

This agreement will define NMFS' relationship to the Governor's Watershed Restoration and Protection Council (WRPC).

DATES: The meeting date is November 12, 1997, 1:00–4:00 p.m. and 6:00–9:00 p.m. Written comments on the draft MOU must be received by November 28, 1997, to be considered during preparation of the final MOU.

ADDRESSES: Both meetings will be held at the State of California Building, Room 410–B, 50 D Street, Santa Rosa, CA. Requests for a copy of the draft MOU should be addressed to Chief, Protected Resources Division, NMFS, Southwest Region, 501 West Ocean Boulevard, Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA, 90802–4213; or Supervisor, Northern California Protected Resources Division, NMFS, 777 Sonoma Avenue, Room 325, Santa Rosa, CA, 95404. Copies of the draft MOU may also be obtained by phone (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**). Written comments regarding the draft MOU should be directed to the same addresses.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jim Lecky at (562) 980–4020, or Patrick Rutten at (707) 575–6059.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The following information is furnished to provide a synopsis of NMFS' salmon and steelhead listing actions and critical habitat designation in California. This information frames the complexity and need for a Federal-State cooperative approach to salmonid management in California.

A. Coho Salmon

1. Central California coho Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU) listed as threatened on October 31, 1996 (61 FR 56138).

2. Southern Oregon/Northern California (SONC) coho listed as threatened on May 6, 1997 (62 FR 24588).

3. Endangered Species Act (ESA) 4(d) interim rule that applied the section 9 take prohibitions, with certain exceptions, to the SONC coho ESU was published by NMFS on July 18, 1997 (62 FR 38479), and became effective on August 18, 1997. The 60-day comment period on the interim final rule ended on September 16, 1997. NMFS will review all comments and publish a final rule in the **Federal Register** in the next 90 days.

4. NMFS is developing a proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the Central California and SONC coho salmon ESUs. The proposed rule is

expected to publish in the **Federal Register** within the next 30 days.

B. Steelhead

1. On August 18, 1997 (62 FR 4393), NMFS listed the Southern California steelhead ESU as endangered and the Central California and South-Central California steelhead ESUs as threatened.

2. Section 9 take prohibitions were automatically applied to the endangered Southern California ESU at the time of listing.

3. NMFS is developing an ESA 4(d) interim rule that will apply the section 9 take prohibitions, with certain exceptions, to the Central California and South-Central California ESUs. An interim final rule is expected to publish in the **Federal Register** in the next 60 days.

4. At the time of the steelhead listing, NMFS announced that it was delaying its proposal for designating critical habitat. NMFS expects to designate critical habitat for these ESUs within the 1-year period allowed for in the ESA.

5. On August 18, 1997 (62 FR 43974), NMFS delayed its decision to list Central Valley, Northern California, and Klamath Mountains Province steelhead ESUs for 6 months. Accordingly, NMFS expects to publish in the **Federal Register** a final listing decision for these ESUs by February 18, 1998. If any of these steelhead ESUs are listed as threatened, NMFS will promulgate appropriate ESA 4(d) interim rules to apply the section 9 take prohibitions.

C. Chinook Salmon

1. NMFS is continuing work on its status review for West Coast chinook salmon.

2. In early 1997, NMFS provided copies of a draft status review for West Coast chinook to peer reviewers and its co-managers in California (i.e., California Department of Fish and Game, Indian tribes, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) for review and comment. NMFS is reviewing these comments and gathering updated information for the status review.

3. NMFS expects to publish in the **Federal Register** a listing proposed rule for West Coast chinook salmon in early 1998.

Watershed Restoration and Protection Council

The State, by Executive Order W–159–97, has established the WRPC to be responsible and provide oversight of State activities aimed at watershed protection and enhancement, including conservation and restoration of anadromous salmonids in California. The WRPC will be composed of State

Secretaries and Chairs of Commissions, or Boards. The WRPC also establishes a Working Group whose members are Directors of State Agencies and Executive Officer's of Regional Water Quality Control Boards. An Executive Director of the WRPC will also be appointed and will be responsible for the coordination of the WRPC and Working Group.

NMFS in cooperation with the California Resources Agency is exploring entering into a MOU that will develop a process and mechanism, through the WRPC, that results in a State plan for the protection of the State's salmonid population. Completion and implementation of this State plan through the WRPC, in consultation with NMFS, will be the basis by which NMFS initiates a rulemaking action (pursuant to its authority under section 4(d) of the ESA) to adopt the State of California's plan or plans as equivalent to habitat conservation plans provided that NMFS determines that the plans are consistent with the requirements of the Federal ESA for issuing incidental take permits to non-Federal parties (section 10 of the ESA).

