



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Press Release

For Immediate Release

March 21, 2002

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Fishing in doubt in NWHI

Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) fishermen are concerned about their future in the fisheries. Last Friday, NOAA announced that the Clinton NWHI Coral Reef Reserve is in place as an interim management measure before the designation of the Reserve as a National Marine Sanctuary. The NWHI Reserve appears to prohibit commercial fishing except for limited bottomfishing within certain areas in federal waters. During the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting in Honolulu this week, Bill Hogarth, head of NOAA Fisheries, responded to questions about how the Reserve would effect fisheries in the area. He told the Council that the Reserve is now the “law of the land”. However, regarding the change of the Reserve to a National Marine Sanctuary, he said that the Reserve provisions were not cast in stone. He said “You have to look at the spirit of the Executive Orders, but also the Sanctuary Act and what the Sanctuary is trying to accomplish ...it does allow for changes.” Timm Timoney, a 20-year NWHI bottom fisherman, was distressed about the uncertain future of the industry. “There are still so many unanswered questions. We don’t know if we will be able to fish in the area at all. These are fisheries with a few boats and very healthy stocks. Only a handful of vessels (17 permits) fish in the 1,200 mile stretch of islands and atolls north of Kauai. We hope the Council’s NWHI fishery management plans will be included in the Sanctuary program.” In a related action, the Council voted to suspend the bottomfish annual landing requirement until the NWHI Sanctuary is established. Currently, permit holders must make minimum trips and fish landings every year to keep their permits.

Coral harvesting Dr. Hogarth announced that the National Marine Fisheries Service Administrator is moving toward a national policy of banning all forms of coral harvesting. Council members and members of its Scientific and Statistical Committee were deeply troubled about the policy's effect on the healthy precious coral fishery in Hawaii. The \$42 million black coral fishery has been sustainably managed in Hawaii for over 40 years. The policy may also impact the Council's Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan as it allows a limited harvest of stony corals for indigenous cultural and religious use. Dr. Hogarth said that the administration will be working with all the fishery management Councils to protect coral resources and allow for sustainable coral fisheries to continue.

Limited entry program for the American Samoa longline fishery Eighty longline vessels are now fishing in American Samoa – hook sets increased from 5 million in the first quarter of 2001 to 25 million hooks set in the last quarter of 2001. The Council's preferred alternative will establish limits on the number of fishing vessels in different size categories with a percentage of permits reserved for native American Samoans. The Council hopes to reduce the risk of “boom and bust” development by longline vessels with no long-term investment in the local community and yet ensure future participation in the longline fishery by American Samoans.

The Council is the policy-making organization for the management of fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (generally, 3 - 200 miles from shore) around American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, and U.S. Pacific Island possessions – an area of nearly 1.5 million square miles. For more information, contact the Council at 522-8220; e-mail nmfs.wprfmc@noaa.gov; or log on to www.wpcouncil.org.