



Federal Fishery Managers Recommend Purse Seine Area Closure for Guam

GUAM (18 March 2008) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, meeting today at the Hilton Hotel in Guam, voted to close all federal waters surrounding Guam to purse seine fishing. In making the decision, the Council considered the current trend of the US purse seine fleet, which is growing from a dozen vessels to a projected three dozen vessels in the near future. These new vessels, being built in Taiwan, will likely operate in the far west of the Western Pacific Region, in waters close to Guam. Also considered is the nascent state of the local Guam fishery. Manny Duenas, Council vice chair from Guam, explained that seamounts in the federal waters surrounding Guam hold promise for local fishermen.

In a related matter, the Council made an initial recommendation that fish aggregation devices (FADs) be registered as fishing gear and directed Council staff to prepare an options paper on the classification and identification of FADs used in the federal waters surrounding the US Pacific islands. Purse seine vessels have been increasingly focusing their fishing around floating and anchored FADs. However, other pelagic fisheries also utilize FADs.

The Council today also addressed management to end overfishing of the main Hawaiian Islands bottomfish stocks. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reported that the 2007 seasonal closure implemented by the Council, NMFS and the State of Hawaii reduced fishing by 29 percent, which exceeded the 24 percent reduction in fishing effort target that NMFS had required to end overfishing. The Council also heard that the 178,000-pound total allowable catch (TAC) for the 2007-2008 season will likely soon be reached. However, due to administrative requirements, mid April will likely be the earliest that the fishery can be closed. Under current regulations, the fishery is to close on May 1 or when the TAC is reached, whichever comes first.

In considering a total allowable catch for the fishery in the future, the Council reviewed a model from the NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) that analyzed the risk of overfishing at various catch levels. The Council concluded by recommending that PIFSC undertake the following:

- Complete an updated Hawaii bottomfish stock assessment as soon as possible.
- Incorporate current fishery statistics and standardized catch per unit effort (CPUE) values through 2007 in the updated stock assessment.
- Work with the Council to prepare a written report and simplified presentation describing PIFSC's risk assessment model and the pros and cons of each risk level by June 2008.
- Conduct fishery-independent surveys of seven popular deepwater bottomfish species (the "Deep 7") for stock assessment purposes.
- Conduct a comprehensive species-specific stock assessments as a priority for at least (but not necessarily limited to) the three main "Deep 7" species (onaga, opakapaka, and ehu) or for a complex of those three species. Tagging analyses for these species, where available, should be included in the stock assessments. An analysis of historical catch and effort data going back to the late 1940s for comprehensive species-specific stock assessments should be given a high priority.

The Council also voted to write a letter to NMFS with a copy to US Sen. Daniel Inouye regarding compensation for additional displaced NWHI fishery participants beyond bottomfish and lobster federal permit holders.

The meeting continues Thursday and Friday at the Saipan Fiesta Spa and Resort, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) to address purse-seine and longline closed areas around CNMI; a purse-seine closed area around and longline program modifications for American Samoa; management of Hawaii swordfish fishery; permits for the squid fishery; and annual catch limits. The Council is the policy-making agency for fisheries management in the offshore waters of the U.S. Pacific Islands. For more information, contact the Council at (808) 522-8220, info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or www.wpcouncil.org.