

Congressional concerns regarding possible localized reductions of these two species because of increased harvesting by commercial and recreational fishermen. The SAFMC believed that an FMP was necessary to protect and manage dolphin and wahoo resources and to address user group conflicts. The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that, to the extent practicable, stocks shall be managed throughout their range. In the case of dolphin and wahoo, the ranges of these stocks extend beyond the SAFMC's area of jurisdiction. For this reason, NMFS initially designated the SAFMC as administrative lead in the development of a joint FMP in cooperation with the GMFMC, CFMC, NEFMC, and MAFMC.

Nevertheless, the National Standard Guidelines (50 CFR 600.320) suggest that alternative management units may be justified if complementary management is planned for other geographic areas or if the unmanaged portion of the stocks are immaterial to proper management within the area under consideration for the alternate management unit, especially if designated alternate management units are specifically relevant to the FMP's objectives.

In the case of the dolphin and wahoo FMP, social and economic issues are identified as the SAFMC's primary objectives in the FMP. The proposed FMP is not attempting to rectify a biological problem with the stocks; neither stock is overfished nor approaching an overfished condition because of overfishing. The SAFMC has specific objectives to: (1) reduce localized reductions in fish abundance, which can have economic and social impacts; (2) minimize market disruptions from intense landings by all sectors; (3) minimize conflicts and competition between recreational and commercial user groups; and (4) optimize social and economic benefits by recognizing and maintaining the historical importance of the recreational fishery.

No similar economic and social issues requiring management have been identified for the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean areas. In the Gulf of Mexico, about 90 percent of the combined dolphin and wahoo commercial and recreational landings are from the west coast of Florida. Of the two species, dolphin dominate the landings, and Florida has regulations in place that restrict the commercial harvest of dolphin to hook-and-line fishing in state waters (where most of the harvest occurs), thus limiting the potential for user group conflicts. Similarly, catches and landings for both dolphin and

wahoo in the Caribbean are minimal compared to the catches in the other areas, and in many instances, the catches are incidental to the catch of targeted species such as billfishes. Therefore, because of anticipated delays in finalizing a joint FMP, which could lead to exacerbated user conflicts in the South Atlantic's area of jurisdiction (U.S. Atlantic coast), NMFS finds merit in the SAFMC's request to forego further development of a joint FMP, and to develop an FMP for the U.S. Atlantic coast.

Inclusion of dolphin in the proposed FMP also would require removal of the U.S. Atlantic Ocean component of the dolphin stock from management in the Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) FMP. The CMP FMP is implemented under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act by regulations at 50 CFR part 622. The CMP FMP is a joint plan involving both the GMFMC and SAFMC, and species in the fishery include king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, cero, cobia, dolphin, little tunny, and in the Gulf only, bluefish. Presently, the only regulations in the CMP FMP that pertain to dolphin are those that specify authorized fishing gears in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone. Removal of the U.S. Atlantic component of the dolphin stock from the CMP FMP would require a plan amendment and would have to be approved by a majority of the voting members, present and voting, of both the SAFMC and GMFMC. Wahoo in the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea, is not included in any Federal FMP.

NMFS requests public comments on the South Atlantic Council's proposal to be designated as the lead Council to prepare a new FMP to manage dolphin and wahoo for the U.S. Atlantic coast. Written comments will be reviewed and considered prior to NMFS' decision on this request.

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

Dated: November 15, 2002.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 111502A]

Southwest Region, Pacific Islands Area Office; Public Meetings

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of public meetings.

SUMMARY: The Pacific Islands Area Office will hold public meetings on November 26 and November 27, 2002, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., to gather input to aid in the development of the American Samoa Observer Program.

ADDRESSES: The public meetings will be held at the Utelei Convention Center, Pago Pago, American Samoa.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kevin Busscher, Port Coordinator; telephone: 973-2937, Ext. 215.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Public Meetings

Public meetings will be conducted to gather input to aid in the development of the American Samoa Observer Program on Tuesday, November 26th and Wednesday November 27th from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Topics to be discussed will include observer placement and specific duties, safety procedures, and vessel reimbursement.

This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Kevin Busscher, 808-973-2937 Ext. 215 (voice) or 808-973-2941 (fax), at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: November 15, 2002

Bruce C. Morehead,

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