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## Press Release

For Immediate Release

### **Council Votes for Federal Permits and Logbooks for All Hawaii Commercial Pelagic Boats and Other Measures to Address Overfishing of Pacific Bigeye Tuna**

#### **Council Also Addresses Hawaii Bottomfish Overfishing and Shark Viewing Issues, Reviews Hawaii and American Samoa Longline Fisheries**

HONOLULU (2 June 2005) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council today finalized its recommended management measures to address overfishing of Pacific bigeye tuna. While the catch of bigeye tuna by the fisheries under the jurisdiction of the Council account for less than 5 percent of the harvest of bigeye tuna in the Pacific, US law requires that the Council take action if overfishing of a species is occurring in its fisheries.

The Council's recommendation, which will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for review and approval, includes a suite of domestic and international measures. Among the domestic measures, all commercial boats that fish for pelagic species (i.e., open-water species as opposed to bottomfish) in federal waters (3- 200 miles offshore) surrounding Hawaii would be required to have federal permits and report their catches through federal logbooks. There has long been concern that fishing by these vessels around offshore Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs) and weather buoys and at Cross Seamount off of the Big Island of Hawaii account for a substantial take of bigeye tuna. The reporting requirements will provide detailed data on the amount of the harvest of not only bigeye but other species as well.

"This reporting is especially critical now as management decisions for migratory species, such as tunas, are being made by international fishery management organizations," noted Council Executive Director Kitty M. Simonds. "These organizations often are relying on country- or fleet-specific quotas based on historical catches, so knowing the amount of the catches for our fisheries is very important."

For example, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) decided that the 2004 catches of bigeye tuna in the Eastern Pacific by longline vessels be capped at 2001 catches by country. These catches were approximately 37,000 mt for Japan; 13,000 mt for Korea; 8,000 mt for Taiwan; 3,000 mt for China; 150 mt for the United States; and 4,000 mt for other fleets.

Among the international measures, the Council voted that the US delegation to the IATTC propose that longline fleets that catch less than 555 mt (i.e., 1 percent of the total average bigeye tuna catch reported in the Eastern Pacific Ocean between 1999 and 2003) be exempted from quotas, as these fleets do not contribute significantly to overfishing.

Other measures voted on by the Council to address bigeye tuna overfishing in the Pacific include the following:

- Hawaii Small Boat Fisheries
  - A control date to be established for all commercial pelagic boats fishing in federal waters (this warns any fisherman considering entering one of these fisheries after this date that they might be excluded from the fishery in the future).
  - An alternative sampling design to be implemented by the Hawaii Marine Recreational Fishing Survey (HMRFS) program in addition to its random digit dialing telephone survey, in order to gather more precise estimates of catch and effort from recreational boat fishermen.
  - Two workshops to be held involving the federal Western Pacific Fishery Information Network (WPacFIN) and the Hawaii State Division of Aquatic Resources (HDAR) to improve the State's data reporting system and estimates for pelagic species, including bigeye tuna.

## Fishery Management Measures 2-2-2-2-2-2

- International Management in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean
  - A US proposal to the international Western and Central Pacific Fishery Commission (WCPFC) to adopt the following measures:
    - Controls that cap and rollback bigeye tuna effort to 1999 for the short term and to a point that eliminates overfishing in the longterm;
    - Country-level quotas (transferable within countries but not between countries); and
    - Mandatory registration and limits to number of FADs utilized by purse seine vessels.

The Council is a member of the US delegation to the WCPFC. Members of the WCPFC are required to adhere to measures passed by the organization. While the US is currently not a member of the WCPFC, President Bush on May 16 of this year sent a message to the US Senate asking it to "give early and favorable consideration to the WCPF Convention and give its advice and consent to its ratification."
- The Role of US Regional Fishery Management Councils in International Management
  - Adoption of a 16-step process ranging from ensuring that Councils are represented on the US delegation in the international arena to implementation of international decisions through the regional fishery management process as mandated in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Also today, the Council voted to

- Move forward with a range of management alternatives to address overfishing of bottomfish around the Hawaiian Islands. The Council will review these options and likely take final action on them at its March 2006 meeting.
- Continue to develop and evaluate options (including expeditious scientific research) to regulate shark viewing operations.

The Council heard reports on the Hawaii swordfish fishery, which was reopened with strict management measures in late 2004 after being closed for several years due to concerns regarding the bycatch of sea turtles. The first quarter 2005 reports show the fishery, which is required to utilize mitigation measures developed in the Atlantic to reduce turtle bycatch, has had interactions with five leatherback turtles and 10 loggerhead turtles, with no mortalities. The fishery will close for the calendar year if the take reaches 16 leatherbacks and 17 loggerheads. From January 1 to May 28, 2005, the fishery landed 1.7 million pounds of swordfish worth \$4.8 million in ex-vessel value.

The Hawaii and American Samoa longline fisheries are the only US longline fisheries for tuna in the Pacific. Both are limited entry fisheries, with the final rule for the American Samoa fishery having been published in the Federal Register, on May 24, 2005.

The Council said farewell to longtime Council Chair Roy Morioka and Vice Chair Frank Farm. In August, each will have completed three three-year terms as Council members from Hawaii. During their tenure the Council was a leader in developing longline management measures to protect seabirds, turtles and other protected species.

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 on these or other agenda items, contact the Council at 808 522-8220, email [info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov](mailto:info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov) or visit the Council's website at [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org).