Pacific Islands Fishery News

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Thousands of Species Slated for Ecosystem Component Designation

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council manages thousands of species from culturally important coral reef fish to deep water corals and from economically significant bottom and pelagic fish to various crustaceans. These diverse species are managed through five place-based Fishery Ecosystem Plans (FEPs), with the understanding that ecosystems are important to the sustainability of fisheries.

In 2006, Congress required that the nation's eight Regional Fishery Management Councils specify annual catch limits (ACLs) for federally managed fisheries. Specifying ACLs for thousands of species in the Western Pacific Region has been impractical, burdensome and, in some cases, unfeasible. Some species lack the data needed to generate a stock assessment and/or have no near-real-time monitoring of catches. The Council has, therefore, specified ACLs by species complexes. Despite such bundling, the Council still had to generate 115 ACLs for the Western Pacific Region.

To streamline the ACL process, the Council is amending its FEPs to designate some species as ecosystem components because the best scientific and commercial information indicates that they are not in need of conservation and management. Ecosystem component species will be retained in the FEPs in order to achieve ecosystem management objectives. The Council will continue to monitor these species, but it will not be required to specify maximum sustainable yield, optimum yield, ACL and essential fish habitat for them.

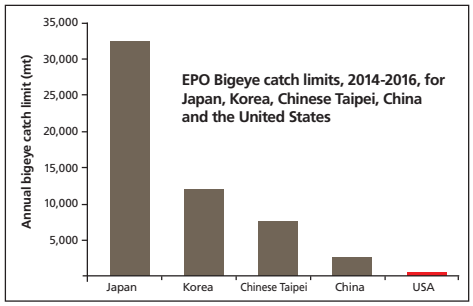
The Council will evaluate the proposed method to determine which species to move into the ecosystem component category during its 169th meeting, March 21 to 23, 2017, in Honolulu. Details can be found at www.wpcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/169-CM-Action-Item-summary-final.pdf.

Photo: Brown bristletooth (Ctenochaetus striatus) and teardrop butterflyfish (Chaetodon unimaculatus) are among the candidate species to be designated as ecosystem components.

Comprehensive Tuna Management Stymied in the Pacific

Tuna, billfish and other highly migratory fish species move in and out of national waters and the high seas. Their effective management requires the cooperation of dozens of countries. The international negotiations are complex and subject to a wide range of geopolitics.

The deliberations for Pacific stocks occur through the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Both Commissions have in recent years attempted to reach multi-year agreements to manage tropical skipjack, bigeye and yellowfin tuna.



IATTC Resolution 13-01 on Tropical Tunas in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) expired in 2016 without a replacement despite meetings in the summer and fall. Consequently, an extraordinary meeting was held Feb. 7 to 10, 2017, in La Jolla, Calif. New purse-seine measures were adopted for 2017; however, the longline measures put in place in 2013 remained unchanged. For 2017, China, Japan, Korean and Chinese Taipei longline vessels will continue to operate under a combined bigeye tuna catch limit of 54,381 metric tons (mt), ranging from 2,507 mt for China to 32,372 mt for Japan. All other nations, including the United States, each have a 500 mt bigeye longline limit for vessels greater than 24 meters in length. US efforts to raise that bar to 750 mt proved unsuccessful.

The WCPFC inter-sessional Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) 16-01 will expire in 2017. The WCPFC will convene a workshop this year to work through issues in order to achieve consensus at the WCPFC plenary to be held in the Philippines in December. The workshop will be hosted by the United States and organized by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council).

Ongoing efforts to reach agreement on tropical tunas tend to overshadow the existing conservation and management achievements of the two regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs). For example, vessels that fish in the WCPO or EPO must be listed on regional registers to gain access to these waters. All vessels must have satellite beacons for vessel monitoring, complete catch logbooks and carry observers (100 percent for purse-seine vessels and 5 percent for longline vessels; national regulations may be stricter, e.g., Hawaii-based longline fishery requires 20 percent observer coverage for deep-set tuna vessels and 100 percent for shallow-set vessels). Both RFMOs have also reached significant agreements on the conservation of seabirds, sea turtles and sharks.

Reaching consensus on conservation and management measures is hampered by members looking to protect their individual fishery interests. Much of the recent policy direction of the WCPFC has been driven by the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) members. FFA and PNA members generally do not develop positions that are contrary to the larger coalition; thus, the FFA and PNA members are a formidable block within the WCPFC. Within IATTC, on the other hand, there are no formally recognized member groups. Instead, country members form individual negotiating positions on various issues. In the IATTC, all decisions are made by consensus. In the WCPFC, decisions regarding allocations of catch or effort limits have been by consensus.

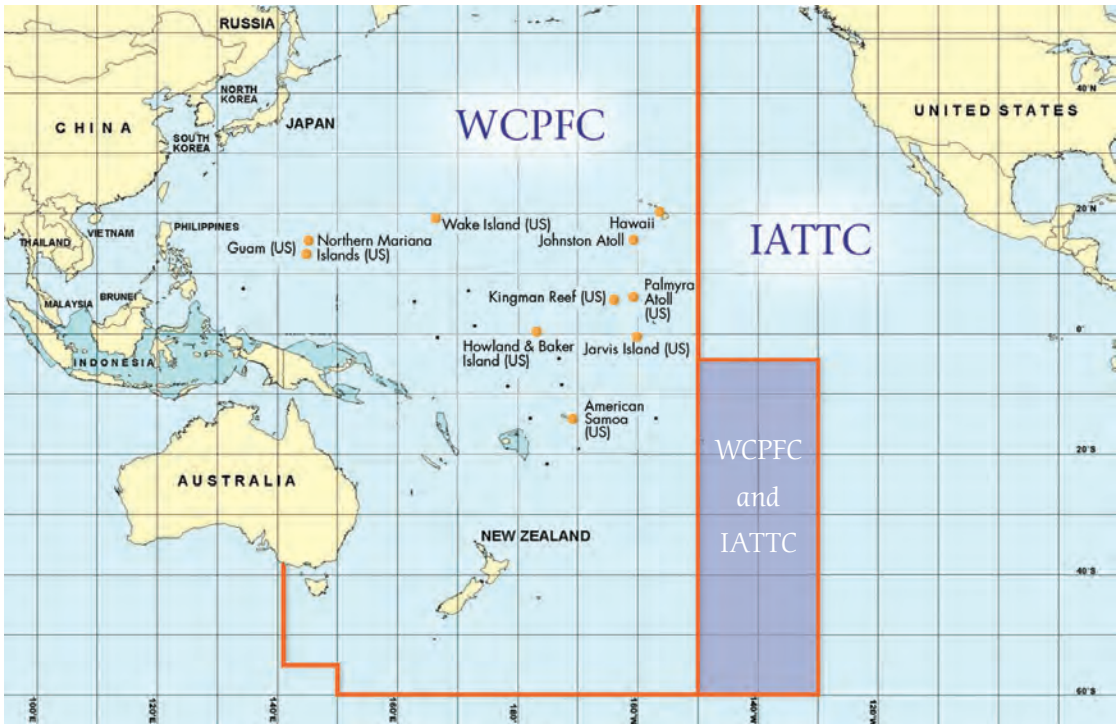
Besides the large commercial purse-seine and longline tuna fisheries that operate in the Pacific, which are subject to international management, the RFMOs also have a duty to ensure that fish stocks are sustainable for local artisanal fisheries, which are not under their management purview.

