

Summary of Action Items at the June 2023 Council Meeting

The Council will consider and may take action on the issues summarized below.

1. American Samoa Fishery Ecosystem Plan BMUS Revision Amendment

The proposed action item aims to refine the bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) complex in American Samoa to accurately reflect the current state of the bottomfish fishery. The BMUS complex, originally recommended in 1996 and revised in 2009 and 2018, has been used for management purposes in the region. However, in response to the 2019 benchmark stock assessment and new assessment models in 2022, there is a need to reassess the BMUS complex and potentially manage the shallow and deep-water species separately.

The purpose of this proposed action is to determine if the current species composition of the BMUS complex in American Samoa aligns with the fisheries and if conservation and management measures are necessary for sustainable bottomfish fisheries. ***The Council will discuss and may select a preliminary preferred alternative at its 195th meeting regarding the American Samoa Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) BMUS Revision Amendment.***

2. Specifying Annual Catch Limits for Kona Crab (Final Action)

The Council will consider the establishment of multi-year harvest limits for the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) Kona crab for fishing years 2024-2026. The decision will be based on the 2019 benchmark stock assessment and catch projections up to 2026. The assessment indicated a maximum sustainable yield of 73,609 pounds and an overfishing limit of 33,989 pounds. ***At its 195th meeting, the Council will review several options and make a final decision regarding the harvest limits and associated accountability measures to prevent overfishing.***

3. MHI Kona Crab Status Determination Criteria (Final Action)

The recent benchmark stock assessment for Kona crab in the MHI showed that the stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. However, the FEP for the Hawai'i Archipelago does not have specific criteria to determine the status of the Kona crab MUS. As a result, the stock status of MHI Kona crab is labeled as "unknown" in the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Species Information System, which is the national database for stock assessment and status determination.

To address this issue, the Council took initial action at its March 2023 meeting and recommended establishing status determination criteria (SDC) for Kona crab fisheries, aligned with the previous stock assessment. The Council recognized the importance of developing SDC specific to this fishery, as criteria from other regions or fisheries may not be suitable.

At its 195th meeting, the Council will consider taking final action to amend the Hawai'i Archipelagic FEP and establish SDC for Kona crab.

This action is necessary to comply with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and its regulations, ensuring the specification of SDC for the Kona crab stock in the MHI under the Hawai'i Archipelago FEP. By establishing SDC, the Council aims to enable the determination and reporting of stock status, consistent with the requirements of section 304(e) of the MSA. This action is also needed to further support the sustainable management of the Kona crab fishery in the MHI.

4. Options for Revising Uku Essential Fish Habitat

The Council is proposing an action to refine the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) designations and associated

provisions for MHI uku (gray snapper) in the Hawai'i FEP. The aim is to ensure compliance with NMFS regulatory guidelines and implementing regulations, as well as National Standard 2, which recommends periodic review and revision of EFH provisions based on the best scientific information available.

To achieve this, at its September 2022 meeting, the Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed two uku EFH models developed by Franklin (2021) and Tanaka et al. (2022), recognizing them as significant improvements over the current approach. The models were then presented to the Council, which instructed staff to assess their use in revising uku EFH through an amendment to the Hawai'i FEP.

At its 195th meeting, the Council will discuss taking initial action to refine uku EFH by considering the options presented in an options paper developed by a working group. A preliminary preferred alternative may be selected based on Level 1 and 2 models developed by Franklin (2021) and Tanaka et al. (2022), respectively.

5. Options for the CNMI Bottomfish Annual Catch Limits (Final Action)

The NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center conducted a 2019 stock assessment update, which indicated a lower long-term maximum sustainable yield estimate of 93,600 pounds (with a 95% confidence interval of 48,800-205,300 pounds) compared to the previous estimate of 173,100 ± 32,190 pounds.

