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### **Federal Fishery Managers Hear CNMI Opposition to Marine Monument Proposal, Vote to Ban Purse-Seine Fishing in CNMI Waters**

SAIPAN, COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS (21 March 2008)  
The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, concluded the first day of a two-day meeting at the Saipan Fiesta Resort, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), yesterday with a variety of fishery management measures proposed for the US exclusive economic zone (0 to 200 miles offshore) surrounding CNMI.

The Council also heard strong testimony from CNMI Rep. Arnold Palacios, Speaker of the House, against having the northern islands of CNMI turned into a marine national monument. A letter from CNMI Gov. Benigno Repeki Fitial likewise opposed the monument designation. The Pew Charitable Trusts had written Gov. Fitial on Dec. 20, 2007, urging him to support the creation of the marine monument. This \$4-billion-plus organization was instrumental in having 137,000 square nautical miles surrounding the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands proclaimed as the first-ever marine national monument and closing down the eight-vessel limited entry bottomfish fishery there. Pew is the sole successor to funds established by the adult children of Sun Oil Company founder Joseph Pew and his wife, Mary Anderson Pew.

Among the Council recommendations for fisheries in the US EEZ surrounding the CNMI are the following:

CNMI Purse Seine Area Closure: The Council voted to prohibit purse seine fishing throughout the entire US EEZ surrounding CNMI. The Council is concerned that the revitalization of the US purse seine fleet combined with the likely constraints on purse seine fishing effort in the western and central Pacific may lead to increased interest by US purse seiners to fish in the US EEZ surrounding the entire Mariana Archipelago. Further, it is likely that new vessels augmenting the US purse seine fleet will be based primarily in the far west of the region in Micronesia. Earlier this week, the Council had voted on a similar purse seine area closure for US EEZ waters surrounding Guam. There were also concerns expressed by the Council members about purse seining close to seamounts due to their propensity to aggregate juvenile bigeye and yellowfin tunas, important to artisanal and scale fisheries for pelagic fishes. Seamounts, especially shallow ones, are also important fishing grounds for bottomfishing for snappers and groupers in the EEZs surrounding American Samoa, Guam and CNMI. Further seamounts are biological hotspots in the ocean with high species diversity. For these reasons, other countries in the region such as Papua New Guinea have specifically prohibited purse seine fishing close to seamounts in their EEZs

CNMI Longline Area Closure: The Council voted to establish a 30 nm longline fishing exclusion zone in the US EEZ surrounding CNMI. The CNMI Council members and members of Council

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advisory committees who had met the previous week arrived at the 30 nm recommendation to protect the small scale troll fisheries in the CNMI, while at the same time encouraging the development of a locally based longline fishery. When it meets in June 2008, the Council will consider establishing a control date of March 20, 2008, which may be used in the future to limit further entry of longline vessels to fish around the US EEZ waters surrounding CNMI. The Council also supported the Government of CNMI's request that a Secretariat of the Pacific Community's master-fisherman assist CNMI-based longline vessels in improving their performance and to provide more information on the potential of pelagic resources in the US EEZ surrounding the Marianas Archipelago.

Council recommendations are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval. The Saipan meeting continued the Council's 140<sup>th</sup> meeting, which began March 17 and 18, 2008, on Guam. For more information on the 140<sup>th</sup> Council meeting including a complete agenda, please go to [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org) or contact the Council in Hawaii at 808 522-8220 or [info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov](mailto:info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov); on Guam at 671 649-3150 or 688-6400; or in CNMI at 670 322-9830 or 287-9482. The Council is the policy-making agency for fisheries management in federal waters surrounding the State of Hawaii, Territory of American Samoa, Territory of Guam, Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands and the US Pacific remote island areas.

### **Council Members (2008)**

Designated State Officials: Ignacio Dela Cruz, CNMI Department of Land & Natural Resources; Alberto Lamorena, Guam Bureau of Statistics and Plans; Laura Thielen, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; and Ray Tulafono, American Samoa Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources.

Designated Federal Officials: Bill Robinson, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Jerry Leinecke, US Fish and Wildlife; RAdm Sally Brice-O'Hara, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; and Bill Gibbons-Fly, US Department of State.

Appointed by the Secretary of Commerce (from nominees selected by Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa and CNMI governors): William Sword, recreational fisherman/civil engineer/manager (American Samoa); Stephen Haleck, business owner (hotel and gas station) (American Samoa) (Vice Chair); Manuel Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (Vice Chair); Frederick Duerr, resort & hotel consultant (Hawaii) (Vice Chair); Peter Young, environmental consultant (Hawaii); Rick Gaffney, boat dealer and ocean recreation consultant (Hawaii); Sean Martin, Pacific Ocean Producers (Hawaii) (Chair); and Benigno Sablan, cultural practitioner (CNMI) (Vice Chair).