Mike Burner, PIFMC

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Northern Islands Mayor's Office, CNMI

Western Pacific Fishery Management Council

The Western Pacific Region includes the State of Hawaii; the US Territories of American Samoa and Guam; the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI); and the US possessions of Johnston, Midway, Palmyra and Wake Atolls; Baker, Howland and Jarvis Islands; and Kingman Reef. This area of nearly 1.5 million square miles is the size of the US continent, constitutes about half of the US EEZ and spans both sides of the dateline and equator. The Western Pacific Council is the most internationally focused of the regional councils. Its largest fisheries target highly migratory pelagic fish and interact with highly migratory protected species within the EEZ and on the high seas. The Region includes a large indigenous population with traditional cultural ties to fishing that span millennia. Its archipelagos lack continental shelves and large land areas, but are rich in coral reef ecosystems that are home to thousands of marine species. Bottomfish, crustaceans, precious coral and coral reef related fisheries are regulated by archipelago using an adaptive, place-based ecosystem approach. Pelagic species are managed under a separate region-wide fishery ecosystem plan.

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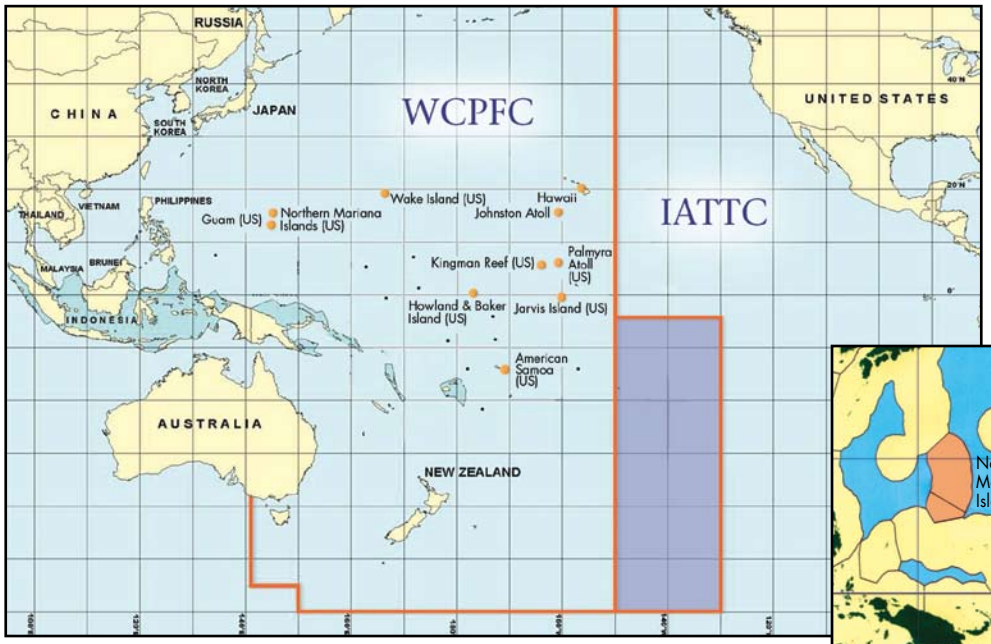
Opportunities & Challenges

Participating in International Fisheries Management

Honolulu ranks among the nation's top 10 fishing ports in value of landings because of the quality of the tuna and swordfish harvested by the Hawaii-based longline fishery. This fleet is part of the Pacific-wide tuna industry, which provides two-thirds of the world's tuna supply and is worth billions of dollars in annual landings.

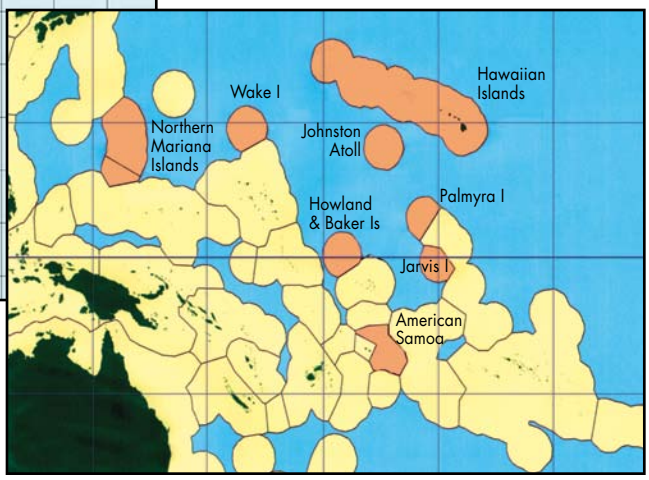
Growing concern about Pacific-wide overfishing of bigeye tuna and the future of yellowfin tuna have prompted the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) to adopt national quotas, effort limits and other measures to reduce and stabilize purse-seine and longline harvesting. Hawaii vessels fish in the jurisdictions of both of these international organizations and are subject to both of their management measures. The Council spends a significant amount of time and resources participating in these organizations to ensure the future of the Hawaii and American Samoa longline fisheries (which account for less than 5% of the Pacific-wide longline catch and effort) and the emerging longline fishery in the Mariana Archipelago (CNMI and Guam).

Two other international fishery management organizations are emerging in the Pacific for seamount-based fisheries. One of these, the North Pacific Convention, is important to the Council as seamounts are a prominent feature within the US EEZ around the Mariana Archipelago and on the high seas north of Hawaii. The Convention provides the opportunity for the Council to participate in development of management measures for seamount-based resources that straddle domestic and international waters.



Jurisdictional areas of the international regional fishery management organizations in the Pacific – the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC).

