



Public Invited to Meetings to Consider Limited Entry Program for Offshore Commercial Pelagic Handline Fishing around Seamounts, Weather Buoys and FADs

HONOLULU (23 May 2008) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will be holding public meetings on management alternatives for the offshore commercial pelagics fishery employing handlines and related hook-and-line gear (e.g., shortlines and vertical longines) off or around seamounts, NOAA weather buoys and private fish aggregating devices. The Council is considering a limited entry program for this fishery. To learn about the issue and provide comments, fishermen and other interested persons are invited to participate in one of the following meetings.

- May 27, 2008 (T), 6 to 9 p.m., Waiakea High School, 155 W. Kawili Street, Hilo
- May 28, 2008 (W), 6 to 9 p.m., Hawaii Big Game Fishing Club, Honokohau Harbor, Kona
- May 29, 2008 (Th), 6 to 9 p.m., Pacific Ocean Producers, Pier 38, 1133 North Nimitz Hwy., Honolulu

Council concern about the offshore handline fishery dates back to the early 1990s, due to the high catch of juvenile bigeye tuna from this fishery and its rapid expansion with catches reaching in excess of 1 million pounds in 1995. In response, the Council established a control date of July 22, 1992, for the Cross Seamount and NOAA weather buoy offshore handline fishery and informed the public that participants entering the fishery after this date might not be assured of continued participation. More recently, the Council established a general control date of June 2, 2005, for all Hawaii non-longline commercial pelagic fisheries in response to the overfishing condition of Pacific bigeye tuna.

The offshore handline fishery has declined since 1995, with landings averaging 450,000 lbs annually. However, the Council continues to be concerned about this fishery due to the potential for fishery expansion if the economy in Hawaii goes into a recession or if bigeye quotas for US longline vessels are reduced by international Pacific tuna regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs) of which the US is a member. Recent studies conducted on handline fisheries suggest a link between fishery participation and unemployment in Hawaii, while bigeye tuna continues to be in an overfishing condition in the Pacific and cuts of up to 25% of longline bigeye catch quotas are being considered by Pacific tuna RFMOs.

In establishing a limited entry program, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires Councils to consider, among other things, present and historical fishery participation, fishery economics, and cultural and social issues relevant to the fishery and fishing communities.

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is the policy-making agency for fisheries management in federal waters (generally, 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.