



Bottomfish Catch Limits Could Increase for American Samoa, Decrease for Guam

HONOLULU (14 October 2015) The Scientific and Statistical Committee, a group of renowned fishery scientists who advise the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, concluded its two-day meeting in Honolulu today by setting the 2016 and 2017 acceptable biological catches (ABCs) for bottomfish in the US territories of American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The ABCs are the amount of fish that can be harvested annually by the fisheries over time without causing overfishing of the stock.

After considering a variety of alternatives, the scientists set the ABCs to a level that corresponds to a 37 percent probability of overfishing in 2017 for American Samoa and 36 percent in 2017 for Guam and CNMI. Federal regulations allow up to a 50 percent level of overfishing. None of the bottomfish stocks in the US Pacific Island territories are currently overfished or experiencing overfishing. Historically, only Guam has experienced overfishing and only in the year 2000. Based on these risk levels, the 2016 and 2017 bottomfish ABCs are 106,000 pounds annually for American Samoa; 66,000 pounds for Guam; and 228,000 pounds for CNMI.

The Council will utilize these ABCs to recommend annual catch limits (ACLs) when it meets Oct. 21 and 22 in American Samoa. The Council could set the ACLs at the ABC levels, which it has done in the past, or recommend ACLs lower than the ABCs based on social, economic, ecological or management uncertainties. The current ACLs (fishing year 2015) are 101,000 pounds for American Samoa; 66,800 pounds for Guam; and 228,000 for CNMI.

In addition to the bottomfish ABCs, the SSC during its meeting this week considered options to address continued Pacific-wide overfishing of bigeye tuna. Reports from the scientists will be forwarded to the Council for its review. They include potential spatial management options, such as applying quotas only to the equatorial region, which is where bigeye tuna catches are highest; establishing separate quotas for each region in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean based on the stock assessment for that region; and closing the high seas to longline fishing in the area near the Line Islands that is suspected to be a bigeye tuna spawning area. The SSC also reiterated its recommendation that the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, the international organization that develops the Pacific bigeye tuna quotas, require registration of fish aggregation devices as fishing gear.

Action items on the Council's agenda include specifying the 2016 catch limits for longline bigeye tuna for the US Pacific territories and reviewing non-regulatory modifications to the Fishery Ecosystem Plans for the Western Pacific Region. For more on the Council meeting, go to www.wpcouncil.org, email info@wpcouncil.org or phone (808) 522-8220. The Council was established by Congress under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act in 1976 to manage domestic fisheries operating seaward of State waters around Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the US Pacific Island Remote Island Areas. Recommendations by the Council are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

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US Territory Bottomfish 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 Ebusui (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 Vincent B. Atkins, US Coast Guard 14th District; and Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office.