



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Federal Fishery Council to Hold June Meeting in American Samoa

Fisheries experts from throughout the western Pacific region will convene in American Samoa for the 113th meeting of the **Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council)**, **June 24 - 27** at the **American Samoa Convention Center** in Pago Pago. The Council expects to make final decisions on the following items:

Limiting longline fishing effort in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) around American Samoa The Council may make a final decision on limiting the amount of fishing vessels by the American Samoa longline fishery due to concerns about a dramatic increase in fleet size and fishing effort in 2001. Fishing vessels in American Samoa cannot fish outside the EEZ without entering the EEZs of neighboring countries, so the recent build-up of longline fishing is compressed inside a small area, without limits on longline fishing. When too many vessels exploit the fishery, catch rates fall, and the fleet becomes uneconomic. A consistent supply of fresh fish is essential to maintain the cultural and ceremonial obligations of Fa'a Samoa (Samoan culture). This demand has been met primarily through a fleet of small longline vessels, but could be threatened by rapid expansion of large longliners. The Council will consider how to keep the fishery healthy without overly hampering its development, or reducing benefits to the local and national economy.

Sustainable Fisheries Act Amendment: The Council is expected to make a final decision on new maximum sustainable yield and overfishing control rules for pelagic, bottomfish, and lobster fisheries. These rules set reference points which define when a fish stock is overfished, requiring the Council to develop a plan to help the stock recover.

Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) bottomfish management The Council is expected to make a final decision on a regulatory amendment, which will suspend the NWHI bottomfish annual landing requirements until the NWHI Sanctuary is established. Currently, permit

holders must make minimum trips and fish landings every year to keep their permits. The objective is to provide security for permit holders, while ensuring that permits are allocated fairly.

In addition to the above items, **the Council will be holding three public workshops at the American Samoa Convention Center for fishermen to provide input on critical fisheries issues.**

Monday, June 24th, 6:00 p.m. Longline Limited Entry Workshop This workshop will provide an additional opportunity for fishermen to review and comment on the alternatives that have been developed, and help shape a limited entry program for the American Samoan longline fleet.

Wednesday, June 26, 5:00 p.m. Protected and Invasive Species Workshop This workshop will provide fishermen in American Samoa information on issues related to fishery interactions with protected species, the threats posed by invasive species to small island ecosystems such as American Samoa, and the beginning of an observer program for the local longline fishery. This workshop will give fishermen a chance to express their concerns related to these topics, and provide input on the future of their fishery.

Thursday, June 27, 3:30 p.m. American Samoa Regional Cooperative Research Workshop The National Marine Fisheries Service Cooperative Research Program funds research projects involving collaboration between fishermen and NMFS fishery scientists. This workshop is the second in a series of regional workshops designed to involve fishermen in determining the types of fishery research projects funded in their areas.

For more information on these workshops or other Council meeting discussion items, contact the Council at 522-8220; e-mail info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov; or log on to www.wpcouncil.org. 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.