



Scientists Recommend 43 Percent Increase for Main Hawaiian Islands Bottomfish Catch, Scientific Justification for President Bush's Proposed Marine Conservation Areas

HONOLULU (10 October 2008) The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council today in Honolulu concluded its three-day meeting with a series of recommendations for the management of offshore fisheries in the US Pacific Islands. The SSC recommendations along with those from the Council's other advisory groups will be forwarded to the Council for consideration when it meets next week, Oct. 14 to 17, 2008, at the Pagoda Hotel, 1525 Rycroft St., Honolulu. The SSC recommendations include the following among others:

Hawaii Bottomfish: The main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) bottomfish fishery is currently closed and is scheduled to reopen on Nov. 15, 2008, under a total allowable catch (TAC) for seven prized deepwater bottomfish to be applied to the commercial sector of the fishery. The SSC recommends that the 2008-2009 TAC be set at 254,050 pounds, which is a 43 percent increase over the 2007-2008 TAC of 178,000 pounds. The SSC decision is based on an updated stock assessment by the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center that indicates overfishing is not occurring in the Hawaiian Islands and that the MHI segment of the stock is not as seriously depleted as previously thought.

Marine Conservation Areas: The SSC reviewed the query from President Bush regarding the potential feasibility and possible impacts of a general proposal to increase conservation and protection around certain Pacific Islands by creating large scale marine sanctuaries and/or marine monuments. These islands include Rose Atoll in American Samoa, the US Pacific remote island areas and the three northernmost islands of the Northern Mariana Islands. The SSC had a variety of comments questioning the proposed sites and recommends that the Council request clear justification on the various specific ocean areas proposed by President Bush. It also recommends that the Council assert that environmental and social and economic impacts be fully assessed for all people and communities impacted by the proposed action or actions and ensure that the views of the indigenous peoples of the potentially affected areas be given full and fair consideration.

American Samoa Longline Fishery: The SSC recommends that a minimum hook depth of 100 meters be established for the American Samoa longline fishery in order to minimize interactions with green sea turtles.

Fish Aggregation Devices: The SSC recommends prohibiting the deployment of purse-seine fish aggregation devices (FADs) and purse seine fishing on all FADs in US exclusive economic zone waters of the Western Pacific Region where purse seine fishing is allowed.

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

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).