



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
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April 2, 2020

Ms. Janice Castro
Director
Division of Coastal Resources Management
CNMI Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality
P.O. Box 501304
Saipan, MP 96950

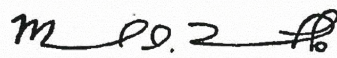
Dear Ms. Castro:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will propose a 2020 catch limit of 2,000 metric tons (t) of longline-caught bigeye tuna for each U.S. Pacific territory (American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or CNMI). NMFS would allow each territory to allocate up to 1,500 t of the 2,000 t to U.S. longline fishing vessels in a specified fishing agreement that meets established criteria. In previous years, each territory's allocation limit was 1,000 t. The overall allocation limit among all territories may not exceed 3,000 t. As accountability measures, NMFS would monitor, attribute, and restrict (if necessary) catches of longline-caught bigeye tuna, including catches made under a specified fishing agreement. The limits support the long-term sustainability of fishery resources of the U.S. Pacific Islands.

Pursuant to section 307 of the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA, 16 U.S.C. 1456(c)(1)(C)), I have determined that the proposed 2020 action is consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the approved Coastal Zone Management Program of the CNMI. I request your review of, and concurrence with, this determination enclosed. Under regulations at 15 CFR 930.41(a), we may presume your concurrence if we do not receive your response within 60 days from receipt of this consistency determination. Because this is a time-sensitive action, however, we request your earliest response to this letter.

If you have any questions or comments or you would like to review draft documents that provide information and analysis supporting this determination, please contact Lynn Rassel at 808-725-5184 or lynn.rassel@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,


Michael D. Tosatto
Regional Administrator

Encl. CZMA Determination



Coastal Zone Management Act Federal Consistency Determination

Agency: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)

Relevant Authorities: CZMA (16 U.S.C. 1451 et seq.); CZMA Federal Consistency Regulations (15 CFR 930).

Determination: Consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the CNMI Coastal Zone Management Program.

Description of proposed activity: NMFS proposes to implement the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council's recommendation for the 2020 Territorial bigeye tuna catch limits. The proposed specifications would continue management of the pelagic longline fisheries of the western Pacific region in accordance with the procedures set forth in 50 CFR 665.819.

Under this proposed rule, NMFS would specify a 2020 catch limit of 2,000 metric tons (t) of longline-caught bigeye tuna for each of the pelagic longline fisheries of American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI. NMFS also proposes to authorize each U.S. territory to allocate up to 1,500 t of bigeye tuna of its catch limit to a U.S. longline fishing vessel or vessels holding a valid permit issued under 50 CFR 665.801 and identified in a valid specified fishing agreement with a U.S. territory. Territories interested in allocating tuna catch would enter into fishing agreements with a U.S. longline vessel or vessels. The total territorial allocation may not exceed 3,000 t of bigeye tuna annually. Funding received by participating territories from fishing agreements would support responsible fisheries development projects as identified in the territories' Marine Conservation Plans.

This catch and allocation management program has been in place since 2014 and the proposed 2020 territorial bigeye tuna catch limits are the same as in previous years. In 2019, NMFS implemented a 2,000 t bigeye tuna catch limit for each U.S. territory in the western Pacific region and authorized each territory to allocate up to 1,000 t of bigeye tuna to vessels fishing under specified fishing agreements for the 2019 fishing year (84 FR 34321; July 18, 2019). After the Hawaii longline fishery reached its 3,554 t bigeye tuna catch limit in July 2019, it subsequently entered into fishing agreements with the CNMI and American Samoa. The fishery closed four days before the end of the calendar year after reaching the 1,000 t allocation limits from these agreements.

Under these proposed 2020 specifications, while the allocation limit increases from 1,000 t to 1,500 t, the maximum territorial allocation of 3,000 t remains the same as in previous years. NMFS anticipates that the most likely outcome is that between two and three fishing agreements would allow the U.S. deep-set longline fishery to catch up to 3,000 t and the fishery would be able to continue fishing year round.

These proposed specifications would establish a bigeye tuna catch and an allocation limit for American Samoa, Guam, and the CNMI that: 1) prevents bigeye overfishing, 2) supports fisheries development in U.S. territories, and 3) promotes the availability of bigeye tuna from

U.S. vessels during the peak end-of-year demand. This action would ensure that NMFS and the Council manage allocations of longline caught bigeye tuna under specified fishing agreements consistent with the conservation needs of the stock.

Expected coastal effects: U.S. longline vessels fishing for bigeye tuna operate in the U.S. Exclusive Zone (EEZ) around Hawaii, American Samoa, Pacific Remote Island Areas, and the adjacent high seas. Under the proposed action the catch and allocation limits apply only to bigeye tuna caught by longline gear in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO; generally west of 150° W) and do not apply to bigeye tuna caught by longline gear in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO; generally east of 150° W).

Historically, the longline fishery has not operated in the EEZ around Guam or the CNMI. Additionally, because Federal regulations prohibit longline fishing within 30 nm around the CNMI, the proposed specifications would not result in any direct effects on marine resources in the CNMI's coastal zone management area, and are not expected to result in changes in effects to target and non-target fish stocks.

Consistency evaluation: The CNMI is comprised of 14 islands that span 440 miles of the western Pacific Ocean. The policies and objectives of the CNMI's Coastal Zone Management Program can be combined into the following major components and functions: (1) promoting sustainable economic development and growth through careful planning, coordination and monitoring of coastal development, and consistency with the CZMA; (2) coordinating state and federal actions and making findings on proposed activities requiring federal consistency determinations pursuant to section 307 of the CZMA (16.U.S.C. Section 1456); and (3) balancing coastal resource use and preservation to ensure that future generations will continue to benefit from the CNMI's rich coastal resources.

As discussed above, if NMFS implemented the proposed specifications, there would be no cause for direct effects to CNMI's coastal zone management area and the specifications are in line with the policies and objectives of the Coastal Zone Management Program. Thus, NMFS has determined that the activity would be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies and objectives of CNMI's Coastal Zone Management Program.