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### **Scientists Recommend Management Measures for Longline Tuna Fisheries in American Samoa and Other US Pacific Islands**

HONOLULU (13 March 2015) At the conclusion of its three-day meeting yesterday, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council recommended three management measures for longline fisheries in American Samoa and other US Pacific Islands, including Hawai'i. These recommendations and others from the SSC and other Council advisory groups will be considered by the Council, March 16-18, 2015, at the Laniakea YWCA's Fuller Hall, 1040 Richards St., Honolulu.

One of the recommended measures would establish an exemption area seaward of 12 nautical miles (nm) within the American Samoa Large Vessel Prohibited Area (LVPA). The measure would open 16,817 square nm to federally permitted American Samoa longline vessels of 50 feet or greater while continuing to restrict them from 11.3 percent of the US exclusive economic zone (EEZ) around American Samoa.

The LVPA was established in 2002 to minimize competition between large fishing vessels and small vessels, especially alia longline vessels. These conditions no longer exist as the alia longline fleet has been reduced to a single vessel from more than 40 in 2002. Similarly, the number of local troll vessels has decreased to about 10 today.

The intent of the measure is to help alleviate economic hardships facing the 19 large longline vessels remaining in the American Samoa fleet. The fishery targets highly migratory pelagic species, with albacore tuna comprising 80 percent of landings followed by yellowfin and bigeye tuna and mahimahi (dolphinfish). Creating a LVPA exemption area could support the American Samoa longline fishery by providing access to additional fishing grounds that are closer to shore and thus reducing trip costs.

The longline fishery provides domestic supply of tuna to local canneries, which are the major employer for the Territory. StarKist uses albacore from the American Samoa longline fleet for military food products and school lunches, which can only use catch from US flag vessels for these products. Due to the depressed state of the American Samoa longline fishery, StarKist is currently buying frozen albacore from China, even though the fish were caught in the South Pacific.

The second measure recommended by the SSC would set an annual catch limit of 5,425 metric tons (mt) for Southern Pacific albacore in the US EEZ around American Samoa. The measure is consistent with the regional approach proposed by the Forum Fisheries Agency and members of the Tokelau Arrangement that would have the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) endorse EEZ-based annual catch limits as well as set flag-based high seas annual catch limits and a total annual catch limit of South Pacific albacore in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). The SSC noted American Samoa's pivotal role as a strategic fish processing hub and its well-managed domestic longline fishery. As such, the SSC recognizes the need for international management efforts including the Tokelau Arrangement and supported American Samoa seeking formal participation status under the Tokelau Arrangement.

The third measure recommended by the SSC would establish a 2,000-mt annual catch limit for longline-caught bigeye tuna for each for the US territories of American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of

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the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The SSC determined that the proposed limits combined with the US longline limit for WCPO bigeye tuna (3,554 mt, caught by the Hawai`i longline fleet) would constitute less than 1 percent of the total stock status of Pacific bigeye tuna. This negligible impact is not expected to impede the effectiveness of international measures to eliminate WCPO bigeye overfishing.

The SSC further recommended that each Territory be authorized to transfer 1,000 mt of its longline bigeye tuna limit to US domestic vessels permitted under the Pelagic FEP, such as Hawai`i longline vessels. The transfers are permissible under Amendment 7 of the Pelagic FEP and provide benefits to both the territories and Hawai`i. Through fishing agreements, the Territories would receive funds to support local fisheries development and Hawaii longline fleet would be able to continue fishing after it reached the US longline quota of 3,554 mt of bigeye tuna in the WCPO, which is established by the WCPFC. The buffer would reduce market uncertainty and mitigate potential negative impacts to Hawai`i longline fishermen, such as the need to venture further out into the eastern Pacific Ocean, increasing risks to fishermen safety at sea.

The Council will consider the recommendations of the SSC and its other advisory groups along with public comments at its 162<sup>nd</sup> Council meeting to be held March 16 to 18, 2015, at the Laniakea YWCA-Fuller Hall, 1040 Richards Street, Honolulu. For more information including a full agenda for the Council meeting, visit the Council's website at [www.wpcouncil.org/category/upcoming-council-and-advisory-body-meetings/](http://www.wpcouncil.org/category/upcoming-council-and-advisory-body-meetings/).

As part of the 162<sup>nd</sup> meeting, the Council will hold a Fishers Forum on Stock Assessments, March 17, 2015, from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Harbor View Center, 1129 North Nimitz Highway at Pier 38 (above Nicos). This free, family friendly event will include information tables, speakers, public discussion, door prizes and more! Can't attend the Fishers Forum in-person? Participate via webconference at [www.wprfmc.webex.com/join/info.wpcouncilnoaa.gov](http://www.wprfmc.webex.com/join/info.wpcouncilnoaa.gov).

**Scientific and Statistical Committee:** Dr. Judith Amesbury (Micronesian Arche ological Research Services); Dr. Paul Callaghan (University of Guam retired); Dr. Frank A. Camacho (University of Guam); Dr. Milani Chaloupka (University of Queensland); Dr. Charles Daxboeck, chair, (BioDax Consulting Tahiti); Dr. Richard Deriso (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission); Dr. Erik Franklin (Hawai`i Institute of Marine Biology); Dr. John Hampton (Secretariat of the Pacific Community); David Itano (consultant); Dr. Pierre Kleiber (NMFS PIFSC, retired); Dr. Donald Kobayashi (NMFS PIFSC); Dr. Molly Lutcavage (University of Massachusetts); James Lynch (K&L Gates); Dr. Todd Miller (CNMI Division of Fish & Wildlife); Alton Miyaska (Hawai`i Division of Aquatic Resources); Dr. Domingo Ochivallo (American Samoa DMWR); Dr. Minling Pan (NMFS PIFSC); Dr. Craig Severance (University of Hawai`i at Hilo, retired); Dr. John Sibert (Pelagic Fisheries Research Program, retired); and Dr. Robert Skillman (NMFS PIFSC, retired).

**Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council:** Appointees by the Secretary of Commerce from nominees selected by American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawai`i governors: Michael Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (vice chair); Edwin Ebisui (Hawai`i) (chair); Michael Goto, United Fishing Agency Ltd. (Hawai`i); John Gourley, Micronesian Environmental Services (CNMI) (vice chair); Julie Leialoha, biologist (Hawai`i); Dr. Claire Tuia Poumele, Port Administration (American Samoa); McGrew Rice, commercial and charter fisherman (Hawai`i) (vice chair); and William Sword, recreational fisherman (American Samoa) (vice chair). Designated state officials: Carty Chang, Hawai`i Department of Land and Natural Resources; Dr. Ruth Matagi-Tofiga, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources; Richard Seman, CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources; and Mariquita Taitague, Guam Department of Agriculture. Designated federal officials: Matthew Brown, USFWS Pacific Islands Refuges and Monuments Office; David Hogan, US Department of State; RAdm Cari B. Thomas, US Coast Guard 14th District; and Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office.

