



Press Release

For Immediate Release – 18 February 2011

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Scientists to Review Management of American Samoa Pelagic Fisheries

HONOLULU (18 February 2011) Scientists will meet next week in Honolulu to make recommendations on the management of American Samoa's pelagic fisheries and other federally managed fisheries in the US Pacific Islands. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) will meet 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Feb. 22 to 24 at the Council office, 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1400, Honolulu. The Council will consider the SSC recommendations and those of its other advisory bodies and the public, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., March 8 to 10, at the Governor Lee Auditorium (Fale Laumei), Pago Pago, American Samoa. Council recommendations are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

Major agenda items to be considered by the SSC include the following:

- **Potential Modifications to the American Samoa Pelagic Longline Limited Entry Permit Program:** The American Samoa longline fishery, which primarily targets albacore tuna, is managed under the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) for Pacific Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region. The fishery has undergone substantial shift in participation in terms of vessel sizes, from a fishery once dominated by small vessels (37 active in 2002) generally less than 40 feet in length, to a large vessel fishery with all but one vessel over 50 feet (25 active in 2009). The lack of participation in the small vessel fleet is a concern, as this fleet when active is believed to provide important socio-cultural and economic benefits to the American Samoa fishing community. A regulatory amendment to the Pelagic FEP considers potential modifications to the limited entry program to reduce programmatic barriers that may be limiting small vessel participation, which in turn, may be affecting sustained community and indigenous American Samoan participation in the longline fishery.
- **Potential Modifications to American Samoa Large Vessel (≥ 50 ft) Prohibited Area:** A draft regulatory amendment to the Pelagic FEP proposes to modify the large vessel prohibited area (LVPA) around American Samoa, which is generally a 0-50 nm rectangle around Tutuila, Manua Islands and Rose Atoll in the south and another 0-50 nm rectangle around Swains Island in the north. The LVPA, which was recommended by the Council in 1998 and implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in 2002, was a response by the Council to concerns that small alia vessels (< 50 ft length overall) which longliners and troll fishermen operate would be outcompeted by an expanding large scale (≥ 50 ft) longline fleet. The LVPA successfully separated the large longliners to an "offshore" area outside of 50 nm from the alia and troll vessels that typically fish within a "nearshore" area (0-50 nm). Hook density in the offshore area has risen since 2002, while hook density in the nearshore area has been significantly reduced as the alia longline fleet has contracted to a single operational vessel and troll fishing has been greatly reduced from its peak during the 1980s and 1990s. Further, no major fishing operation has been developed on Swains Island, which continues to be inhabited by less than 10 people, engaged in a largely subsistence lifestyle and dependant on copra harvesting. As such the need for physical separation between the two sectors is not as warranted. Moreover, the US exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters outside of the LVPA is approximately 260,000 km². However, the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument established in 2009 with boundaries that are incongruent to the LVPA further reduced the fishing area available to the large vessel fleet by approximately 6,175 km² to 253,825 km². For these reasons and others, the Council is considering potential modifications to the LVPA boundaries.

The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council was established by Congress to manage fisheries in EEZ waters surrounding the U.S. Pacific Islands. For more information or the full SSC agenda, visit www.wpcouncil.org or email info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov; phone (808) 522-8220, or fax (808) 522-8226.

Scientific and Statistical Committee: Dr. Stewart Allen (NMFS), Dr. Judith Amesbury (Micronesian Archeological Research Services), Dr. Brian Bowen (Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology), Dr. Paul Callaghan (University of Guam retired), Dr. Frank 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), Dr. Donald Kobayashi (NMFS), Dr. Molly Lutcavage (University of New Hampshire), Mr. Francis Oishi (Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources), Dr. Minling Pan (NMFS), Dr. Craig Severance (University of Hawaii retired), Dr. John Sibert (Pelagic Fisheries Research Program), Dr. Robert Skillman (NMFS retired) and Mr. Michael Trianni (NMFS).

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