For the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, the main objective is ensuring that the United States receives fair allocations within these international commissions and that Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands fisheries are not be used as negotiating pieces within larger geopolitical negotiations.

Sound fisheries management relies on good data, fair and transparent decision making, and an ability to quickly adapt and modify regulations to respond to dynamic fishery conditions. 2017 is a pivotal year in which every member country in the Pacific tuna RFMOs, including the United States, has much at stake. Part of this process is improvement of the bigeye tuna stock assessment, which this year will include a cutting edge catch-per-unit-effort standardization, a new growth curve for bigeye tuna, and possibly a new spatially disaggregated stock assessment.

The new assessment may also redefine the spatial boundaries such that the equatorial band between 10° N and 10° S, where most of the bigeye fishing mortality occurs, is more clearly defined. This will be advantageous for the Council since all its longline effort in the WCPO will fall into one statistical cell in the sub-tropics. We hope that if the new assessment is adopted then it will make a stronger case for spatially explicit management measures for bigeye, rather than the blunt instrument of fleet-wide allocations as at present. For the Council, the main objective is ensuring that the United States receives fair allocations within these international commissions and that Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands fisheries are not be used as negotiating pieces within larger geopolitical negotiations.

Overview of the Pacific Tuna RFMOs



WCPFC

- Established by the 2000 Honolulu Convention for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the WCPO, which entered into force in 2004
- Members include Canada, China, Chinese Taipei, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Philippines, United States and Forum Fisheries Agency countries (i.e., independent Pacific Island countries plus Australia and New Zealand), and Parties to the Nauru Agreement (Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu). Cooperating non-members are Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Liberia, Thailand, Vietnam
- 80 percent of the WCPFC catch is taken by purse-seine gear within the EEZs of Pacific Island members

Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

IATTC

- Established in 1949 by the United States and Costa Rica to provide access to baitfish for US pole-and-line tuna vessels
- Focus shifted to tuna management as more members joined with the advent of longline and purse-seine fishing in the EPO
- In 2003, members signed the Antigua Convention, strengthening IATTC's powers and defining its convention area as 30°N to 30°S latitudes and east to the 150°W longitude
- Members are primarily Central and South American countries with Pacific coasts (except Chile), United States, Canada, Japan, Korea, China and Chinese Taipei
- Members fish the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) off coasts of member countries and the highs seas, where a large portion of the catch is taken

CIAT IATTC

Untangling the Hawai'i Fish Flow Maze

Participants of the Fish Flow Workshop included Hawai'i's top seafood processors and distributors.

If you're like many others in Hawai'i, you enjoyed a nice dinner with visiting family or friends at a fine restaurant during the holidays. Someone ordered the fresh, raw 'ahi appetizer. Someone had the catch of the day. Did you stop to think where that fish came from? Where and by whom it was caught? Where it was first sold? Who filleted and delivered it to the restaurant earlier that day so you were able to enjoy that perfect fish fillet?

In Hawai'i, fresh fish flows through a complex network of processors, distributors and retailers. The dynamic nature of the Hawai'i seafood industry poses unique challenges to those trying to understand that flow. When imported fresh and frozen seafood products are added into the equation, tracking the fish flow becomes nearly impossible.

The Council in partnership with the National Marine Fisheries Service's Socioeconomics Program hosted a "Fish Flow Workshop" on Feb. 15, 2017, in Honolulu to try and unravel the maze that fresh local and imported seafood travels through in Hawai'i before it reaches the consumer. The workshop brought together two dozen of the state's top seafood processors and distributors to tackle this issue. The participants discussed product sources, market forms, market structure, import and export channels, geography, product traceability, quality, labeling and emerging markets. Also on the agenda were presentations on annual pelagic harvest quotas, longline labor issues and illegal, unregulated and unreported fisheries.

The workshop outcomes will help fishery scientists and managers better assess and mitigate industry and community impacts resulting from new fishing regulations, disasters and other changes. For example, when the Hawai'i longline fishery closes after reaching its quota, how does that impact price, product substitution, imports, exports and consumers? These topics that the workshop investigated will help inform future management decisions.

American Samoa Longline Fishery Seeks Blue Eco-Label

In December 2016, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) announced that the American Samoa longline fishery is being assessed for certification. MSC-certified fisheries are evaluated against a list of sustainability standards and chain of custody protocols. The fisheries receive a proprietary blue eco-label to distinguish their certified products in wholesale and retail markets. The certified fisheries typically receive higher ex-vessel prices because their products can command higher retail prices. The certified products are in high demand in Europe. The demand in US markets is growing.

StarKist Samoa, a long-operating cannery in Pago Pago American Samoa, is funding the MSC assessment. A team from ME Certification Ltd., a United Kingdom-based firm, is conducting the assessment, focusing on the American Samoa longline fishery operation in the US EEZ around the territory and South Pacific albacore and yellowfin tuna landings and associated fishery products. Fourteen longline vessels in American Samoa have signed on to be the vessels under the Unit of Certification.

