



Federal Fishery Managers Recommend New Annual Catch Limits, Address Other Measures for US Pacific Island Fisheries

HONOLULU (27 June 2014) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council today completed its three-day meeting in Honolulu with recommendations regarding annual catch limits (ACLs) for federally managed species in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the Pacific Remote Island Areas. The Council also addressed other measures for US Pacific Islands fisheries operating seaward of State/Territorial waters. Council recommendations are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

Annual Catch Limits

For CNMI reef shark, bumphead parrotfish and humphead wrasse in American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI and precious corals, deep-water shrimp, slipper lobsters and Kona crab in all island areas, the Council recommended that the ACLs for fishing years 2015-2018 remain the same as the 2014 ACLs. All of these stock/stock complexes did not exceed the ACLs in 2012 and 2013 or have no new scientific information and catch data.

For the main Hawaiian Island (MHI) Deep 7 bottomfish fishery, the Council recommended that the 2013-14 ACL of 346,000 pounds be rolled over for fishing year 2014-15 and that a review of the most recent stock assessment be conducted. The Deep 7 fishery includes six deep-water snappers and a grouper.

The Council recommended that the ACLs for several other species/species complexes be 5 percent lower than their acceptable biological catch. They include MHI non-Deep 7 bottomfish; reef sharks in Hawaii, American Samoa and Guam; and spiny lobsters in all island areas. The reduction takes into account social, ecological, economic and management (SEEM) uncertainty. MHI non-Deep 7 bottomfish includes such species as grey snapper (uku) and ulua.

The Council noted that 2013 catches for MHI non-deep 7 bottomfish and Hawaii crabs, mollusk, parrotfish, squirrelfish and surgeonfish exceeded the 2013 ACLs for the second time. In 2013, catches of Hawaii spiny lobsters, Guam jacks and CNMI bigeye-scad and goatfish also exceeded their specified 2013 ACLs. The Hawaii overages are likely a result of the 2009 implementation of the civil resource violation (CRV) penalties by the State of Hawaii, which may have improved catch reporting. The CNMI and Guam overages were likely the result of catch overestimates caused by extrapolating the catches of a small number of fishermen with high catches to estimate total island-wide catch. Although the overfishing limit is not known, other biological indicators suggest that the overages will not impact stock sustainability or result in overfishing. The Council will work with Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources to closely monitor the Hawaii spiny lobster and parrotfish fishery and to get a better understanding on the effect of changes in ACLs on these stocks and impacts of the CRV.

Recognizing that for some species groups, catch has exceeded the ACL more than once in a four-year period, the Council is modifying its system for specifying ACLs by applying a model that uses additional data to calculate maximum sustainable yield and overfishing limits for federally managed species.

Pelagic Fisheries

The National Marine Fisheries Service recently announced the overfished condition of West Central North Pacific (WCNP) striped marlin stock. The Council will draft domestic regulations to prohibit the retention of WCNP striped marlin in the Hawaii longline fishery when 95 percent of the US limit is reached by the Hawaii longline fishery. The Council will take final action on this issue at its next meeting, Oct. 20-23, 2014, in Honolulu.

To provide support to the American Samoa longline fishery for albacore, the Council at its March 2014 meeting began looking at providing a temporary exemption to fish within portions of the American Samoa Large Vessel Prohibited Area (LVPA). The LVPA was developed to address potential gear conflict with the small-scale alia (catamaran longline) fishery. The alia fishery has subsequently declined in size. The Council noted its support for all forms of pelagic fishing in American Samoa and the need to balance existing fishing activity and fishery

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development aspirations. It deferred action until further discussions and public meetings are held with representatives of the American Samoa government, Swains Island, Tutuila, Manua Islands and American Samoa fishermen. The Council will reconsider the LVPA at its next meeting, Oct. 20-23, 2014, in Honolulu.

The Council will work with the State of Hawaii to explore options for increasing the commercial minimum size limit for yellowfin and bigeye tuna including a potential size limit of 24 inches.

Archipelagic Fisheries

Hawaii Fishery Ecosystem: The Council will consider options to change the federal non-commercial bag limit of five Deep-7 bottomfish per person per day and to establish a grace period of up to seven days for the possession of bottomfish for seafood dealers and markets should the MHI bottomfish fishery be closed after reaching its ACL.

Mariana Fishery Ecosystem: The Council will communicate to the Department of Defense on behalf of the Guam fishing community concerns about impacts to traditional fishing grounds from the potential establishment of the Ritidian firing range complex. The complex is also a national wildlife preserve and Marine Protected Area. The proposed military closure of part of the refuge for up to 39 weeks out of the year would be more than half of the total days fishermen are currently allowed to fish.

The Council will also continue to support activities addressing immigrant fishing impacts on Guam's resources through existing Council projects.

The Council will transmit to the National Marine Fisheries Service amendment to the Mariana Fishery Ecosystem Plan to remove the 50-nautical-mile closure for bottomfish vessels over 40 feet in length around the southern islands of Rota, Tinian, Aguijan and Farallon de Medinilla and 10 nautical miles around Alamagan.

American Samoa Fishery Ecosystem: The Council will request Certificate of Origin information from the National Marine Fisheries Service for foreign landings in Pago Pago to evaluate landings trends and assess the leakage of foreign-caught fish into local markets. The Council will consult with fishing industry representatives to develop a fisheries training program and assist the American Samoa government with the following: 1) to identify potential markets for locally caught fish in American Samoa and to explore the potential for fish for the Manu`a Islands to be used in the local school lunch program; 2) to standardize docking fees for fishing vessels in Pago Pago Harbor and assist in the planning activities to address dock space for all vessels in Pago Pago including container ships, cruise ships and purse seine, longline and alia fishing vessels; and 3) to identify the potential impacts to the Territory of the proposed expansion of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument. The Council additionally recommended that the American Samoa National Marine Sanctuary program complete a study to identify direct economic benefits of the Sanctuary to American Samoa and draft a research plan and make it available for review to local agencies, community members and the Council. The Council also recommended that the American Samoa government reestablish the American Samoa Ocean Regional Council and to consider participation by ocean users and other affected individuals and businesses.

For more information, visit the meetings section of the Council's website at www.wpcouncil.org or contact 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 American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawaii governors: Michael Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (Vice Chair); Edwin Ebisui (Hawaii) (Vice Chair); Richard Seman, education and outreach specialist (CNMI); William Sword, recreational fisherman (American Samoa) (Vice Chair); Michael Goto, United Fishing Agency Ltd. (Hawaii); Julie Leialoha, biologist (Hawaii); Dr. Claire Tuia Poumelle, Port Administration (American Samoa); and McGrew Rice, commercial and charter fisherman (Hawaii). **Designated state officials:** Arnold Palacios, CNMI Department of Land & Natural Resources (chair); William Aila, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; Dr. Ruth Matagi-Tofiga, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources; and Mariquita Taitague, Guam Department of Agriculture. **Designated federal officials:** Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Bill Gibbons-Fly, US Department of State; RAdm Cari B. Thomas, US Coast Guard 14th District; and Susan White, Pacific Reefs National Wildlife Refuge Complex.