Services), Dr. Brian Bowen (Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology), Dr. Paul Callaghan (University of Guam), Dr. Frank A. Camacho (Guam Community College), Dr. Milani Chaloupka (University of Queensland), Dr. Charles Daxboeck (BioDax Consulting Tahiti), Dr. Richard Deriso (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission), Dr. John Hampton (Secretariat of the Pacific Community), Dr. Pierre Kleiber (NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center), Dr. Molly Lutcavage (University of New Hampshire); Dr. James Parrish (Hawaii Cooperative Fishery Research Unit), Dr. Dan Polhemus (Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources), Mr. Marlowe Sabater (American Samoa Marine & Wildlife Resources Department), Dr. Craig Severance (University of Hawaii at Hilo), Dr. John Sibert (Pelagic Fisheries Research Program), Dr. Robert Skillman (NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center retired) and Mr. Michael Trianni (Northern Mariana Islands Division of Fish & Wildlife).