These vessels have historically provided nearly all of their albacore and other tuna catch to StarKist Samoa. Several operate under a tuna supply agreement with the cannery. Once the American Samoa longline products are MSC-certified, they are all expected to be canned in Pago Pago and sold in US markets. StarKist and the vessel owners will explore other markets that provide higher premiums for the MSC certified fish and the best economic returns. Currently, MSC-certified cannery-grade albacore command a $100/ton premium compared to non-MSC certified albacore. For the American Samoa longline fishery, which has struggled financially in recent years due to low catch rates and high operating costs, any increase in ex-vessel fish prices is critically important.

Other tuna fisheries in the Western Pacific region that have received MSC certification include longline albacore from Fiji and the Cook Islands and purse-seined fish aggregation device (FAD)-free skipjack from Tri Marine and the Parties to the Nauru Agreement.

CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD MSC www.msc.org ™

The American Samoa longline fishery is the first fishery domestically managed by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council that will undergo MSC certification evaluation. The certification assessment process is expected to take about eight to 10 months to complete. For more information on the certification process for the American Samoa longline fishery go to https://fisheries.msc.org/en/fisheries/american-samoa-eez-albacore-and-yellowfin-longline-fishery/market-information/.

Aerial Survey Tracks Akule Abundance around O'ahu

A study conducted by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and funded by the National Marine Fisheries Service's Cooperative Research Program uses fishery independent aerial surveys to estimate the abundance of akule (bigeye scad) around O'ahu. The surveys report all of the observed fish and offer advantages over more traditional estimates based on catch per unit effort (CPUE), which may introduce biases associated with trip catch limits, market demand, and hold and processing capacities. Also, CPUE can be maintained despite a decrease in fish abundance, especially for schooling pelagic fish such as akule.

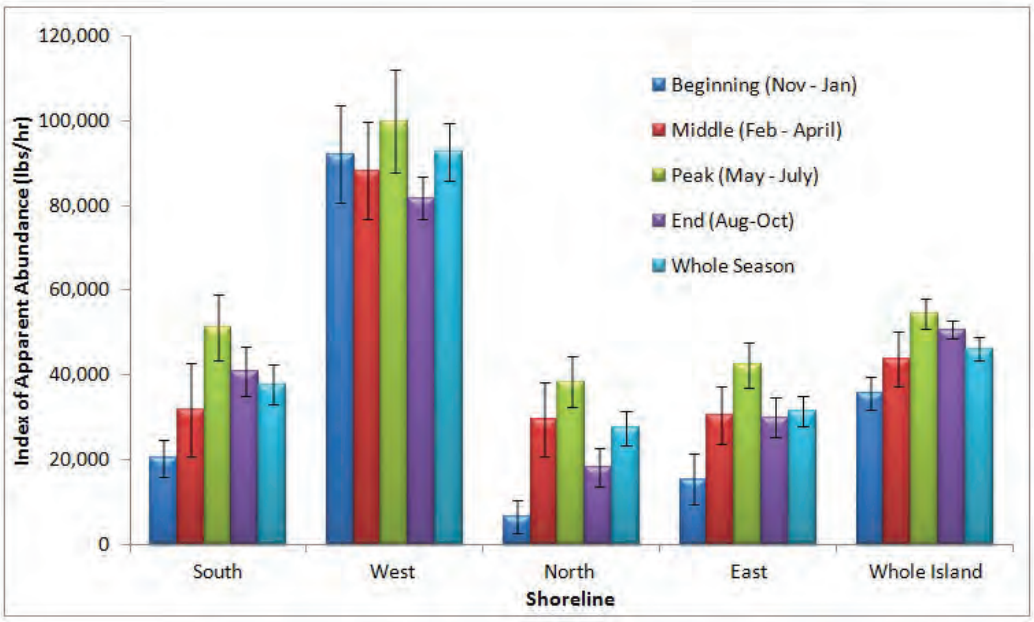
Aerial surveys offer a unique opportunity to directly observe species that can be found at the ocean's surface. Aerial surveys have been used to estimate population sizes and distributions of turtles, dolphins, dugongs, sharks, tunas and smaller fishes similar to akule such as jack mackerel, Pacific mackerel, Pacific bonito, Pacific sardines and northern anchovies. For the akule study, an experienced fish spotter provided the expertise in locating the fish, identifying the species and estimating the biomass of the fish.

The yearlong survey began Nov. 1, 2015, at the beginning of the State of Hawai'i season for juvenile akule, or halalū and included 117 flights. For each flight, the pilot scanned the entire shoreline of O'ahu at an altitude of 1,000 feet. Once schools of fish were spotted, the pilot flew in a tight circle taking pictures, estimating the biomass and determining the life stage (akule or halalū) for each school.

Indexes of apparent abundance were then calculated based on these careful aerial observations. During the entire survey period, the western shoreline values exceeded the other shorelines by two to three times. The southern shoreline had the next highest index and was closely followed by the eastern shoreline; the northern shoreline had the lowest value.

In addition to these spatial patterns, the indexes have distinct temporal trends. Akule abundance was lowest at the beginning of the season (November to January). The northern shoreline value was especially low during this time. Following the beginning season low point, abundance increased into the middle months (February to April), reached an apex during peak months (May to July) and decreased during the end months (August to October). The northern shoreline demonstrated roughly a six-fold index increase from the beginning season to peak season.

