

Summary of Action Items at the September 2023 Council Meeting

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

1. Options for Fishing Regulations in Proposed PRIA Sanctuary

In 2009, President Bush used the Antiquities Act to designate the Pacific Remote Islands (Baker, Howland, Jarvis, Wake Islands, Johnston and Palmyra Atolls, and Kingman Reef) as the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, covering 490,343 square miles with prohibitions on commercial fishing but allowances for non-commercial and charter fishing. In 2014, President Obama expanded the Monument using the same authority to include Wake, Johnston, and Jarvis Islands out to the 200 nm U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) limit while keeping the 50 nm limit for other islands. In March 2023, President Biden instructed the Commerce Secretary to consider making the monument and additional U.S. EEZ areas a national marine sanctuary.

The National Marine Sanctuaries Act requires involving the appropriate fishery management council for fishing regulations within the EEZ. NOAA has identified that proposed fishing management actions are necessary, and provided the Council a package of materials intended to help it determine what would best fulfill the sanctuary goals and objectives. The Council can decide to create draft fishing regulations, determine there is no need for regulations, or defer a decision.

At its 196th meeting, the Council will consider taking initial action on the need for draft fishing regulations. If needed, the Council will formulate these regulations by Dec. 20, 2023, considering aspects like necessity, the types of fishing regulations, and implications for commercial and noncommercial fishing within the proposed sanctuary.

2. American Samoa Bottomfish: Discontinuing the Rebuilding Plan and Annual Catch Limit Specifications

At its 195th meeting, the Council reviewed the 2023 American Samoa bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) stock assessment and confirmed the fishery was not overfished or experiencing overfishing. The Council directed staff to draft a Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) amendment to end the current rebuilding plan and assemble P* (risk of overfishing) and SEEM (Social, Economic, Ecological and Management Uncertainty) working groups. In August 2023, these groups along with the Scientific and Statistical Committee evaluated multiple factors and advised a risk level to the Council. *At the 196th meeting, the Council will decide whether to discontinue the rebuilding plan and set annual catch limits and accountability measures for the American Samoa bottomfish fishery from 2024 to 2027.*

3. 2024 US Territorial Bigeye Tuna Catch Limit and Allocation Specification (Final Action)

Bigeye tuna is managed as separate stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) and Eastern Pacific Ocean by international commissions. The 2023 stock assessment for WCPO's bigeye tuna reveals it is not overfished or experiencing overfishing. The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) establishes conservation measures for species like bigeye tuna caught by various fisheries and flag states, including the United States. Since 2018, conservation and management measures (CMMs) like 2018-01, 2020-01, and 2021-01 maintain catch limits, like the United States' 3,554-metric ton (mt) bigeye limit.

CMM 2021-01, expiring in 2023, doesn't set individual limits for Small Island Developing States and territories like American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI. Potential new catch limits and extending current ones might emerge. The Council's Amendment 7 to the Pacific Pelagic FEP sets management rules for U.S. Participating Territories, granting them authority to manage species within WCPFC limits. The Council is considering single-year specifications for 2024 and awaits WCPFC's future limits.

Past years saw bigeye limits of 2,000 mt for each U.S. Participating Territory, and allocation limits with U.S.-flagged vessels to up to 1,000 mt. However, the fishery closed in 2019 before the season ended, during a time of high demand. The Council adjusted limits for 2020-2023, with allocations not exceeding 3,000 mt. U.S. vessels operated through these years. The final rule for the 2023 specification was issued in June 2023. *At its 196th meeting, the Council will consider taking final action on the 2024 bigeye limits for U.S. territories and catch transfer limits under the Pacific Pelagic FEP.*

4. Review of the Guam and CNMI Marine Conservation Plans

The MCP for Guam expired in August 2023 and the CNMI government is requesting an amendment to its MCP. *At its 196th meeting, the Council will assess the MCPs for agreement and approval.* Once approved by the Council and the Secretary of Commerce, the MCPs will be valid for three years. However, the plans can be adjusted at any time and resubmitted for approval.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act (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. 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. 🐟

2023 Council Calendar

Check the Council website for in-person and remote public participation options for meetings hosted by the Council.

SEPTEMBER

11-15

1st Pacific Islands Conference on Ocean Science and Ocean Management, the Pacific Community, Nadi, Fiji*

11-16

11th Scientific Committee Meeting of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization, Panama City, Panama*

12-14

149th Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting, Honolulu

15

Pelagic & International Standing Committee meeting, Honolulu

15

Program Planning Standing Committee meeting, Honolulu

15

Fishing Rights of Indigenous Peoples Standing Committee meeting, Honolulu

15

Executive & Budget Standing Committee meeting, Honolulu

18-20

196th Council meeting, Honolulu

20-26

19th Technical and Compliance Committee Meeting of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)*

29-30

Development of a Revised WCPFC Tropical Tuna Measure Workshop 4, Pohnpei, FSM*

OCTOBER

2-3

Permanent Advisory Committee to advise the U.S. Commissioners to the WCPFC, Honolulu*

2-5

6th Regional Conference of Heads of Planning and Statistics, Noumea, New Caledonia*

11-13

Council Coordination Committee meeting, Washington, DC

21-28

U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands*

NOVEMBER

14-16

6th Climate Workshop, TBD*

30-Dec 12

2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

DECEMBER

4-8

20th Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, Rarotonga, Cook Islands*

5-7

150th SSC meeting, Honolulu

11-14

197th Council meeting (virtual)

** Meetings not hosted by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council.*