Based on stock projection results, assuming a complete harvest of the six-year bottomfish catch limit in previous years, it was found that setting the ACL at 95,000 pounds would result in a 50% probability of overfishing in 2024 and 2025, which is the maximum allowable risk according to federal guidelines. Therefore, 95,000 pounds is considered the proxy for the overfishing limit for

this two-year period. For reference, the average annual total catch between 2019 and 2021 was 43,792 pounds.

At its 195th meeting, the Council will discuss and will consider taking final action on the ACL specifications for the CNMI bottomfish fishery for 2024-2025.

6. Review of the Guam Marine Conservation Plan

The MCP for Guam will expire in 2023. ***At its 195th meeting, the Council will assess the MCP for agreement and approval.*** Once approved by the Council and the Secretary of Commerce, the MCP will be valid for three years. However, the plan can be adjusted at any time and resubmitted for approval.

The MSA authorizes the Secretary of State to negotiate and sign a Pacific

Insular Area Fishery Agreement (PIAFA), provided that the Secretary of Commerce and the Council concur. A PIAFA would allow foreign fishing within the 200-mile U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) around American Samoa, the CNMI, Guam or the PRIA with the concurrence of the appropriate governors. Before entering into a PIAFA, the appropriate governor must develop a three-year MCP providing details on the use of any funds collected by the Secretary under the PIAFA, with the concurrence of the Council.

In addition to PIAFA funds, fines and penalties resulting from violations by foreign vessels in the EEZ around the Pacific Insular Areas are to be deposited into the local government's treasury and used to implement the respective MCP. The Council is also authorized by

the MSA to use funds from the Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund to implement MCP projects.

The MCP must be consistent with the Council's FEPs. The MSA mandates that the MCP comprise conservation and management objectives, such as Pacific Insular Area observer programs, marine and fisheries research, and conservation, education, and enforcement activities related to marine and coastal management. Education and training in sustainable marine resources development, scientific research, and conservation strategies are also required. The MCP must also include Western Pacific community-based demonstration projects to promote the management, conservation, and economic enhancement of the Pacific Insular Areas. 🐟

Upcoming Events

The 148th Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting will be held June 14 to 16, 2023, at the Council office, 1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI, 96813. The meeting will be in a hybrid format, with in-person participation available for SSC members and the public, or remote participation via Webex: <https://tinyurl.com/147SSCMtg>.

Major agenda items include: American Samoa Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) amendment for bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) revision (action item); Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) BMUS annual biological catch (ABC) specification for 2024-2025 (action item); Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) Kona crab ABC specification for 2024-2026 (action item); Uku essential fish habitat (EFH) revision options (action item); False killer whale issues review; and 2022 Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report and recommendations review.

The 195th meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will be held June 27 to 29, 2023, at the Governor H. Rex Lee Auditorium, American Samoa Highway 001, Utulei, AS. The meeting will be in a hybrid format, with in-person participation available for Council members and the public, or remote participation via Webex: <https://tinyurl.com/194CouncilMtg>.

Major agenda items include: American Samoa FEP amendment for BMUS revision (action item); MHI Kona crab annual catch limit (ACL) specification and status determination criteria establishment (action items); Uku EFH revision options (action item); CNMI Bottomfish ACL options (action item); Guam Marine Conservation Plan review (action item); Hawai'i deep-set and American Samoa longline fishery final biological opinions and implementation plan review; 2022 Annual SAFE Report and recommendations review; and Research priorities and international fishery issues review.

For more information on the Webex connections, and complete agendas and meeting documents, go to www.wpcouncil.org/meetings-calendars.

The Fishers Forums on “Rising Tides and Changing Times” will take place from 6 to 9 p.m. June 27, 2023, at the Governor H. Rex Lee Auditorium,



American Samoa Highway 001, Utulei, AS. This free, family friendly public event includes informational tables, presentations and more. Come learn about climate change in American Samoa—how it affects fisheries, what government agencies and community partners are doing to address it, and how you can get involved. 🐟