



Milestone Reached in Setting of New Bottomfish Catch Limits for US Pacific Island Territories

HONOLULU (18 Sept. 2015) A milestone was reached this week in the setting of the 2016 and 2017 annual catch limits (ACLs) for federally managed bottomfish fisheries in the US Territories of American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The current ACLs of 101,000 pounds; 66,800 pounds; and 228,000 pounds, respectively, for the territories were initially set for fishing year 2013 based on a 2012 stock assessment and then rolled over for fishing years 2014 and 2015. The ACLs are specified by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

On Sept. 16, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) considered a recent update of the 2012 stock assessment and a review of the updated assessment by a panel comprised of Dr. Erik Franklin (Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology), Dr. Milani Chaloupka (University of Queensland) and Dr. Donald Kobayashi (National Marine Fisheries Service). The bottomline of the stock assessment update is that the bottomfish management unit species in American Samoa, Guam, and CNMI are not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. The SSC determined that the updated stock assessment is the best scientific information available. The Council is required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to use the best scientific information available in its fisheries management decision-making.

Several other steps will take place next week to develop the 2016 and 2017 ACLs. On Sept. 23 and 24, a working group will meet in Honolulu and by teleconference to recommend the risk of overfishing to be used in setting the ACLs. The risk of overfishing is based on scientific uncertainty of the information about the fisheries. On Sept. 25, another working group will meet to provide guidance on the social, economic, ecological and management uncertainty in the information about the fisheries. Then on Oct. 13 and 14, the SSC will meet in Honolulu during which time it will consider the working group findings and determine the acceptable biological catch for the territorial bottomfish fisheries, i.e., the amount of fish that can be harvested without overfishing. The Council will meet Oct. 21 and 22, 2015, in American Samoa during which time it will use the acceptable biological catch specifications, the working group findings and public comments to determine the 2016 and 2017 ACLs.

While it is too early to determine what the final numbers will be for the 2016 and 2017 territorial bottomfish ACLs, last year the Council rolled over the 2014 ACL to 2015 noting that the actual catch of bottomfish by the Territories comprise a small proportion of the limits and there was no significant change in the fishery or the management of it. Except for the updated stock assessment, that situation remains the status quo.

For more information on the upcoming meetings and how to provide written and/or oral testimony on the topics to be covered at them, please go to www.wpcouncil.org/meetings or contact the Council at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or call 808 522-8220.

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New US Pacific Island Territories Bottomfish Catch Limits 2-2-2-2

Scientific and Statistical Committee: Judith Amesbury (Micronesian Archaeological 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 Ochavillo (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: Suzanne Case, 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 Matt Sablan, Guam Department of Agriculture. Designated federal officials: Matthew Brown, USFWS Pacific Islands Refuges and Monuments Office; William Gibbons-Fly, US Department of State; RAdm Cari B. Thomas, US Coast Guard 14th District; and Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office.