



WESTERN
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COUNCIL

Press Release

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Technology Creep Continues to Confound Scientists Monitoring Tuna Stocks

PAGO PAGO, SAMOA (23 March 2009) Technology creep is a major problem confounding fisheries managers throughout the world. As fishermen acquire new technology to locate and catch fish, traditional measures of fishing success may not reflect the declining stock abundance. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting last week at the Gov. Rex Lee Auditorium in American Samoa addressed this problem with respect to the increasing use of Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs) by purse-seine vessels. Due to this technology, fishing vessel effort is no longer related to fish abundance as measured by days fished. Instead, fishing effort is related in some ways to the number of FADs used by purse-seine vessels and puts into question the current use of vessel days as the primary management measure for purse-seine fishing by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). The jurisdiction of this international tuna management organization is the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

To address this issue, the SSC recommends well-designed research on purse-seine fishing on FADs to better understand the bigeye tuna stock, species composition of the catch, bycatch, actual fishing depth of the purse seines, the rate and impacts of “lost” FADs, and how fast fish biomass accumulates under a FAD after it has been fished.

The SSC met to review this and other issues that the Council will address March 24-26, 2009, at the same location in American Samoa. The Council is the federal agency responsible for management of offshore fisheries in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and other US Pacific islands.

Among the other recommendations made by the SSC are the following:

- With respect to the alternative of prohibiting purse seine FAD fishing in waters surrounding Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Guam and CNMI except for US hulled vessels participating in cooperative research: a) Research projects with the goal of reducing incidental catch of juvenile bigeye tuna in the purse seine fisheries should be a priority and should include milestones and performance standards; b) Research experimental design should be reviewed by the SSC or the Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review; and c) Utilize well-qualified scientific observers on all cruises.
- To reduce green sea turtle interactions in the American Samoa longline fishery: a) Require that the distance from each float to adjacent branch lines is at least 70 meters to help ensure that all hooks are deeper than 100 meters; b) Research effects of larger circle hooks on both albacore

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catch rate and turtle interactions; c) Increase observer coverage to the level of the Hawaii deep-set longline fishery; d) An intensive year-long experiment with a minimum of 30 percent observer coverage to explore variability in turtle interactions over time and space and with different gear configurations; e) Identification of the genetic stock of the green sea turtles that interact with the American Samoa longline fishery; and f) Continue Council work with the US delegation to the WCPFC to strengthen conservation and management measures that would reduce sea turtle interactions with non-US fishing fleets.

- To address the establishment of marine national monuments in waters around CNMI, Guam and American Samoa by President Bush's December 2008 executive orders: a) Recommend that the Departments of Commerce and the Interior develop a research program designed to understand the various impacts associated with the monument designation, including changes in fish biomass or size structure, changes in species composition, changes in benthic habitat composition, spillover effects, protected species abundance estimates and usage rates within the monuments, and local socio-economic impacts; and b) Recommend that the Commerce and Interior Departments provide open access to local government agencies for the purpose of conducting research germane to local fisheries management and stock assessment needs.
- To address the US quota of bigeye tuna for longline vessels under the WCPFC: a) Urge NMFS to immediately announce the US 2009 quota for bigeye tuna required under the WCPFC measures and to indicate how the longline fishing for bigeye tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean will be closed should the quota be reached; and b) Develop and rapidly introduce a limited access privilege program for catch quota allocation to fishermen in the Hawaii longline fishery.
- Regarding the list of species ranked by their vulnerability to overfishing developed the Council's Archipelagic Plan Team and staff for Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam and CNMI: a) Accept the list on a provisional basis so information necessary to develop annual catch limits (ACLs) can be developed; b) for Hawaii: keep Kona crab, parrotfish (uhu), black coral and menpachi on the list; drop akule and opelu; add seamount monchong; and reconsider onaga and hapuupuu (Hawaiian grouper) given that they are already managed through total allowable catch measures and are in a stock complex with well defined ACLs.
- Support collaboration of American Samoa and neighboring independent Samoa to address mutual concerns regarding bottomfish stocks and management of the albacore tuna fishery.
- Improve ability for Hawaii, American Samoa, Guan and CNMI to monitor imports and exports of fish and fish products.
- Support the creation of a new control date for management of hook-and-line fisheries on Cross Seamount and the NOAA weather buoys and expand research on Cross Seamount monchong.

The Council will also consider the recommendations of the American Samoa Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee, which met Friday, and the Archipelagic Plan Team and Advisory Panel, which meets today, at the Gov. Lee Auditorium in American Samoa. For more information, contact Council at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or in American Samoa this week at +1 (684) 258-0975.

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SSC members: Dr. Stewart Allen (NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center), Dr. Judith Amesbury (Micronesian Archeological Research Services), Dr. Brian Bowen (Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology), Dr. Paul Callaghan (University of Guam retired), Dr. Frank A. Camacho (Guam Community College), Dr. Milani Chaloupka (University of Queensland), Dr. Charles Daxboeck (BioDax Consulting Tahiti), Dr. Richard Deriso (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission), Dr. John Hampton (Secretariat of the Pacific Community), Dr. Pierre Kleiber (NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center), Dr. Molly Lutcavage (University of New Hampshire), Dr. James Parrish (Hawaii Cooperative Fishery Research Unit retired), Dr. Dan Polhemus (Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources), Dr. Marlowe Sabater (American Samoa Marine & Wildlife Resources Department), Dr. Craig Severance (University of Hawaii at Hilo retired), Dr. John Sibert (Pelagic Fisheries Research Program), Dr. Robert Skillman (NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center retired) and Mr. Michael Trianni (Northern Mariana Islands Division of Fish & Wildlife).