



### Scientists to Discuss Management of US Pacific Islands Bottomfish and Pelagic Fisheries

HONOLULU (29 February 2006) The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will convene 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., March 3 to 6, 2008, at 1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400, in Honolulu. This group of expert scientists from throughout the United States and the Pacific will discuss management of fisheries in federal waters (3-200 miles offshore) of the US Pacific islands and may make recommendations to the Council on the following issues, among others:

**Update on Status of MHI Bottomfish Management and Monitoring:** In 2007, the Council took action to address the depletion of bottomfish in the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI). Joint actions by Council, National Marine Fisheries Service and the State of Hawaii led to complementary state-federal regulations, including an interim seasonal closure between May and September 2007 and a commercial catch limit of 178,000 lbs for seven deepwater species (ehu, onaga, gindai, kalekale hapuupuu, lehi and opakapaka). Proposed measures for 2008 include a fishery closure between May and August, a recreational bag limit for the seven deepwater species and a new MHI commercial catch limit. The SSC will review the measures that have been established to monitor the performance of the fishery as well as a modeling approach to establish the new commercial catch limit.

**Hawaii Swordfish Fishery Effort:** This segment of the Hawaii longline fleet that shallow-sets for swordfish has been constrained to 2,120 total sets annually since 2004, along with "hard" caps on the level of loggerhead (17) and leatherback turtle (16) interactions each calendar year. These measures were part of broader management regime for this longline fishery segment, which included the mandatory use of large (18/0) circle hooks and mackerel-type fish bait, to minimize sea turtle interactions. New information has recently emerged suggesting that only about 10% of longline interactions with loggerhead turtles result in a fatality and that, while loggerheads remain depleted, the nesting beach trend has shown a consistent increase over the past few years. The Hawaii Longline Association petitioned the Council to relax the cap on fishing effort claiming that the fishery is overly constrained by the current management regime. The SSC will review a range of fishing effort limits above the current cap and examine their potential impacts in order to provide the Council with their recommendation.

**Longline and Purse Seine Area Closures:** The Council has a history of using area closures as a means of minimizing potential interactions and competition between different fishery sectors targeting the same or overlapping stocks of fish. In Hawaii and Guam longline fishing is prohibited to between 50 and 75 nautical miles (nm) around the two archipelagos, while in American Samoa, all pelagic fishing by any vessel greater than 50 feet is prohibited within 50 nm of this South Pacific archipelago. The establishment of longline fishing in the Northern Mariana Islands has prompted the Council to develop a longline area closure to protect small vessel troll fishermen operating from the inhabited southern islands from interactions and competition with the nascent longline fishery. Further, the US purse seine fleet, which operates under an international treaty with the Pacific Island nations across the Central and Western Pacific, has an operational cap of 40 vessels, but in recent times only 10 to 12 vessels were actually fishing. However, the US fleet has begun to expand with new vessels entering the fishery and a fleet size expected to rise to between 25 and 30 vessels. This has prompted Council members from American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands to seek some additional purse seine area closures within the US exclusive economic zones (EEZ) around their islands. The SSC will review a range of alternatives for the different area closures.

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**Non-Longline Pelagic Fishery Management:** The Council continues to consider management needs for non-longline pelagic fisheries in Hawaii, especially as the requirements to develop catch limits increases through domestic statutes and international fisheries agreements. The SSC will be apprised of progress to date in understanding the elements that comprise the non-longline pelagic fisheries in Hawaii, including troll, handline and shortline (longlines less than 1 nm in length), and what, if any, regulations are required. The SSC has continued to state that it believes that all fishing in federal waters should be permitted and reported. However, a measure to implement commercial permits and reporting for all pelagic fisheries in the US EEZ around Hawaii was disapproved by the National Marine Fisheries Service in 2007.

**Other scheduled SSC activities**

- Review of international fishery management conventions on Pacific tunas and related species and emerging international management arrangement for seamounts and bottomfish on the high seas.
- A one-day workshop to develop maximum sustainable yields (MSY) or proxies for MSY for federally managed stocks and to review a report from a recent ecological risk assessment workshop.
- Review progress on improving marine recreational fishery data collection in the US and how this relates to the Western Pacific Region.
- Review issues concerning protected species that may interact with fisheries under Council jurisdiction.

The SSC recommendations will be considered by the Council, March 17 to 21, 2008, in Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. Issue papers on the above items as well as instructions on providing public comment may be found at the Council's website at [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org).

**SSC members include** 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).

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, the policy-making agency for fisheries management in federal waters (3 to 200 miles offshore) of the US Pacific Islands. For more information, contact the Council at (808) 522-8220, (808) 522-8226 (fax), [info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov](mailto:info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov) or [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org).