



Fishery Scientists, Managers to Focus on Federal Annual Catch Limits

HONOLULU (9 June 2011) All federally managed fish stocks and complexes, unless exempted, are required by Congress to have annual catch limits (ACLs) by the end of 2011. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, which makes recommendations to the Secretary of Commerce for the management of fisheries in federal waters surrounding the U.S. Pacific Islands, will focus on meeting this deadline when it convenes 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., June 16 to 18, 2011, at the Waikiki Beach Marriott Resort.

In establishing the ACLs, the Council is required to utilize the acceptable biological catch (ABC) set by its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). This group of expert scientists from throughout the region will meet 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., June 13 to 15, at the Waikiki Beach Marriott Resort to discuss setting the ABCs as well as address other fishery management issues for the region. Recommendations from the SSC are forwarded to the Council for consideration.

Species for which ACLs are to be established include mollusk, lobsters and coral reef finfish in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI); deepwater shrimp in Hawaii and CNMI; and Kona crab, akule, opelu, black coral and deepwater bottomfish in Hawaii. When recommending ACLs, the Council must adhere to National Marine Fisheries Service guidelines. The method differs from that used the past few years by the SSC and the Council to set the total allowable catch (TAC) for the seven main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) deepwater bottomfish species. The ACL method will likely reduce the allowable harvest of MHI bottomfish for the 2011-2012 season, which opens Sept. 1, from the 383,000 lbs recommended by the Council this past March using the TAC method but still keep it more than 50,000 lbs higher than the 2010-2011 TAC.

The Council will also discuss recommendations for management measures for bigeye tuna. This highly migratory species is exempted from the ACL requirement as it is internationally managed by a regional fishery management organization, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). The current WCPFC management measures include a quota on bigeye tuna catches for the Hawaii longline fleet. Last year, the Hawaii fleet reached its quota in late December. This year, it may reach the quota in October.

Other major agenda items on the SSC and/or Council meetings include Hawaii bottomfish essential fish habitat and habitat areas of particular concern; non-commercial data collection; limited entry for aquaculture; overfishing of Pacific bluefin tuna; American Samoa shallow-set longline fishery for swordfish; longline access to the American Samoa Large Pelagic Vessel Area Closures; American Samoa pelagic fishing vessel landing requirements; and Marine Conservation Plans for Guam, CNMI and the Pacific Remote Island Areas (i.e., Wake, Jarvis, Howland and Baker Islands; Johnston and Palmyra Atolls; and Kingman Reef).

The public is invited to the meetings, and public comment periods are scheduled throughout the agendas. The public is also invited to the Standing Committee meeting 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. March 15 at the Waikiki Beach Marriott Resort and the Fishers Forum on the future of honu (Hawaiian green sea turtle) management 6 to 9 p.m. June 16 at 2933 Kalakaua Ave., Waikiki. More information and the agendas are available at www.wpcouncil.org or by contacting the Council at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or (808) 522-8220.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Appointees by the Secretary of Commerce from nominees selected by Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa and CNMI governors: Stephen Haleck, business owner (American Samoa); William Sword, recreational fisherman (American Samoa); Manuel Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam); David Itano, researcher (Hawaii); Benigno Sablan, cultural practitioner (CNMI); Frederick Duerr, resort and hotel consultant (Hawaii); Julie Leialoha, environmentalist (Hawaii); and Sean Martin, Pacific Ocean Producers (Hawaii). Designated state officials: Ignacio Dela Cruz, CNMI Department of Land & Natural Resources; Mariquita Taitague, Guam Department of Agriculture; William Aila, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; and Ray Tulafono, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources. Designated federal officials: Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Don Palawski, U.S. Fish and Wildlife; RAdm Charles Ray, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; and Bill Gibbons-Fly, U.S. Department of State.