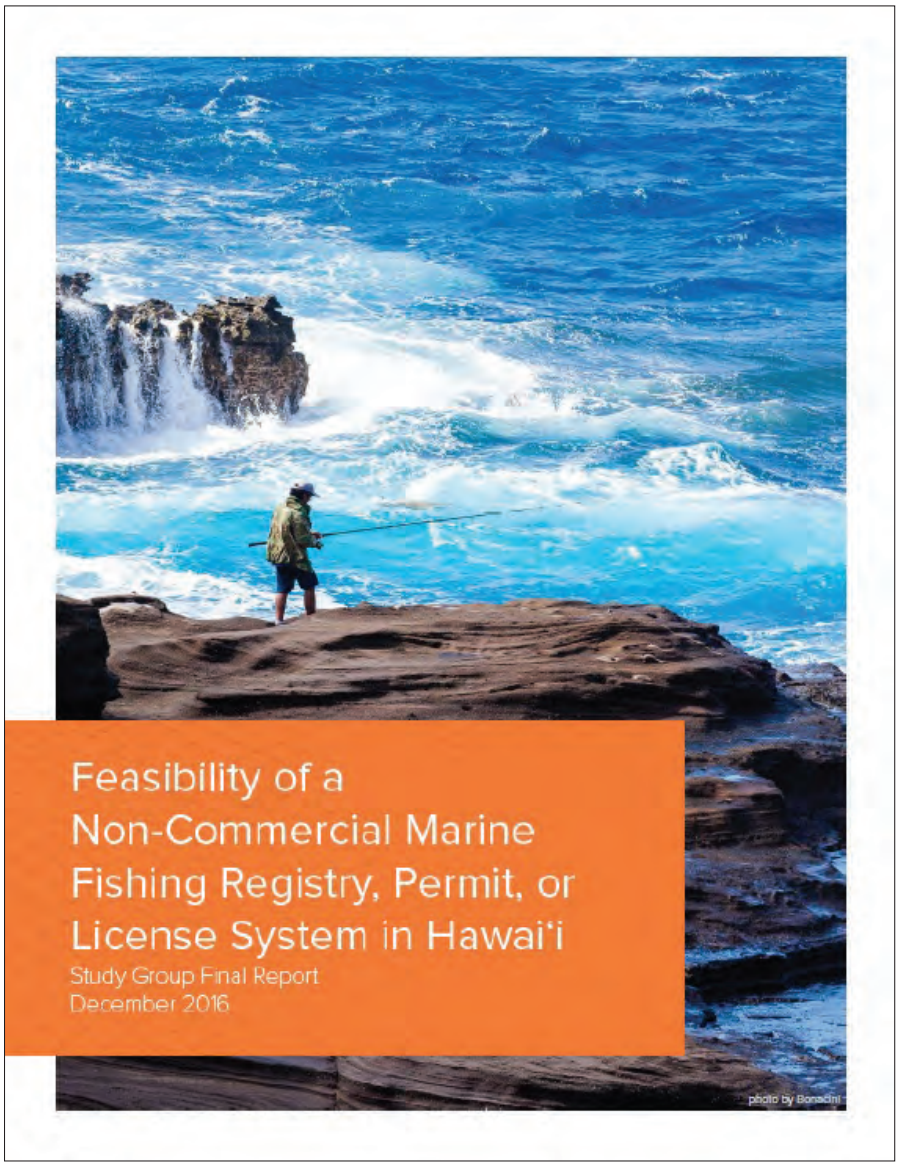
The second aspect of this project quantified the fishing parameters, such as catch and effort, of the fishing operation that works in tandem with the spotter pilot. The dominant commercial fishing method to catch akule is surround gill nets. Some claim akule fishermen catch all the fish within a targeted school when using this method. However, the study revealed the catch to be a fraction of what was spotted from the air. The catch averaged about 20 percent of the pilot's estimate.



When looking at the bycatch (or unwanted species) for the observed fishing operation, one can appreciate how this fishery is highly selective for the target species. Fishermen usually caught 15 to 20 pounds of bycatch on each trip, which is less than 3 percent of the total catch.

A paper on the study is being prepared for publication.

Fee-Based System Can Meet Hawai'i Non-commercial Fishing Goals, Study Finds



In December 2016, a study on the feasibility of a non-commercial fishing registry, permit or license (RPL) system was released by a group convened by Conservation International Hawaii and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council. The group included individuals from different fishing organizations and interests who were tasked with gathering and analyzing information to understand the implications of any prospective RPL system.

The group evaluated potential RPL systems based on their ability to meet three primary objectives: (1) provide additional and more robust data to support fishery management; (2) foster two-way dialogue between fishers and managers by identifying the universe of non-commercial fishers in Hawai'i and developing approved communication pathways; and (3) create a source of independent, continuous funding to support effective fisheries management. The group examined RPL systems enacted by other states, reviewed legal and financial analyses of these systems, interviewed fisheries managers in other coastal states, and focused outreach efforts on certain unique stakeholders and rights-holders.

The State of Hawai'i concluded that no legal or constitutional barriers in Hawai'i would prohibit the implementation of a new RPL system and that it is possible, subject to further consultation regarding implementation, to design a system that does not violate the Native Hawaiian traditional and customary rights protected under Hawai'i law. The study further concluded that a fee-based license or permit system would address all three primary objectives.

The study does not identify a preferred option or recommend a specific system that should be created. Instead it provides conclusions about the topic for the general public and decision makers to use as a reference for any future efforts regarding non-commercial fishing RPL system. Additionally, the report includes recommendations on outreach, additional research and information gathering, funding considerations, a possible advisory board, Native Hawaiian rights, enforcement and other issues.

The report can be downloaded at www.wpcouncil.org/2016/12/05/rpl-report/.

Guam Fishermen's Co-Op Celebrates 40 Years with New Facility Groundbreaking

Co-op new facility groundbreaking.

On Jan. 28, 2017, the Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association reached another milestone in its 40-year history by breaking ground for a new facility. The Guam Economic Development Authority provided $1 million for phase 1 of the project, which will restore the seawall and develop a new walkway that begins adjacent to the Co-op building and extends seaward along the Agana Marina (Boat Basin) channel. Once all phases are completed, the new $5 million-plus facility will provide local residents and businesses with economic opportunities that will further diversify Guam's tourism attractions.

In its four decades of existence, the Co-op has helped develop local fisheries, trained local people to participate in the fishing industry, promoted the sustainable use of Guam's ocean resources and provided a place fishermen could call home. Its membership approved a long-term Master Plan with projects and programs to serve the fishing and the greater island community as a priority.

One ongoing program is "From the reef to the deep blue sea," which aims to replace the local desire for limited reef fish with more abundant pelagic fish such as mahimahi and tuna. This effort includes the development of recipes and engaging the community through education and outreach activities.

