



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Fact Sheet

Fishery Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the US Pacific Islands

- From its first meeting in 1976, the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council recognized the economic importance of tuna resources to the US Pacific Islands. The Council's first priority was getting jurisdiction over these highly migratory species within the US exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which extends 200 miles from shore. In 1992, the Council's goal was reached when Congress recognized coastal state jurisdiction over highly migratory species within the EEZ.
- More recently, the Council helped develop new federal legislation that authorizes fees collected from foreign fishing vessels in exchange for fishing rights to be deposited into the treasuries of the respective US Pacific Islands to fund marine conservation projects. Fines imposed on fishing vessels convicted of violations in the EEZ will also be deposited into the treasury of the island area where the violation occurred. For example, the National Marine Fisheries Service will award the American Samoa government with \$61,000 in collected penalties on Oct. 19, during the 101st Council Meeting press conference.
- To protect domestic small-boat fisheries, the Council has established large areas that are closed to longline fishing in waters around Guam and Hawaii (e.g., out to 50 to 70 miles from shore, depending on the location and season). It is now making a concerted effort to establish a closed area for fishing vessels greater than 50 feet in length in waters around American Samoa.
- With Congressional support, the Council also succeeded in getting authorization for the federal government to make direct grants each year to eligible communities for the purpose of establishing demonstration projects. These projects will increase the involvement of residents of eligible communities in the fisheries within the Council area.
- In addition, the Council is authorized to establish community development programs to increase the share of economic benefits that indigenous peoples receive from commercial fisheries. As of June 1999, the Council's bottomfish fishery management plan reserves 20 percent of the permits for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Mau Zone limited access fishery for such a community development program.
- The Council also is required to take traditional indigenous fishing practices into account in preparing any fishery management plan. The Fishery Rights of Indigenous Peoples Advisory Panel advises the Council on such matters. The Council also pursues studies on these issues. For example, at the behest of the Council, the National Marine Fisheries Service is currently contracting a study on the cultural significance of sharks and shark fishing in Hawaii, American Samoa and the Mariana archipelago that the National Marine Fisheries Service.