



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Federal Managers Make Recommendations to Keep US Pacific Island Fisheries Viable

GARAPAN, COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS (24 October 2018) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council yesterday concluded its two-day meeting in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) with recommendations regarding pelagic, international and American Samoa fisheries. Underpinning the discussions were concerns about keeping healthy, sustainable US Pacific Island fisheries viable amid an accumulation of US regulations and international negotiations. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976, the Council has authority over fisheries seaward of state waters of Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the CNMI and the US Pacific Remote Islands.

The Council expressed dismay over the recent amendment to the Billfish Conservation Act of 2012, which bans the interstate commerce of billfish (excluding swordfish) landed by US fishermen in Hawaii and the US Pacific Islands. The stocks of the billfish caught by Hawaii and US Pacific Island fisheries are healthy, unlike the billfish in the Atlantic. The bill to amend the Act was introduced and promoted by Congressional delegates and sports fishing organizations from Florida. Recent guidelines from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) say that the billfish landed in the US Territories and Hawaii are also prohibited from being sold in foreign markets. The Council directed staff to develop a list of questions and issues associated with compliance with the amendment to the Billfish Conservation Act of 2012 and send them to NMS for a response.

The Hawaii deep-set longline fishery catches billfish incidentally when targeting bigeye tuna. The amount of bigeye in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) that the fishery may retain annually is developed by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), an international regional fishery management organization to which the United States is a party. The WCPFC is scheduled to hold its 15th annual meeting in Honolulu on Dec. 9 to 14, 2018. The Permanent Advisory Committee (PAC) to Advise the US Commissioners to the WCPFC met Oct. 11 and 12, 2018, in Honolulu. The Council at its current meeting endorsed the recommendation of the PAC majority for the US to obtain a

longline bigeye quota of 6,000 metric tons (mt) at the upcoming WCPFC meeting. This amount is slightly less than the amount of bigeye caught in the WCPO in 2016 by Hawaii longline vessels, including those vessels operating under agreements with US Participating Territories. The Council will communicate this recommendation to the US Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross. The Hawaii longline fleet is the sole fishery that utilizes the US quota, which is currently set at 3,554 mt.

Country	2017 Catch* (mt)	2018 Catch Limit (mt)
Japan	11,669	17,765
Korea	10,220	13,942
Chinese Taipei	9,638	10,481
China	7,023	8,724
Indonesia	13	5,889
USA	2,968	3,554

*as reported to the WCPFC by member countries

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The Council also endorsed the PAC recommendation that the US position generally be in support of adoption of a South Pacific albacore target reference point. The reference point is a catch target that supports economically viable operations and healthy biomass. The American Samoa longline fishery, which harvests this stock, has been in decline since 2011. The Council asked NMFS to provide economic evaluations of the fleet's performance at various target reference points in advance of WCPFC15.

Among other pelagic and international fishery matters, the Council recommended initial action be taken that would require electronic reporting in the Hawaii longline fishery. The Council will ask NMFS to continue to develop electronic reporting in the Hawaii longline fishery and to work with Hawaii longline participants and Council staff to address several implementation issues and report back to the Council at its March 2019 meeting.

The Council had intended to take action regarding the management of loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles in the Hawaii shallow-set longline fishery, which targets swordfish. However, action was postponed as a draft biological opinion due from NMFS on Oct. 1 has not been completed. The Council will reconvene its Scientific and Statistical Committee Working Group when the draft opinion is available to review it. The Council may convene an interim Council meeting, if needed, to review the draft opinion and consider revisions to its June 2018 recommendations, including a possible specification of individual trip limits for leatherback sea turtle interactions.

Regarding American Samoa fisheries, the Council recommended an annual catch limit (ACL) of 106,000 pounds for the American Samoa bottomfish species complex for fishing year 2019. The Council noted that the next benchmark assessment, which is scheduled for review in February 2019, will provide new information to set the ACLs for fishing year 2020 to 2022. The Council also directed its staff to work with the Council's American Samoa Advisory Panel to develop a plan for outreach and education, preferably in cooperation with Territory's Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, to educate communities on various fisheries and fisheries related issues.

The Council will reconvene at 11 a.m. on Oct. 26 at the Hilton at Tumon, Guam, pending typhoon Yutu and rescheduling of air flights. For complete agendas and background materials on the meeting, go to www.wpcouncil.org/category/upcoming-council-and-advisory-body-meetings or contact the Council at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or (808) 522-8220.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Secretary of Commerce appointees from nominees selected by American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawaii governors: John Gourley, Micronesian Environmental Services (CNMI) (acting chair); Michael Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (vice chair); Dean Sensui, film producer (Hawaii) (vice chair); Archie Soliai, StarKist (American Samoa) (vice chair); Michael Goto, United Fishing Agency (Hawaii); Christinna Lutu-Sanchez, commercial fisherman (American Samoa); Edwin Watamura (Hawaii). Designated state officials: Raymond Roberto, CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources; Suzanne Case, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; Matt Sablan, Guam Department of Agriculture; Henry Sesepasra, American Samoa Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources. Designated federal officials (voting): Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office. Designated federal officials (non-voting): RADM Kevin Lunday, USCG 14th District; Michael Brakke, US Department of State; Brian Peck, USFWS.

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