



Federal Fishery Managers Recommend Lifting Hawaii Longline Swordfish Effort Limit, Managing Purse-Seine FADs in US Pacific Islands

HONOLULU (19 June 2008) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, concluded its four-day meeting in Honolulu today, with a suite of recommendations for management of offshore pelagic fisheries in the US Pacific islands.

The Council voted to remove the effort limit that has kept the Hawaii longline fishery for swordfish operating at half of its historical level of fishing for the past four years. The effort limit was imposed when the fishery reopened in 2004 following a lawsuit focused on the fishery's interactions with loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles. Since its reopening, the fishery has been subject to a suite of management measures that include, among others, an effort limit, requirements that a federal observer be onboard during each and every Hawaii swordfish trip, and annual hard caps of 16 leatherback or 17 loggerhead sea turtle interactions, with the fishery closing down if either cap is reached. In making its decision, the Council considered the status of the swordfish stock, which scientists at the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) and elsewhere have determined to be healthy, as well as the significantly reduced interactions with sea turtles following implementation of the 2004 management measures.

Additionally, the Council voted to modify the sea turtle hard caps for the Hawaii longline swordfish fishery to 19 leatherback and 46 loggerheads. In making this decision, the Council considered that none of the sea turtle interactions since 2004 have resulted in direct mortalities, and the new caps do not appear to jeopardize the continued existence of either population.

Also today, the Council voted to continue work on management measures for fish aggregating devices (FADs) used by purse seine vessels operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the US Pacific islands. The Council is looking to classify all floating objects that have been purposefully deployed, enhanced or instrumented with the intent of utilization as FADs by purse seine operations. All such FADs would be required to be marked with the owner's name and vessel identification and be registered with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The Council will also look at limiting all purse seine FAD fishing in the US EEZ to these registered FADs and restricting the use of FAD sets by purse seiners in the US EEZ waters around American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and Hawaii. However, the Council will not take a final vote on these matters until after the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission convenes in December 2008, in Korea. This international commission is expected to address FAD management during its negotiations on measures to end overfishing of bigeye tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

Additional recommendations made by the Council today include the following, among others:

- Develop draft measures for a limited entry program for the offshore handline and associated (non-trolling) hook-and-line fishery around Cross Seamount, weather buoys and private FADs in EEZ waters around Hawaii.

--- more ---

Lifting of Hawaii Longline Swordfish Effort Limit 2-2-2-2

- Set a control date of June 19, 2008, for the Hawaii charter vessel fishery. A control date may be used as a reference point when establishing a limited entry program. Concerns were raised about significant declines in blue marlin catches by this fishery and the potential for this fishery to expand with the creation of new large harbors in Kona on the Big Island and in Ewa on Oahu. Recent information also indicated that one-third of this fishery does not meet license and reporting requirements.
- Set a control date of June 19, 2008, for the CNMI-based longline fishery. The measure recognizes the potential for this fishery to increase rapidly, as it did in Hawaii and American Samoa. Two longline vessels currently operate in the CNMI. Both began operating in the last couple of years.
- Develop measures to mitigate sea turtle interaction with the American Samoa longline fishery. Public meetings will be held with longline fishermen in American Samoa beginning in July. NMFS will also be requested to immediately undertake cooperative research with fishermen around American Samoa regarding potential measures to cost effectively reduce the longline-sea turtle interactions.

The Council is the policy-making agency for fisheries management in the offshore waters of the US Pacific Islands. Recommendations made by 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).