



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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Federal Fishery Managers Recommend Extending Main Hawaiian Bottomfish Closure to November 15

HONOLULU (18 June 2008) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, meeting this week in Honolulu, voted today to delay the opening of the 2008 main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) bottomfish fishery from Sept. 1, 2008, to Nov. 15, 2008. The purpose of the extension is to allow the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) time to complete an updated assessment of the stocks and to run this data through a computer model to analyze the potential risk of overfishing at different catch levels. The updated stock assessment is to include the 2005 through 2007 catch data for this fishery. The current stock assessment includes data only to 2004. The Council also recommended that the risk assessment model incorporate data for both the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) and the MHI and account for reduced NWHI effort over time. An executive order by President George W. Bush will close the NWHI fishery in 2011. The Council and its Scientific and Statistical Committee are scheduled to review the new stock assessment and risk analysis in October, at which time a total allowable catch (TAC) for the fishery for the 2008-2009 season would be set, prior to the opening of the MHI fishery in November.

The MHI bottomfish fishery closed for both commercial and recreational fishermen on April 16, 2008, after reaching its 2007-2008 TAC of 178,000 pounds. The TAC was implemented in 2007 to meet a federal mandate to end overfishing of MHI bottomfish by reducing MHI bottomfish fishing mortality by 24 percent.

Also, today, the Council continued discussions that began yesterday regarding Congressional legislation that would allow foreign-built purse-seine vessels flagged to the United States to fish in the Territories of American Samoa and Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the US Pacific remote island areas of Howland, Baker, Wake, Jarvis, Palmyra, Kingman Reef and Johnston Atoll. Currently foreign-built US flagged fishing vessels over 200 tons are prohibited from fishing within the US exclusive economic zone around American Samoa, Guam and CNMI. The Council is concerned that the legislation could lead to possible expansion of purse-seine fishing in the US Pacific Islands and may impact measures to reduce overfishing of bigeye tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. Council members from American Samoa also expressed concern because these purse-seiners may claim American Samoa as their homeport, but they provision, fuel and transship fish at other ports and thus provide no benefits to the territory.

Yesterday, the Council took initial steps toward establishing annual catch limits (ACLs) for all managed fish species in offshore waters of the US Pacific Islands, as directed by the reauthorized the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act. The Council voted to begin by establishing ACLs for all species with estimated maximum sustainable yield (MSY) values,

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except for those species managed under international regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs). Currently, bottomfish and precious corals are the only species with estimated MSY in the US Pacific Islands that are not managed by RFMOs. The Council further voted to recommend that species without MSY estimates be ranked according to their risk of overfishing and that MSY proxies and ACLs be determined for these species beginning with those which are most vulnerable to overfishing.

The meeting continued tonight with a Fishers Forum at the Ala Moana Hotel that focused on the rising cost of fishing (which now accounts for nearly 70 percent of trip expenses for Hawaii small-boat fishermen) as well as the impacts of ocean acidification on coral reefs and associated fisheries.

Tomorrow the Council will conclude its four-day meeting and is scheduled to take action on management of the Hawaii swordfish fishery, the Hawaii charter fishery, the Hawaii non-longline offshore pelagic fishery, the CNMI longline fishery and fisheries around fish aggregation devices throughout the US Pacific Islands.

The Council is the policy-making agency for fisheries management in the offshore waters of the US Pacific Islands. Recommendations made the Council are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval. For more information, contact the Council at (808) 522-8220, info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or www.wpcouncil.org.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management 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; and Ray Tulafono, American Samoa Department of Marine and 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; 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 and 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).