The Co-op also continues the cultural practice of sharing its economic harvest with the community. Donations are regularly made to various medical fundraisers, homeless programs, youth programs, faith-based organization and other community needs.

The true value of the Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association is that it represents the community and its goods and services benefit the community. The Co-op makes every attempt to buy Guam first. Its operation is supported by more than 50 local wholesalers (produce to store supplies), farmers, marine stores, tackle shops, grocery stores and other business entities.

Other Co-op Milestones

- Adoption of the Federal Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) Program in 1997 placed stringent measures on fishermen to ensure the highest quality product to customers. Consumers' embrace of this program is evident in their frequent return to the market.
- Sponsorship of the first seafood training program, which engaged not only Co-op staff but also representatives from various government agencies involved with public health.
- A successful value-added program, with daily customer requests for sashimi, poki (Guam style) and kelaguen.
- Collaboration with the US Coast Guard on safety at sea issues, University of Guam's Agricultural Extension Program (4-H) and the Department of Youth Affairs on youth issues, and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and other organizations on fishery issues.
- Sponsorship of the annual Guam Marianas International Fishing Derby, with support from the community and in partnership with the Gupot Y Peskadot (Fisherman's Festival), which raises awareness of environmental and resource issues through seafood samples and exhibits from various marine-related organizations.
- Co-sponsor of the Gupot Fanha'aniyan Pulan Chamoru (Chamorro Lunar Calendar Festival) to promote traditional knowledge and the sustainable use of island resources.
- Support of Guam Ocean and Fisheries Conservation Act of 2015 (Public Law 33–144), signed on April 16, 2016, to revive the island's fishing and water sports community with Guam Liberation Day fishing and sporting events, including the Guam Marianas International Fishing Derby, spearfishing, shoreline challenges, and surfing and paddling competitions.

Gov. Eddie Calvo (left) and Co-op and Council Advisory Panel members Stephen Meno, James Borja and Dale Alvarez (right) enjoy good food and friends at the groundbreaking ceremony.

CNMI Fish Demand to Increase as Casinos Open

The Best Sunshine Casino is temporarily located at the T Galleria by DFS in Garapan, across the road from the Grand Mariana construction site.

The Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI) has two industries: tourism, which has been in existence since the Trust Territory era, and casino gaming, which has been approved for the islands of Tinian, Rota and, most recently, Saipan. From the mid-1980s to late 2005, CNMI also had a thriving garment industry, but it ended due to increased global trade, lifting of quotas, changes on duties and imports and so on. The benefits from tourism and casinos can and should inspire the establishment of another industry, fishing. CNMI's current fishing activities are small scale operations. Working towards developing this industry into another viable revenue generating activity would be a smart move for Saipan and the entire Commonwealth.

The Imperial Pacific (also known as Best Sunshine) officially opened on Nov. 27, 2015. It operates a casino temporarily on the ground floor of the building formally used by Duty Free Shoppers, Inc. Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it employs more than one thousand local and non-resident workers. Imperial Pacific has purchased other buildings on island for its office needs, as well as condominiums and houses for its staff, the majority of whom are recruited from abroad. Imperial Pacific continues to expand its business opportunities by acquiring real estate properties as part of its planned luxury integrated resort. According to the company's website, the resort on Saipan is being developed with an investment of more than $3.1 billion.

Above: The Grand Mariana being constructed in Garapan will be a five-star resort, with a total surface area of 140,000 square meters and more than 200 gaming tables and 350 slot machines.

The company is also constructing the Grand Mariana, a 250-room five-star hotel across from its current location. The 140,000-square-meter facility will need additional employees to run its gambling and related activities, as well as groundkeepers, housekeepers, cooks, parking lot attendants and other workers to run and operate a successful hotel. The number of weekly hotel guests, whose average stay is three days, is expected to triple.

With the number of hotel employees and guests both increasing, the demand for locally caught seafood would also likely grow as fish is consumed by the local staff as well as their non-resident co-workers and the resort guests, who are mostly Asian. The growing demand for seafood provides an opportunity for local fishermen to invest in bigger vessels with more power and bigger storage capacities to supply this new market. Thus, the burgeoning casino industry could be the turning point for consumption of CNMI's marine resources, especially pelagic species such as tuna and mahimahi as well as bottomfish, such as onaga, an expensive and delicious favorite.

Oceanic White Tip and Manta Ray ESA listings

Environmental organizations have petitioned the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to add great white, bigeye thresher, common thresher, scalloped hammerhead and whale sharks to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) list. Of this assemblage, only the Eastern Atlantic and Eastern Pacific distinct population segments (DPSs) of scalloped hammerhead shark were listed.

More recently, NMFS received petitions to list the oceanic white tip shark and two species of manta rays. In response, NMFS published a proposed rule on Dec. 29, 2016, to list the oceanic white tip shark as threatened and a 12-month finding and a proposed rule on Jan. 12, 2017, to list the giant manta ray as threatened. NMFS also found that listing of the reef manta ray was not warranted.

The oceanic whitetip shark is distributed worldwide in epipelagic tropical and subtropical waters between 30° North latitude and 35° South latitude. The species is highly migratory and usually found offshore and in deep waters. NMFS conducted a status review of the global population of oceanic white tip shark to compile the best available information and assess the current and future extinction risk for the species. NMFS found that the historically abundant species had undergone significant historical declines throughout its range and likely continues to experience declines.

Ocean white tip (NOAA photo)

NMFS identified the most significant threat to this species as the high rates of fishing mortality driven by demands of the international trade in shark fins and meat, as well as impacts related to incidental bycatch and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The species was once commonly caught in both longline and purse-seine fisheries in tropical waters, but their presence in observer samples has become increasingly rare over time. Catch rate analyses of data from both fisheries showed clear, steep declines in abundance. Declining median size trends for oceanic whitetip sharks were observed in all regions and sexes in both fisheries. While management measures to reduce impacts to oceanic whitetip sharks have been implemented through the regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs), NMFS determined that these measures are inadequate, with the exception of implementation and enforcement in US waters. Based on the status review, NMFS determined that the species currently has a moderate risk of extinction and is on a trajectory toward a high risk of extinction in the foreseeable future (about 30 years) and thus proposed to list it as a threatened species under the ESA.

