

Council has recently adopted Amendment 8 to the FMP, which if approved, would allow the bottomfish resources in the EEZ waters of the CNMI to be managed under the FMP. Amendment 8 is currently being finalized for transmittal to NOAA.

The FMP provides a management framework for which the Secretary has promulgated corresponding regulations at 50 CFR 660.61. For example, if Amendment 8 is approved, the CFR regulations that would apply to the bottomfish fishery in the EEZ waters of CNMI include, among other things, gear restrictions (50 CFR 660.64) and vessel identification requirements (50 CFR 660.16)

### Background

The bottomfish fishery resources occurring in the EEZ waters of Guam are managed under the FMP. Recently, Guam's bottomfish fishery has experienced an increase in effort due to the entry and participation of large-scale vessels (> 50 ft)(15.2 m). This has concerned the Council for multiple reasons: (1) there is a lack of information regarding Guam's bottomfish fishery resources, (2) local catch rates might decline to levels not viable to support the small-vessel component of the fishery, (3) community participation in the fishery may be threatened, and (4) traditional patterns of supply for bottomfish products in the local markets may be disrupted.

These concerns prompted the Council to recommend the development of Amendment 9 to the FMP that would address the apparent increase in effort occurring in Guam's bottomfish fishery. An environmental assessment prepared for the amendment described the various management needs and options to effectively manage the fishery, in addition to the costs of no action. On

June 12, 2003, the Council chose the preferred alternative which excludes large-scale vessels (≤50 ft)(15.2 m) from fishing for bottomfish within 50 nm of Guam, the implementation a permit system, and logbook reporting requirements. Reflecting the preferred alternative, Amendment 9 is currently being finalized for transmittal to NOAA.

### CNMI

For several years, there has been bottomfish fishing in the EEZ waters of CNMI. A significant portion of the effort in the CNMI's bottomfish fishery is from larger vessels (> 50 ft), which account for sixty percent of the total bottomfish landings in the CNMI.

As a response to the Council's development of Amendment 9, which addresses the emergence of large-scale vessels in Guam's bottomfish fishery, the CNMI is concerned that large-scale vessels displaced from Guam's bottomfish fishery will subsequently fish and exploit the nearby bottomfish resources in the EEZ waters around the CNMI. For this reason, the Council has recommended the development of a comprehensive EIS that describes various options for effective management of the bottomfish fishery around the CNMI.

### Alternatives

The Council is scoping to establish a reasonable range of alternatives, which may include gear restrictions, limited access, closed areas, seasonal closures, permits and reporting requirements, and catch limits. In addition to developing possible alternatives, the scoping meetings will serve to identify and eliminate the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review.

### Public Involvement

Public scoping is an early and open process for determining the scope of

issues to be addressed. A principle objective of the scoping and public involvement process is to identify a reasonable range of management alternatives that, with adequate analysis, will delineate critical issues and provide a clear basis for distinguishing between those alternatives and selecting a preferred alternative.

### Dates, Times, and Locations for Public Scoping Meetings

1. Tinian, CNMI — Wednesday, September 24, 2003, from 2–4 p.m. at the Tinian Gaming Commission Conference Room, San Jose, Tinian 96952.

2. Saipan, CNMI — Wednesday, September 24, 2003, from 7–9 p.m. at the Pedro P. Tenorio Multipurpose Building, Susupe, Saipan 96950;

3. Rota, CNMI — Thursday, September 25, 2003, from 1–3 p.m. at the Department of Lands and Natural Resources Building, Songsong, Rota 96951.

4. Agana, Guam - Friday, September 26, 2003, from 7–9 p.m. at the G. D. Perez Marina, Agana, Guam 96910.

### Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Kitty M. Simonds, 808–522–8220 (voice) or 808–522–8226 (fax), at least five days prior to the meeting date.

**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

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*Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.*  
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