



Scientists to Weigh in on Swordfish, FADs, Annual Catch Limits and Other Proposed Fishery Management Measures for the US Pacific Islands

HONOLULU (3 June 2008) The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will convene 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., June 10 to 12, 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 off-shore fisheries of the US Pacific islands and may make recommendations to the Council on the following proposed actions, among others. The SSC recommendations will be considered by the Council, June 16 to 19, 2008, in Honolulu. Issue papers and instructions on providing public comment on the items below as well as others to be considered by the SSC may be found at the Council's website at www.wpcouncil.org.

Hawaii Shallow-Set Longline Fishery: This fishery targets the North Pacific stock of swordfish, which appears healthy, and currently operates under a suite of regulations that include, among others, annual limits to both catch effort and to sea turtle interactions. If either limit is reached, the fishery is immediately closed. The proposed action would provide increased opportunities for sustainable harvest of swordfish and other fish species by removing the effort limit. To avoid jeopardizing sea turtles and other protected species, 100 percent observer coverage would continue and annual sea turtle caps would be set at 46 loggerhead and 19 leatherback interactions, respectively. These interactions represent three or fewer adult female turtle mortalities per year of each species.

Management of Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs): The expansion of purse seine fishing in the Pacific Ocean has contributed to overfishing of bigeye tuna, especially in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, where the stock may be approaching an overfished condition. Similarly, purse seine fishing utilizing FADs has also contributed to yellowfin tuna approaching an overfishing condition as a consequence of high juvenile catches. The action under consideration may require FADs to be registered as a fishing gear and may prohibit purse seine fishing on anchored and drifting FADs in offshore waters around American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Guam and Hawaii. The purpose is to minimize impacts of purse seine fishing on small scale troll fisheries around inhabited US Pacific islands, while recognizing that hook-and-line troll and handline fisheries extensively use and reap benefits from FADs.

Non-Longline Pelagic Fishery Management: Tuna in offshore waters of the US Pacific islands are targeted by both longline and non-longline pelagic fisheries (NLPF), such as troll, handline, short-line and pole-and-line. The proposed action would establish a limited entry program for the NLPF operating around seamounts, weather buoys and FADs to address concern about juvenile bigeye tuna catches by these fisheries and their potential impact on fisheries for bigeye closer to shore. Additionally, the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act requires the Council to establish annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures for overfished stocks by 2010 and for all stocks by 2011.

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Scientists to Weigh in on Proposed Fishery Management Measures

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Annual Catch Limits: The SSC will consider alternatives for ACLs for stocks currently subject to overfishing, as well as issues related to allocation, monitoring, and management.

Bottomfish Risk Assessment Model: New management measures for main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) bottomfish include an annual total allowable catch (TAC) for seven deepwater species. The SSC will review a range of potential TACs based on various levels of risk of overfishing, developed by NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center. The Council will look to the SSC for guidance in establishing the 2008-2009 TAC for the MHI bottomfish fishing season.

Management of Barter, Trade and Subsistence Fisheries: The SSC will consider a range of alternatives for defining small-scale fisheries, which may be of potential usefulness to the Council when developing future fishery management measures.

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 or www.wpcouncil.org.