Reef manta ray (NOAA photo)

The giant manta ray is found worldwide in tropical, subtropical, and temperate bodies of water. The species is considered to be a migratory, with estimated distances travelled of up to 1,500 km. There are no current or historical estimates of the global abundance of this species, only anecdotal account of sightings and abundance from divers and fishermen.

NMFS identified overutilization for commercial purposes to be the most significant threat to the giant manta rays, especially in the Indo-Pacific and eastern Pacific. Giant manta rays are both targeted and caught as bycatch in a number of global fisheries throughout their range and are most susceptible to industrial purse-seine and artisanal gillnet fisheries. The estimated take of giant manta rays, particularly in many portions of the Indo-Pacific, frequently exceeds numbers of identified individuals in those areas. Observations from these areas also indicate declines in sightings and landings of the species. Giant manta rays have low reproductive output and overall productivity, which NMFS identified as a factor making the species inherently vulnerable to threats that would deplete its abundance, with a low likelihood of recovery.

Although there is considerable uncertainty regarding the species' current abundance throughout its range, according to NMFS, the best available information indicates the species has experienced population declines of potentially

significant magnitude due to fisheries-related mortality within the Indo-Pacific and eastern Pacific portion of its range, which NMFS determined qualifies as a "significant portion its range" under the final Significant Portion of Its Range (SPR) policy (79 FR 37577; July 1, 2014). While larger subpopulations of the species still exist in this SPR, NMFS noted that giant manta rays are a migratory species and will continue to face fishing pressure and experience fisheries-related mortality particularly in the industrial purse-seine fisheries and artisanal gillnet fisheries operating throughout the SPR. The proposed rule concluded that overutilization will continue to be a threat to the remaining giant manta ray populations through the foreseeable future, placing the species at a moderate risk of extinction throughout a significant portion of its range. As such NMFS is proposing to list it as a threatened species under the ESA.

The reef manta ray is observed in only the Indian Ocean and the western and south Pacific. The species is considered a more resident than giant manta rays and exhibits a degree of site-fidelity, returning to known aggregation areas. However, like the giant manta ray, current global population numbers are unknown and no historical baseline data exist. While the populations of reef manta rays have not been well assessed, NMFS concluded that this species is likely to be at a low overall risk of extinction as the species does not appear to be subject to significant threats that are causing declines. Hence, NMFS determined that the reef manta ray does not warrant listing under the ESA.

NMFS is accepting public comments on the proposed listing of the giant manta ray until March 13, 2017, and on the oceanic white tip until March 29, 2017. To read the full proposed rules and submit comment, visit the links below.

Giant and reef manta rays: https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=NOAA-NMFS-2016-0014

Oceanic white tip shark: https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=NOAA-NMFS-2015-0152

The reef manta ray is not proposed for listing under the ESA. (National Ocean Service photo)

Council Director Weighs in on Marine Protected Area Discussion

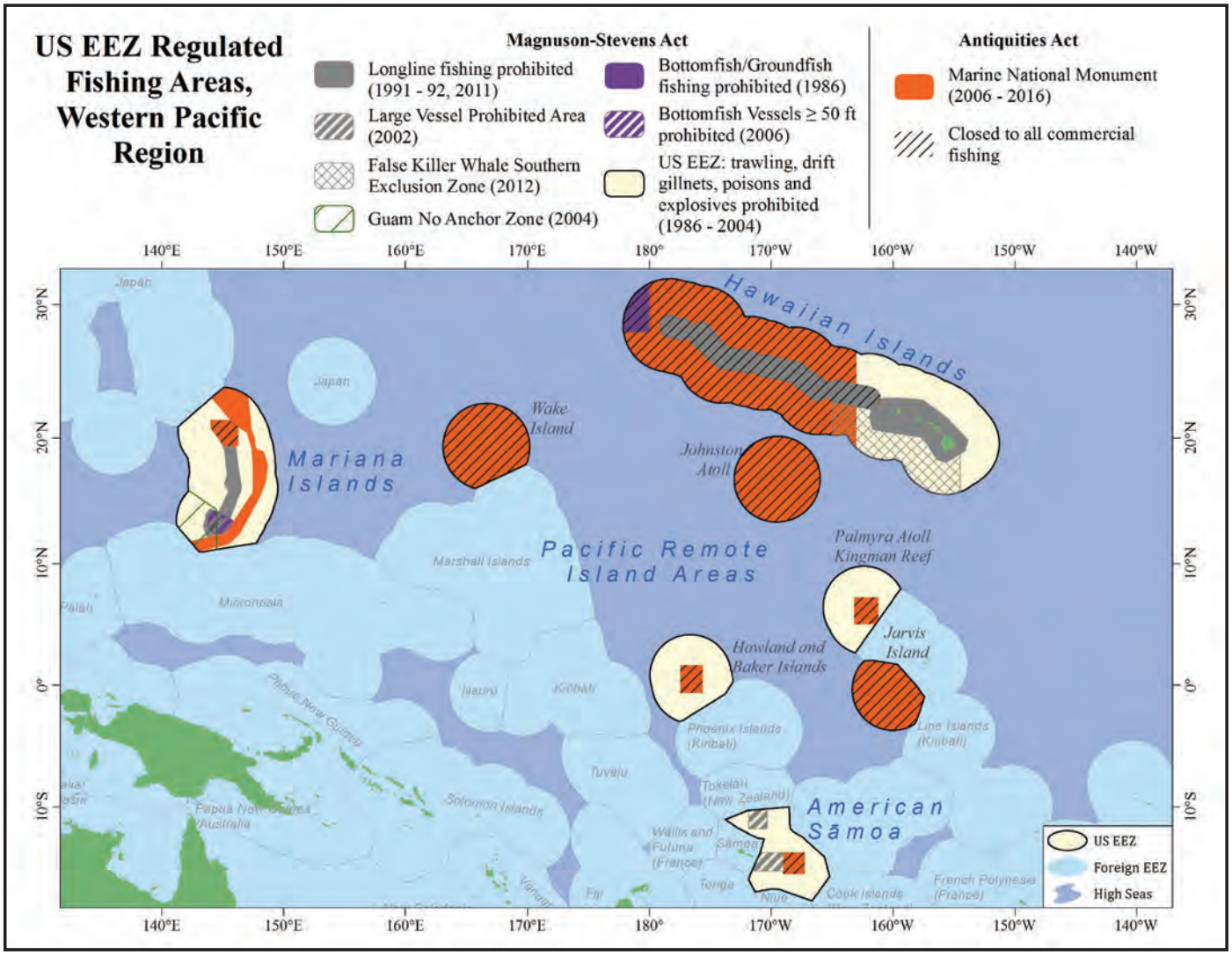
An online discussion on marine protected areas (MPAs) was recently organized by the Collaborative for Food from Our Oceans Data (CFOOD), a network of scientists working together to better understand the science of fisheries sustainability.

