UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

MAY - 2 2013

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) conducted an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: Fishery Management in the Marianas Trench, Pacific Remote Islands, and Rose Atoll Marine National Monuments (RIN 0648-BA98)

LOCATION: U.S. Monuments in the EEZs around American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands and the Pacific Remote Islands

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: Michael D. Tosatto
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Pacific Islands Regional Office
National Marine Fisheries Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
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SUMMARY:

On January 6, 2009, President George W. Bush issued Presidential Proclamations 8335, 8336, and 8337, that established the Marianas Trench, Pacific Remote Islands (PRI), and Rose Atoll Marine National Monuments, respectively. The Proclamations define the Monuments' boundaries, prohibit commercial fishing in most Monument areas, and describe the management of Monument resources. Among other provisions, the Proclamations direct the Secretary of Commerce to take action under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to regulate fisheries and ensure proper care and management of the Monuments. The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council recommended incorporating certain fishery management measures into the western Pacific Pelagics, American Samoa, Pacific Remote Island Areas, and the Mariana Islands Fishery Ecosystem Plans (FEPs), and recommended the Secretary of Commerce establish certain provisions relating to the management of non-commercial fishing including provisions for traditional indigenous fishing.

Consistent with the Proclamations and based on the Council's recommendations, NMFS will implement the new requirements for fishing in the Monuments, which are described in the environmental assessment (EA). NMFS made the draft FEP amendment including an Environmental Assessment, available for a 60-day public review and comment period. NMFS did not receive any comments specifically addressing the environmental impact analysis.

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As described in the amendment and EA, the Council and NMFS do not expect the action to result in a large change to the low level of fishing that occurred in the past and may be occurring in the Monument areas because these areas are so remote from populated areas (which results in high costs to travel to these areas) and because the prohibition on mixing non-commercial fishing in a monument with commercial fishing outside of a monument during the same trip is expected to reduce interest in a fishing permit. Furthermore, logbooks will allow fisheries managers and scientists to monitor fishing activities. The low level of permitted non-commercial fishing is, therefore, not expected to have significant effects on target, non-target, or bycatch stocks, or on protected species. The no-take areas at Rose Atoll and around the PRI will provide areas where fish resources will not be harvested, with the exception of a low level of non-commercial fishing, which may be authorized by the USFWS in consultation with NMFS and the Council.

The opportunity for residents of fishing communities in American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and Hawaii to continue to fish in these remote areas, and (for Guam, the CNMI and American Samoa), the opportunity for residents to continue to catch and share fish from these areas with their families, friends, and community residents, is expected to help preserve traditional indigenous and cultural fishing practices.

The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant impact on the environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement was not prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact (FONSI), including the environmental assessment, is enclosed for your information.

Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed EA/FONSI, we will consider any comments submitted that would assist us in preparing future NEPA documents. Please submit any written comments to the Responsible Official named above.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Montanio
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure