



## Press Release

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### US Fishery Managers Act to Address Endangered Species, Foreign Fishing Concerns

KOHALA COAST, HAWAII (4 May 2012) The chairs and executive directors of the nation's eight Regional Fishery Management Councils (RFMCs) yesterday in Hawaii concluded their three-day Council Coordinating Committee (CCC) meeting. The CCC is convened annually to enable the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), NOAA officials and others to exchange information with the RFMCs. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the RFMCs are responsible for developing management plans for the nation's offshore fisheries. After approval by the Secretary of Commerce, the plans are implemented by NMFS. This year's CCC was hosted by the Western Pacific Council, whose jurisdiction includes the federally managed fisheries of Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Manuel Duenas, chair of the Western Pacific Council and president of the Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association, presided over the meeting with Samuel D. Rauch III, acting assistant administrator for NOAA Fisheries. Key concerns addressed by the U.S. fishery managers were the Endangered Species Act (ESA) process, leveling the playing field between domestic and imported seafood markets, stock assessments, and preventing overfishing while achieving optimum yield from domestic fisheries.

The CCC noted that U.S. fisheries are affected by critical habitat designation, listing of species as endangered or threatened and other ESA measures. The CCC said the ESA process should have a higher level of transparency and public involvement than is currently typical. In agreement with the NOAA Scientific Integrity Policy, which calls for achieving a greater level of public confidence and trust in the science used in federal decision making, the CCC will establish a working group with NMFS and the Marine Fishery Advisory Council to address these issues.

Regarding international fisheries, the CCC noted that NMFS is working on its second report to Congress on the certification of nations with respect to equivalent measures to the United States in relation to preventing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, bycatch and shark catches on the high seas. In its first report, NMFS did not negatively certify any nation, despite the generally accepted understanding that many nations importing seafood into the U.S. market are not on the same playing field as U.S. fisheries with respect to data collection and monitoring, safety at sea requirements, protected species mitigation, and other management measures. Therefore, the CCC recommended that NMFS enhance its activities to identify nations that do not implement equivalent measures. The CCC also recommended that NMFS work with the U.S. fishing industry to develop underutilized fisheries. Developing these fisheries may benefit target and non-target stocks and protected species through transferred effects as well as promote employment in coastal communities and enhance local food security. The United States currently imports about 86 percent of the seafood that it consumes, resulting in an annual seafood trade deficit of more than \$10.4 billion—second only to oil in the natural resources category.

Among other matters, the CCC voiced concern that current stock assessments are inadequate to cope with fishery management needs. The CCC will request that NMFS consider basic data collection programs, explain the merit of advanced technology to attain information for stock assessments and appropriately allocate funds to NOAA Fisheries Science Centers to carry out regular stock assessments. The CCC also noted that additional stock assessment, monitoring and ecosystem assessment information will be needed by the Councils to fulfill the Congressional mandate to manage all federally managed fisheries under annual catch limits (ACLs). The CCC recommended that the 2013 budget for the Councils remain the same as in 2012 at \$28.4 million, noting that since the NMFS total budget is proposed to remain stable, the RFMC total budget should also be stable. The CCC will also write to NOAA regarding its intent to modify the national standard that requires the prevention of overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield from each fishery for the U.S. fishing industry.

Discussion on advancing sustainability of the nation's fisheries will continue at the third Managing Our Nation's Fisheries conference being organized by the RFMCs in partnership with NMFS. The conference will be held the first week of May 2013 in Washington, DC. For more information, on the RFMCs, visit [www.fisherycouncils.org](http://www.fisherycouncils.org).

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