Invited experts contributing to the discussion included Serge Garcia, chair of the IUCN Fisheries Experts Group; Nobuyuki Yagi, University of Tokyo; Chris Costello, National Bureau of Economic Research; Doug Butterworth, University of Cape Town; Kevern Cochrane, Rhodes University; Magnus Johnson, University of Hull; Andrew Rosenberg, Union of Concerned Scientists; and John Tanzer, Global Marine Program at WWF International.

The scientists were primed with the following questions: What is the utility of setting MPA targets? Do MPAs need to be no take zones (NTZs)? What is the utility and wisdom of creating large ocean MPAs? The responses can be found at http://cfooduw.org/8-scientists-talk-mpas/.

Ray Hilborn, a CFOOD editorial board member and University of Washington professor, asked Kitty Simonds, executive director of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, to comment on them.

Simonds said the issue of creating MPA targets in the Western Pacific Region is moot. Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama established their blue legacies by proclaiming as no-take MPAs 53 percent of the US exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the Western Pacific Region, which equates to 26 percent of the total US EEZ. These areas were established with little scientific evidence and with promises of jobs and tourist dollars, which have not materialized. Further, most of



the vulnerable habitats in the Western Pacific Region were protected long before monument designation by smaller MPAs as part of the management of coral reef and associated ecosystems by state, federal and territorial governments. Targets are meaningless unless they are tied to an objective of the closure and are expressed as a percentage of a given habitat type, Simonds added.

Regarding NTZs, Simonds noted that current MPA theory indicates that they will typically accumulate biomass. However, from a fisheries management standpoint, there should be a payoff from spillover and recruitment enhancement. Unfortunately, recent research using a number of different techniques shows the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) will not receive substantial resource subsidy from the large MPA in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. This illustrates the need for a much more intensive process to implement MPAs, with clearly defined goals, realistic expectations of benefits, review schedules and mechanisms to modify the MPA. Most of the large MPAs in the Western Pacific Region are remote and isolated from human populations. Only foreign fishing vessels, government vessels or expensive, well equipped, oceangoing private vessels have the ability to reach these areas, so increased tourist traffic is highly unlikely.

Regarding the utility and overall wisdom of large ocean MPAs, Simonds pointed to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission's effort to curb fishing mortality for tunas by establishing two large open-ocean MPAs. Fishing mortality did not fall, Simonds said, because fishing effort moved into neighboring EEZs. Highly migratory species by virtue of their life history will move through large ocean MPAs and thus remain vulnerable to fishing. Moreover, with climate change, the static nature of MPAs, large and small, may be called into question if they have no mechanism to be modified or relocated if species distributions change. Establishing an MPA is often seen as the target gain, with no real consideration apart from vaguely defined benefits, nor with the dynamic aspects of ecosystems in mind.

Simonds concluded by commenting on the recent IUCN World Conservation Congress motion to protect 30 percent of global oceans by 2030. She noted that the Western Pacific Region has exceeded this target by 23 percent, yet little to no measurable benefits have accrued from these closures except to provide jobs for those charged with managing the MNMs.

For Simonds complete comment, go to http://cfooduw.org/simonds-post/.

Council to Consider Fishing Options for the Expanded NWHI Marine Monument

At its 169th meeting, March 21-23, 2017, in Honolulu, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will consider fishing regulations in the monument expansion area from 50 to 200 nautical miles (nm) around the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. President Barack Obama under authority of the Antiquities Act proclaimed this vast area, twice the size of Texas, adjacent to the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument as a marine protected area on Aug. 26, 2016. During its deliberations, the Council will consider the results of public scoping meetings that were held in December 2016 to determine what information is available as the first step in the process of analyzing alternatives and recommending management regulations.

The Proclamation directs the Secretaries to prohibit commercial fishing activities and anchoring on any living or dead coral. It also allows the Secretaries to permit for non-commercial fishing and the exercise of Native Hawaiian traditional, customary, cultural, subsistence, spiritual and religious practices if consistent with the care and management of the monument expansion. However, fish harvested either in whole or in part cannot enter commerce through sale, barter, or trade, and the resource must be managed sustainably.

On Sept. 23, 2016, the National Marine Fisheries Service sent the Council a letter requesting recommendations for amending the Hawai'i Archipelago and Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plans to establish appropriate fishing requirements for the expanded monument area. A similar process occurred in 2009 after the designation of marine national monuments for the Pacific Remote Islands, Rose Atoll (American Samoa) and Marianas Trench.

Council Family Updates

Va'amua Henry Sesepasara is the newest member of the Council and serves as the designated State official for the Territory of American Samoa. He was appointed Acting Director of the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) in January of 2017 and later that month confirmed by the Fono as the director, replacing Dr. Ruth Matagi-Tofiga who was named as the Territory's Director of Education. Sesepasara had been serving as the Governor's Fisheries Adviser and on the American Samoa Fisheries Task Force. He coordinated the task force's operations along with its chair, Solip Hong. Sesepasara brings a great deal of experience with him to the Council as he has served as the DMWR director under previous Governors and has also been president of the American Samoa Alia Association. Sesepasara is an avid fisherman as well as a fautasi boat captain.

