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### **Fishery Managers to Recommend Allowable Catch of Bottomfish for the Main Hawaiian Islands, Public Testimony to Be Taken during Oct. 15<sup>th</sup> Fishers Forum**

HONOLULU (9 October 2008) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will convene Oct. 14 to 17, 2008, to address management of offshore fisheries in the US Pacific islands, including the annual catch level of bottomfish that can be harvested from waters surrounding the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI). The MHI bottomfish fishery has been closed since April 2008 and is scheduled to reopen on Nov. 15, 2008. In making its decisions, the Council will review recommendations of its advisory groups, including the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), which is meeting this week in Honolulu. The Council will also consider public testimony on this subject to be taken at the Fishers Forum, 6 to 9 p.m. Oct. 15, 2008, at the Pagoda Hotel as well as during the Council meeting. Council decisions are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval.

The MHI bottomfish fishery is currently closed as a means to end “overfishing” of bottomfish in the Hawaiian Islands. The overfishing determination was made by the Secretary of Commerce in 2006 based on analysis of the fishery by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC). The analysis determined that overfishing of the stock throughout the archipelago (i.e., MHI and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands combined) was occurring because of excessive fishing pressure in the MHI.

The MHI fishery was scheduled to reopen in September 2008 under a total allowable catch (TAC) limit. However, under recommendation by the Council in June 2008, the closure was extended to Nov. 15 to allow PIFSC time to complete an updated assessment of the Hawaii bottomfish stock, which is needed to determine the appropriate TAC.

During this latest assessment, PIFSC addressed concerns from fishermen and others about the analysis that led to the overfishing determination. PIFSC conducted in-depth interviews with bottomfish fishermen and convened a workshop with scientists from the Council and the State Division of Aquatic Resources. The workshop, informed by the fishermen interviews, allowed PIFSC to standardize the bottomfish catch data that has been collected on the fishery since 1948. PIFSC then generated a computer model using the refined data to provide a more accurate and up-to-date assessment of the stock. This assessment indicates that, contrary to earlier conclusions, overfishing of bottomfish is not occurring in the Hawaiian archipelago. However, it confirms previous findings that the MHI segment of the archipelagic stock is experiencing localized depletion.

At the SSC meeting yesterday, PIFSC presented the findings from the fishermen interviews and the data standardization workshop, as well as the completed stock assessment and an analysis of the risk of overfishing at various TAC levels. The SSC is expected to make a recommendation on MHI bottomfish management and the new stock assessment when it concludes its three-day meeting tomorrow.

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Other major issues to be discussed during next week's Council meeting and for which the Council may take action include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Measures for annual catch limits;
- Hawaii shallow-set longline fishery;
- Sea turtles interactions with the American Samoa longline fishery;
- Pelagic fishing vessel marking requirements for high seas operations; and
- Fishing on fish aggregation devices in US exclusive economic zone waters in the Western Pacific Region.

Complete agendas for the meeting and additional information on the topics may be found at the Council's website at [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org) or by contacting the Council by phone (808) 522-8220, fax (808) 522-8226 (fax), or email [info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov](mailto:info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov). The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is the policy-making agency for fisheries management in offshore waters around the US Pacific Islands.

**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 retired), 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 retired), Dr. Dan Polhemus (Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources), Dr. Marlowe Sabater (American Samoa Marine & Wildlife Resources Department), Dr. Craig Severance (University of Hawaii at Hilo retired), 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).

**Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council Members:** 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. Appointees 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); David Itano, researcher (Hawaii); Sean Martin, Pacific Ocean Producers (Hawaii) (Chair); and Benigno Sablan, cultural practitioner (CNMI) (Vice Chair).