



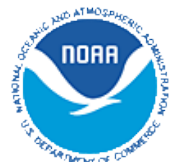
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October 20, 2010

I want to welcome you to the 2010 Hawaii Seafood Symposium: *Making Sense of Seafood Health Benefits and Risks.*

The NOAA Fisheries Service has the responsibility for managing America's ocean fisheries for sustainability and for the maximum benefit to the nation. The Pacific Islands Regional Office has the challenge of managing these US fisheries throughout the central and western Pacific including the EEZ areas around Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. This large ocean region holds one of the world's greatest fishery resources, primarily tuna and other pelagic and highly migratory species. This means that we have the responsibility to maintain these resources for future generations and must use best available science, including what is generated here, in that charge. I encourage each of you to consider that the information that you will exchange over the next 3 days has the potential to impact the future of our nation's marine fisheries.

So why this Symposium and why this topic? We chose to help organize this Symposium with the Hawaii Seafood Council and NOAA's National Seafood Inspection Laboratory because of the importance of seafood and ocean fisheries to the U.S. Pacific Island communities. Seafood is an integral part of our island cultures. Fish consumption rate in the U.S. Pacific Islands is many times higher than the U.S. average and most of the fish eaten are open ocean fish like tuna and other popular market species.



Consumers here, and across the country are receiving a very mixed and often confusing public health message about seafood. It is still a commonly-held belief that eating fish is good for heart and brain health. But at the same time, advisories and media attention to mercury and other potential hazards associated with seafood unintentionally has frightened some consumers away, forgoing the health benefits of fish consumption. The key is to first understand what the science tells us about these risks and benefits, and then to develop a balanced public health message. This is the purpose of the Symposium and the challenge for us moving forward.

Over the next 3 days, this Symposium will provide an update on the latest evidence of the health considerations of seafood consumption. There will be a special emphasis on mercury risk because all of our pelagic fish species accumulate mercury to various levels. Concerns about potential mercury health risks impact our fisheries, our seafood businesses, our markets and consumer confidence. We hope this Symposium allows you, with open minds, to examine the scientific evidence and come to conclusions that adequately weigh mercury health risks with consideration of the known health benefits of nutrients found in these important food fish.

Thank you again for joining this Symposium.

Michael Tosatto
Acting Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries Service
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