



**WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL**

MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties

September 23, 2015

FROM: Kitty M. Simonds

SUBJECT: Action Items for 164th Council Meeting

- 1. 2016 US Pacific Territory Longline Bigeye Specification**
 - 2. Annual Catch Limit (ACL) Specification for Territorial Bottomfish**
 - 3. Non-Regulatory Fishery Ecosystem Plan Modification and Reorganization**
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The Council will consider the issues summarized below, including any public comments on this initiative. The Council is expected to take action on this at its 164th Council Meeting to be held between October 21 and 22, 2015 at the Governor H. Rex Lee Auditorium (Fale Laumei), Utulei, American Samoa. Written comments should be received by the Council's Executive Director by 5:00 p.m. (Hawaii time) October 17, 2015 by mail, FAX or email as indicated below.

Mail: Executive Director
Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

FAX: (808) 522-8226

E-mail: info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov

1. 2016 US Pacific Territory Longline Bigeye Specification

The Council will consider 2016 longline bigeye catch limit specifications for the US Territories, including limits on the amount of catch that could be transferred under Specified Fishing Arrangements pursuant to Amendment 7 of the Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP). The Council will consider the following alternatives:

- 1) No action. No 2016 Territory specifications.
- 2) Specify 2,000 mt longline total annual catch limits and 1,000 mt transferable catch limits for bigeye tuna per Territory.
- 3) Specify lower/higher total annual catch limits and lower/higher limits on the amount transferable per Territory.

Bigeye tuna is a Pacific-wide stock that is internationally managed and assessed separately in the WCPO and Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) by the WCPFC and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), respectively. Stock assessments were conducted in 2014 for bigeye in both areas. According to the stock status determination reference points in the Council's Pelagic FEP, the most recent stock assessments indicate that bigeye overfishing is occurring in the WCPO, but the stock is not overfished in the WCPO or EPO. However, bigeye is considered overfished when using the WCPFC's limit reference point which is not based on Maximum Sustainable Yield.

The WCPFC, of which the United States is a member, develops and agrees on conservation and management measures (CMMs) for highly migratory species caught by WCPFC members and Participating Territories (CCMs) in the WCPO. The US Participating Territories include American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI).

In December 2014, the WCPFC agreed on CMM 2014-01, which builds off earlier conservation and management measures (e.g. CMM 2012-01, 2013-01). Longline catch limits for non-SIDS were further reduced, with catch limits approximating a 40 percent reduction from 2001-2004 levels. The measure also limits members that harvested less than 2,000 mt of bigeye in 2004 with longline gear to no more than 2,000 mt for each of the years 2014 through 2017. However, CMM 2014-01 does not establish an individual limit on the amount of bigeye tuna that may be harvested annually in the Convention Area by SIDS and Participating Territories, including American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI.

In 2014, Amendment 7 to the Council's Pelagic FEP was approved and implemented. Amendment 7 established a management framework that provides for the following:

- Catch or effort limits applicable to the US Participating Territories that include the authority of the US Participating Territories to use, assign, allocate and manage the pelagic management species catch and effort limits agreed to by the WCPFC through Specified Fishing Arrangements with US vessels permitted under the Pelagic FEP for the purposes of responsible fisheries development.
- Authorization for the Council to recommend and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to specify catch or effort limits in the absence of such limits or additional or more restrictive limits than the WCPFC for conservation and management purposes.

- Consistency review of Territory arrangements with the Pelagic FEP and other applicable laws by the Council and NMFS, as well as annual review and specification recommendations by the Council.

In 2014, NMFS approved the Council's recommended specification of annual bigeye tuna longline limits of 2,000 mt per year for each of the US Participating Territories, of which 1,000 mt may be transferred annually under agreements consistent with the Pelagic FEP and other applicable laws to eligible US vessels permitted under the Pelagic FEP. Under these agreements, funds have been provided to the Territories to assist them with fisheries development. Amendment 7 requires the Council to recommend Territory longline bigeye specifications on an annual basis.

In 2015, the Council recommended the specification of annual bigeye tuna longline limits of 2,000 mt per year for each of the US Participating Territories, of which 1,000 mt may be transferred annually under specified fishing agreements as defined under Amendment 7.

At its 164th meeting, the Council will consider options related to the specification of the annual Territory bigeye longline limits applicable for 2016.

2. Annual Catch Limit (ACL) Specification for Territorial Bottomfish

At its 164th meeting the Council will specify annual catch limits for the bottomfish fishery in American Samoa, Guam and Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands. The Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center updated the 2012 Territorial Bottomfish Stock Assessment with data up to 2013.

These stock assessment updates were reviewed by the Tier 3 Panel following the Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review policy. The results of the WPSAR review deemed the stock assessment update adequate for management. The SSC, in a special session on September 16, 2015 will make a best-available available scientific information determination for the Council based on the comments raised in the Tier 3 WPSAR review.

A P-Star Working Group meeting will be held on September 23-24, 2015 to determine the level of risk after considering the scientific uncertainties in the assessment and on the stock. This will be the basis for the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) specification by the SSC on the October meeting.

A SEEM working group will be convened to assess the uncertainties around the social, economic, ecological and management dimensions of the territorial bottomfish fisheries. This will be the basis for the ACL specification. Potential alternatives will be:

- 1) No action - do not specify ACLs for the territorial bottomfish fisheries
- 2) Status quo - maintain the current specified ACLs and not use the current new information
- 3) Specify new ACLs based on the SSC recommended ABC and SEEM analysis
- 4) Specify ACLs lower than the SSC recommended ABC and recommended ACL based on the SEEM analysis

3. Non-Regulatory Fishery Ecosystem Plan Modification and Reorganization

The Council will consider non-regulatory modifications to its five fishery ecosystem plans (FEPs). The Council engaged its advisory body members and others via a series of meetings in Guam and CNMI (November 2014), American Samoa (January 2015) and Hawaii (February 2015) to solicit feedback and hired an outside consulting group to recommend improvements to the plans. At its 162nd meeting, the Council directed staff to revise the FEP outline to address the issues described during the review process. At the 163rd meeting, staff provided the revised FEP and annual report outlines to the Council for input, feedback, and direction. Council members indicated they were satisfied that the revised outlines substantially addressed those issues and staff proceeded to develop draft revised plans. Although the revisions to the FEPs are non-regulatory in nature, they do include items that necessitate Secretarial review, such as new FEP goals and objectives language. The proposed changes place more emphasis on several important fishery ecosystem elements, make it easier for the public to find and understand the required management information, and align the FEPs better with the Council's annual fishery status reports, fishery council operational guidelines, and the Council's operating procedures.