Public Comments Solicited

The meeting will focus on the latest draft MOU provided to NMFS by the State of California. Participants are reminded that this is only a draft and that NMFS intends that the final MOU will take advantage of the information and recommendations from all interested parties. Therefore, comments and suggestions are hereby solicited from the public, other concerned governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, and any other person concerned with these draft guidelines.

Dated: October 22, 1997.

Hilda Diaz-Soltero,

*Director, Office of Protected Resources,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 102097B]

North Pacific Fishery Management Council; Public Meetings

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

ACTION: Notice of advisory group meetings scheduled in November, 1997.

SUMMARY: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) Vessel Bycatch Accountability (VBA) Committee and Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish plan teams will hold meetings in November in Seattle, WA.

DATES: The VBA Committee will meet Friday, November 14, 1997, beginning at 8:00 a.m.

The groundfish plan teams will meet November 17–21, 1997, beginning at 1:00 p.m. on Monday, November 17.

ADDRESSES: VBA Committee: Nordby Conference Center, Suite A, Fishermen's Terminal, 1711 W. Nickerson, Seattle, WA.

Plan teams: Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE., Building 4, Room 2079, Seattle, WA.

Council address: North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 605 W. 4th Ave., Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501–2252.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dave Witherell, telephone: 907–271–2809.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

1. The VBA Committee will further define options of a vessel bycatch accountability program, with emphasis on initial and annual allocations.

2. The groundfish plan teams will review any new stock assessment information and catch statistics, prepare final stock assessment documents for the 1998 groundfish fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands, and prepare recommendations for acceptable biological catches for individual species. The teams will also discuss streamlining the process of setting annual total allowable catches and review research needs and priorities.

Although other issues not contained in this agenda may come before the Committee or Plan Teams for discussion, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during the meetings. Committee or Plan Team action will be restricted to those issues specifically identified in the agenda listed in this notice.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Helen Allen, 907–271–2809, at least 5 working days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: October 21, 1997.

Richard W. Surdi,

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

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 101597C]

Western Pacific Fishery Management Council; Public Meetings

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

ACTION: Notice of public meetings.

SUMMARY: The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and its committees will hold public meetings in Honolulu, HI. Prior to the Council meeting, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will hold its 67th meeting.

DATES: The meetings will be held on November 10–14, 1997. See

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION for specific dates and times.

ADDRESSES: The SSC meeting will be held at the Council office, 1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI; telephone: (808) 522–8220. The 94th Council meeting will be held at the Ala Moana Hotel, 410 Atkinson Dr., Garden Lanai and Hibiscus Ballroom, Honolulu, HI; telephone: (808) 955–4811.

Council address: Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI 96813.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Kitty M. Simonds, Executive Director; telephone: (808) 522–8220.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The SSC meeting will be held on November 10–11, 1997, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., each day. The Council's Standing Committees will meet on November 12, 1997, as follows:

7:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.—Enforcement
8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.—Crustaceans
9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.—Vessel Monitoring System (VMS)
10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.—Pelagics and Bottomfish

1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.—Indigenous Fishing Rights and Ecosystem & Habitat
3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.—Precious Corals and Executive/Budget & Programming

The full Council will meet on November 13–14, 1997, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., each day.

The SSC and Council will discuss and take final action on an amendment to establish a framework process for future management of precious corals (including public hearings). This will also be the first meeting under the framework procedure for pelagic fishery management changes for the American Samoa longline fishery regarding closed areas and a limited access program.

Other agenda items that the Council will discuss and may take action on include:

1. Pelagic fishery issues, including a) status of longline fisheries in Hawaii and American Samoa, b) international meetings addressing the management arrangements for highly migratory species, and c) protected species interaction/incidental take issues (turtles, sharks, albatross).

2. Bottomfish fishery issues, including a) status of the State's management plan focusing on monitoring and enforcement components, for overfished Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) onaga and ehu, b) consideration of the Federal management alternatives for the recovery of overfished MHI onaga and ehu including a draft plan amendment, c) draft amendment for the limited access program for the Mau Zone in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) including a public hearing, and d) update on armorhead fishery in the NWHI;

3. Crustacean fishery issues, including regulatory adjustments for 1998, such as allowing VMS carrying vessels to return directly back to port via the permit subzone, adding the month of May to the closed season of the main Hawaiian Islands lobster fishery within Federal waters, allowing vessels to temporarily leave fishing gear on the banks, opening the season one month earlier on 1 June, creating separate species and fishing bank quotas, providing fishermen with at least 24 hours notice before the close of the fishery, and announcing the harvest guideline 90 days after season closure;

4. Ecosystem and habitat issues, including a) consider the need for a coral reef fishery management plan, b) Essential Fish Habitat amendment and National Environmental Policy Act requirements, and c) Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Farallon de Mendenilla bombing issue;

5. Precious coral issues, including a) status of the fisheries, and b) consistency between state and Federal regulations;

6. Native rights and indigenous fishing issues, including the status of Demonstration Projects and Community Development Programs;