Shelton J. Harley recently joined the Council's Scientific Statistical Committee (SSC) and will attend his first SSC meeting in March. He brings with him 15 years of experience in overseeing and delivering stock assessments and fisheries modelling in support of fisheries management across a range of species, including tuna, sharks and demersal species. He holds a PhD in biology from Dalhousie University and an MSc in biology from Auckland University. He is currently the manager of fisheries science for the Ministry for Primary Industries in New Zealand and previously was the principal scientist (stock assessment and modelling) for the Secretariat of the Pacific Community leading tuna assessments for the Western and Central Pacific. Harley has also worked as a stock assessment scientist for Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission and the National Institute for Water and Atmospheric Research.

Robert Skillman was recognized in March for his 30 years of service on the SSC (1986-2016). He had also served for years as chair of the Council's Pelagic Plan Team and is retired from the National Marine Fisheries Service's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center.

In Memoria

Jerome K. Aldan was elected in 2014 to be the seventh mayor of Gani, which is the traditional name for the Northern Islands of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). He succeeded his father, the late Mayor Tobias Aldan, and will be remembered as a champion who fought tirelessly against military plans to have a live firing range on Pagan. He started the first Northern Frontier Summit and the Northern Islands Resettlement and Redevelopment Program, developed the Pagan Cold Storage Facility Project and was the driving force behind the Northern Islands community-based fishery management plan, to name a few of his accomplishments. He also served on Save Pagan Island, the Association of Mariana Islands Mayors, the Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and many other organizations to advocate and protect the interest of his people and their islands. His unexpected departure at age 41 is a big loss to Gani and the CNMI.

Jerry Kaluhiwa worked to support traditional fisheries and indigenous resource management at the 'Aha Moku Puwalu and First Stewards conferences on coastal communities and climate change. He and his wife, Rocky, also assisted the Council and the Hawai'i Division of Boating and Ocean Recreation in Fishermen Code of Conduct outreach efforts, including the posting and maintenance of signage at He'eia Kea harbor, near their family home. He will be missed for the many ways he helped the Council to improve the future of fishing communities in Hawai'i and the Western Pacific Region. He was always in the conversation pushing, pulling, agreeing, disagreeing, cajoling and having a good laugh. He was a strong, steadfast supporter of family and for doing the right thing.

Recipe

Vaisu

This recipe is for a cooked variation of the Samoan oka. It was provided by the Ilaoa family of Leone Village, American Samoa.

Ingredients

1 whole palu malau (ruby snapper, scaled and gutted)

4 cups coconut milk (hand strained from grated coconut)

½ onion, finely chopped

Salt to taste

Black pepper to taste

¾ tsp red pepper flakes

1 kipolo (Samoan lime), medium-sized

Method

Combine coconut milk, salt, pepper, onion and red pepper flakes in a bowl. Rinse the fish thoroughly and pat completely dry. Cut shallow crisscross lines making about 1-inch squares. Rub with salt and pepper. Grill 6 minutes on each side of the fish. Cut the kipolo (Samoan lime) in two, and squeeze a half over each side of the fish during the grilling process.

Plating

Plate the fish, and cover it with the sauce. Turn it over after a few minutes allowing the sauce to be absorbed by the fish. Remove the fish from the sauce, and serve over a bed of rice.

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2017 Council Calendar

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March

15-17
Joint Advisory Panel, Non-Commercial Fisheries Advisory Committee, Fishing Industry Advisory Committee and Community Demonstration Projects Program Advisory Committee, Honolulu

20
Standing Committees, Honolulu

21-23
169th Council Meeting, Honolulu

22
Fishers Forum on Using Fisher Knowledge to Inform Fisheries Management, Honolulu

30-31
Protected Species Advisory Committee, Honolulu

April

3
Social Science Planning Committee, Honolulu and by teleconference

5-6
Marine Planning and Climate Change Committee, Honolulu

17
American Samoa Flag Day

18-19
Archipelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan Team, Honolulu

25-27
Bluefin Stakeholder Workshop, Tokyo

20-21
Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee, Honolulu

May

1-2
Regional Recreational Fishing Summit, Honolulu

2
World Tuna Day

2-4
Pelagic Plan Team, Honolulu

8-12
Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission's Science Advisory Committee, La Jolla, Calif.

15-18
Councils Coordination Committee, Gloucester, Mass.

June

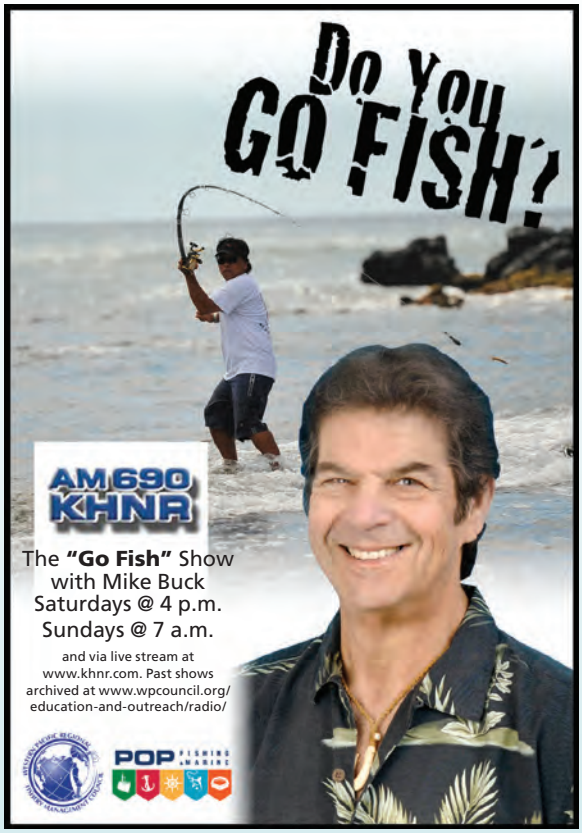
1
Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission's General Advisory Committee, La Jolla, Calif.

5-9
United Nations Oceans Conference, New York

13-15
Scientific and Statistical Committee, Honolulu

19-23
170th Council Meeting, Honolulu

26-29
National Marine Educators Association conference, Charleston, SC



ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT OF FISHERIES IN THE US PACIFIC ISLANDS

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council was established by Congress in 1976 to manage marine resources and maintain opportunities for sustainable domestic fishing in the US exclusive economic zone waters and high seas around Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the eight US Pacific remote island areas.

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