Jurisdiction boundaries
Under Western Pacific Council jurisdiction
Jurisdiction of both WCPFC and IATTC



EEZ Waters Managed by the Western Pacific Council

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Protecting Sea Turtles and Other Protected Species

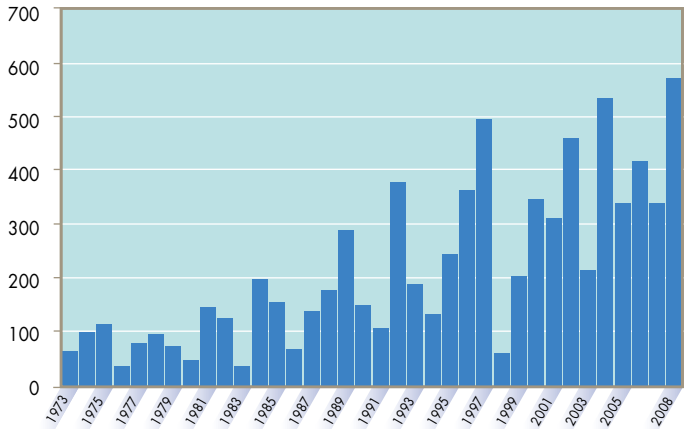
The Western Pacific Council has been very successful at protecting sea turtles and minimizing the effects of fisheries on seabirds. New management measures implemented in 2004 for the Hawaii longline fishery for swordfish have reduced bycatch of seabirds and sea turtles by more than 90%. Through Council-hosted International Fishers Forums, exchange programs and workshops, knowledge of these successful measures (e.g., circle hooks, side setting, night-setting, bait type) have been transferred to fishermen and governments Pacific-wide.

The Council's sea turtle projects have led to increased numbers of protected nests and reduced poaching of turtle eggs in Japan, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia, where leatherbacks and loggerheads that transit Hawaii waters originate. In Mexico, where these loggerheads forage, the Council has supported education, outreach and research to reduce sea turtle interactions in coastal artisanal fisheries. The Council's seven-year partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program and other organizations has led to the launch of the Turtle Research and Monitoring Database System, which centralizes and standardizes data from throughout the Pacific.

Still, much critical and urgent work remains. Stock assessments for sea turtles and whales are needed so that the impacts of fisheries are better understood and the validity of fishery management decisions — such as closing the Hawaii fishery if it interacts with 16 leatherback or 17 loggerhead sea turtles — can be made. Both a long-term strategy and a much-needed funding mechanism for Pacific sea turtle conservation have been developed but not implemented. The significant bycatch of sea turtles by foreign coastal static net fisheries has been identified but not addressed. And, despite the recovery of the Hawaii green sea turtle, harvests for indigenous and ceremonial purposes are still not allowed.

Community-based rangers learn how to collect nesting beach data for leatherback sea turtles in Papua New Guinea.

Green Turtle Nesting at East Islands
French Frigate Shoals, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands
Annual Trend for 36 Seasons • 1973-2008



George Balazs, Marine Turtle Research, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service

The traditional fishing of atule (scad) by an American Samoa village. Photo by Evelyn Lili'o

Promoting Indigenous and Community Programs

For thousands of years, the ocean has been a primary source of nutrition, materials, knowledge and spirituality for the indigenous communities of the Western Pacific Region. The Magnuson-Stevens Act acknowledges this, stating that the "Pacific Island areas contain unique historical, cultural, legal, political and geographical circumstances which make fisheries resources important in sustaining their economic growth." It created three programs —the Community Demonstration Project Program (CDPP), Community Development Program, and Marine Education and Training Program — to promote continued participation of indigenous communities in Pacific Island fisheries. The Council plays a significant facilitation role in these programs. In 2006 and 2007, it hosted the *Hoohanohano I Na Kupuna* (Honor Our Ancestors) *Puwalu* (conference) series to develop a consultation process with Native Hawaiians in the ecosystem-based management of fisheries.

Today, the Region's indigenous communities are threatened by economic instability and increased loss of fishery rights, practices and associated traditional ecological knowledge. A US federalization process is imposing minimum wage standards and withdrawing local immigration authority. These moves are jeopardizing the American Samoa tuna canneries, CNMI garment and tourism industries, and other businesses. The Chamorro and Refaluwasch populations are becoming an even smaller minority on Guam and CNMI due to the relocation of the US military base and operations from Okinawa to these islands. The anticipated influx of 40,000 military families and contract workers will increase competition for local marine resources and access to them. At the minimum, an effective community cultural consultation process in each of the island areas and annual CDPP funding, as authorized by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, are needed.

Managing Coral Reef Fisheries

The coral reefs in the Western Pacific Region contain several thousand fish and shellfish, making this Region arguably the most bio-diverse of all the Council regions. Several hundred species are regularly harvested. The Council's Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan (FMP), implemented in 2004, was the nation's first ecosystem-based FMP. The Council has since transformed all of its species-based FMPs into place-based fishery ecosystem plans.

Unfortunately, data needed for best management of many coral reef fisheries is either lacking or has not been inventoried, reviewed and analyzed. Also needed are household surveys to gather social and economic information, analytical capacity-building in local fishery agencies, and economic valuation of coral reef fisheries. Such accounts are of vital importance from an ecosystem management perspective as coral reefs do not exist in a stable equilibrium but are subject to a variety of natural and anthropogenic forces. For example, typhoon/cyclones can reduce coral coverage by 90 percent. Stream channelization and divergence has significantly impacted near-shore waters and coral reef ecosystems—storm-water flow and related sedimentation has increased while freshwater flow and related nutrient input has been halved archipelago-wide. Additionally, greater effort is needed to evaluate the impacts of no-take marine protected areas as a fisheries management tool. The same needs for review apply to other management measures for coral reef fisheries, such as bans on particular gears, minimum retention lengths and closed seasons.