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COUNCIL

MEMORANDUM

August 21, 2024

TO: Interested Parties  
FROM: *Kitty* Kitty M. Simonds  
SUBJECT: Summary of Action Items for the 200th Meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

1. **ACL Specifications for Main Hawaiian Islands Deep 7 Bottomfish for 2024 to 2027**
  2. **Modifying the Guam Bottomfish Rebuilding Plan**
  3. **Review of MSA304(i) Domestic Obligations for Western and Central North Pacific Striped Marlin**
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The 200<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will convene in person September 23-25, 2024, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Hibiscus Ballroom, Honolulu, HI. Remote participation option will be available by web conference (Webex).

The Webex link is <https://tinyurl.com/200CouncilMtg> (if prompted, enter event number: 2632 182 2465; password: CM200mtg). Specific information on joining the meeting, instructions for connecting to the Webex and providing oral public comments during the meeting will be posted on the Council website at: [www.wpcouncil.org/event/200th-council-meeting](http://www.wpcouncil.org/event/200th-council-meeting)

The Council will consider and may take action on the issues summarized below, including any public comments on them. Written public comments on final action items should be received by the Council's executive director by 5 p.m. (HST), Thursday, September 19, 2024, by postal mail, fax or email as indicated below.

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## Summary of Action Items at the 200th Council Meeting

### 1. ACL Specifications for Main Hawaiian Islands Deep 7 Bottomfish for 2024 to 2027 (Final Action)

At its 198<sup>th</sup> meeting held March 2024, the Council received the 2024 Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) Deep 7 bottomfish benchmark stock assessment that found that the fishery was not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. The Council accepted it as best scientific information available on the status of the fishery, and directed staff to convene the P\* (Risk of Overfishing) and SEEM (Social, Economic, Ecological and Management Uncertainty) Working Groups. In May 2024, the Council's P\* and SEEM Working Groups and the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) evaluated the scientific, social, ecological, economic, and management uncertainties and recommended a risk level to the Council.

At its 199<sup>th</sup> meeting held in June 2024, the Council received the report from the P\* and SEEM working group analysis that quantified an 11% reduction due to data and management uncertainty. The Council took initial action and identified alternative 3 as its preliminary preferred alternative.

At its 200<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Council will consider taking final action on an alternative on specifying annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) for the MHI Deep 7 bottomfish fishery for fishing years 2024-2025 to 2026-2027. The Council will consider the following alternatives:

- 1) Alternative 1: No Action. Do not specify an ACL and AMs
- 2) Alternative 2: Status quo, specify an ACL of 492,000 lbs
- 3) Alternative 3: Specify an ACL (493,000 lbs) based on P\* and SEEM scores (P\*=39%)  
(Preliminary preferred)
- 4) Alternative 4: Specify an ACL (<493,000 lbs) below the P\* and SEEM scores (P\*<39%)

### 2. Modifying the Guam Bottomfish Rebuilding Plan (Initial Action)

The 2018 stock assessment determined that the Guam bottomfish complex was overfished and experiencing overfishing. Based on that determination, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) informed the Council of a change in stock status for Guam bottomfish, which required the Council to end overfishing and to develop a rebuilding plan within 15 months. In response, the Council specified lower catch limits to <31,000 lbs to reduce overfishing and developed a rebuilding plan that would help to restore the bottomfish stocks. The Council, however, noted issues with the data and stock assessment and requested NMFS to reassess the stocks.

A new stock assessment update for the Guam bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) was presented to the Council in June 2024, which included previous recommendations to conduct a data workshop to discuss the data and its application to the stock assessment. Although the stock assessment result found that the fishery was not overfished, the bottomfish fishery was not rebuilt based on the criteria of the rebuilding plan and status determination criteria under the Mariana Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan. The new assessment was reviewed by the Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review (WPSAR) panel and the Council's

SSC and deemed the best scientific information available (BSIA) for the Guam bottomfish stock. At its 198<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Council directed staff to develop options to modify the Guam BMUS rebuilding plan. Further, the Council requested the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center to provide catch projections that would rebuild the stock and for the Pacific Islands Regional Office to provide a review of the rebuilding plan progress.

At its 200<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Council will consider taking initial action on an option to modify the rebuilding plan and specifying the ACL and AMs for the Guam bottomfish fishery to rebuild the stock by 2031. The Council will consider the following options:

- 1) Option 1: No Action. Do not modify the rebuilding plan
- 2) Option 2: Modify the rebuilding plan
  - a. Maintain an ACL of 31,000 lbs and modify the AM to rebuild the stock by 2028;
  - b. Modify the ACL to 34,500 lbs and the AMs to rebuild the stock by 2031;
  - c. Establish a prohibition on bottomfish fishing in federal waters to rebuild the stock by 2026.
- 3) AMs to consider for 2a and 2b:
  - a. In-season monitoring using the creel survey expansion monitoring
  - b. Post-season three-year average overage adjustment

### **3. Review of MSA 304(i) Domestic Obligations for Western and Central North Pacific Striped Marlin (Initial Action)**

At its 199<sup>th</sup> Council Meeting, the Council was informed that the Western and Central North Pacific (WCNPO) striped marlin stock status changed to no longer overfished while still experiencing overfishing under the Council's FEP. NOAA General Counsel, Pacific Island Section and PIRO Sustainable Fisheries Division will provide a decision on whether the stock status change will obviate the need for the Council to implement a domestic measure under MSA Section 304(i). If there is no need for domestic action, the NMFS may disallow rulemaking following the Council's previous recommended regulatory amendment to establish a catch limit and accountability measure of WCNPO striped marlin for U.S. longline fisheries under the Hawaii limited entry program.

At its 193<sup>rd</sup> Meeting, the Council recommended NMFS enact a catch limit of 457 t and a retention limit of 443 t for vessels with a Hawaii limited entry longline permit. If the retention limit is projected to be reached, retention of striped marlin would be prohibited for the remainder of the year. The Council recommended that the catch and retention limits be implemented as a regulatory amendment to facilitate quick implementation. In the event the previously recommended regulatory amendment is not implemented by NMFS under the auspices of MSA 304(i), the Council may decide to revisit Alternatives to establish a catch limit under MSA 304(e) or other provisions of the MSA.

At its 200<sup>th</sup> Meeting, the Council may modify the purpose and need for a catch limit for WCNPO striped marlin and reconsider the alternatives from its action at its 193<sup>rd</sup> Meeting:

- 1) Alternative 1, the no action or status quo Alternative, would not set a retention limit for WCNPO striped marlin.
- 2) Alternative 2 would set a longline retention limit of 443 t and a catch limit of 457 t, consistent with WCPFC conservation and management measures, below catch from 2019, and as the Council Preferred Alternative.

- 3) Alternative 3 would set a longline retention limit of 397 t and a catch limit of 409 t, consistent with a reduction of the relative contribution of U.S. vessels to international overfishing of this stock.
- 4) Alternative 4 would prohibit retention of WCNPO striped marlin (a retention limit of 0 t).