



NWHI Fisheries and Ecosystem Protection Have and Can Co-Exist

UTULEI, AMERICAN SAMOA (15 June 2006) President Bush today announced the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) as the nation's largest National Monument, describing the area as bursting with life—great predators and the healthiest coral reef system in the United States. The news came as the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council convened in American Samoa today to address management of fisheries in federal waters of the U.S. Pacific islands, including proposed fishing regulations for an anticipated NWHI National Marine Sanctuary.

“We are pleased that the President recognizes the near pristine condition of the NWHI waters,” said Frank McCoy, chair of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council. “We believe the abundance and biodiversity of the area attests to the successful management of the NWHI fisheries by the Council the past 30 years and indicates that properly regulated fisheries can operate in the NWHI without impacting the ecosystem. The small NWHI bottomfish fishery has not and would not jeopardize the protection of the NWHI that President Bush is pursuing by designating the area a national monument.”

After passage of the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act and creation of the Regional Fishery Management Councils in 1976, the Council developed conservative fishery management plans that expelled foreign fishing vessels from the NWHI; banned destructive fishing gear such as trawling and dynamiting; created a Protected Species Zone within 50 miles of the islands and atolls of the NWHI within which longline fishing was banned to eliminate interactions with monk seals, birds and sea turtles; limited the bottomfish fishery to 17 permits and vessel size of under 60 feet; and limited lobster fishing to 13 percent of the harvestable quota, which posed a 10 percent risk of overfishing.

The Council also began developing in the early 1990s a Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan (FMP), which became the basis of President Clinton's executive orders that established the NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve. This first ecosystem fishery management plan in the United States was eventually implemented for all of the U.S. Pacific Islands except the NWHI. The Council is now in the process of continuing the move to the ecosystem approach to fisheries management by restructuring all of its existing species-based FMPs into place-based Fishery Ecosystem Plans for the American Samoa, Hawaii and Mariana Archipelagos as well as the Pacific pelagic fishery.

“Hawaii's NWHI fishermen are small family businesses that have shared with us the responsibility of being good stewards of the area,” noted Kitty M. Simonds, Council executive director. “Over the decades many NWHI fishermen have lost their lives in this area to provide sustenance to our local population. We look toward Congress, the President and the Administration to appropriately recognize the achievements and dedication made by the fishermen, fishery scientists and fishery managers who have been the original stewards of the waters of the NWHI.”

“We also hope that President Bush continues to support public participation in the process for

developing a plan for the NWHI National Monument, as consensus regarding fishing in the NWHI has not been reached,” Simonds added. “The local fishing industry, chefs and visitor industry feature bottomfish as Hawaii’s signature local cuisine. Fifty percent of the local bottomfish is from the healthy stocks of the NWHI. This fishery has no significant impact on habitat, the ecosystem or protected species, as documented by federal scientists.”

President Bush testified in favor of the National Monument Fairness Act of 2001 (H.R. 2114) that would amend the Antiquities Act of 1906 to make presidential designations of monuments exceeding 50,000 acres ineffective unless approved by Congress within two years; to the ‘extent consistent with protection of’ the resources in question, would establish a process for public input in presidential monument designations; and require monument management plans to be developed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

“With our long history and knowledge managing the waters surrounding the NWHI, the Council looks forward to working with the President, his Administration, the State of Hawaii and others to help develop the plan for managing this National Monument,” Simonds added.

“We are an island state and island territories in the Pacific,” noted Council member Edwin Ebisui of Hawaii. “Fisheries have cultural and social as well as economic significance to all of the ethnicities that make up our islands.”

“The NWHI comprise two-thirds of the waters surrounding our state,” said Sean Martin, Council vice chair and NWHI fisherman. “Other national monuments in the United States allow fishing. We would hope that fishing would also be allowed in areas within the NWHI National Monument.”

The Council is the agency responsible for managing fisheries in the federal waters (generally 3-200 miles offshore) of the US Pacific islands. Recommendations made by the Council are forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval. For more information, contact the Council at 808 522-8220, email info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or visit the Council’s website at www.wpcouncil.org.