Report of the 64th Meeting of the Scientific and Statistical Committee

Executive Centre
Honolulu, Hawaii
29-31 October 1996

Pelagics

Pelagics fisheries research:

Status of PFRP: John Sibert gave a progress report on the Pelagic fisheries Research Program (PFRP). Many of the projects are now complete or near completion. Five technical reports were published earlier this year and many others are in press in the primary scientific literature. Also, numerous articles for the general public were written by PFRP investigators. There have been numerous articles published in the Hawaii Fishing News. The first ever PFRP Newsletter was published in October 1996 which featured research in stock structure using genetic techniques. The next three issues, scheduled to be published quarterly, will feature economic, fisheries-oceanography and modeling and statistics.

Due to shortfall in FY 1996 PFRP appropriation, principal investigators have been asked to economize or postpone their second-year funding of their multi-year projects. In addition, it is doubtful that new projects can be funded from the FY 1997 appropriation.

The PFRP convenes semiannual meetings for its principal investigators. The first was in May in conjunction with the Lake Arrowhead Tuna Conference and the next is scheduled for November 15 in Honolulu.

The PFRP is exploring possibilities for a Hawaii EEZ-wide tuna tagging project. A workshop will be held in Honolulu 1 November 1996 on shifting the emphasis of this study from yellowfin tuna to bigeye tuna. Bigeye tuna landings currently exceed yellowfin landings in all commercial fleets. Tuna tagging in Hawaii should include both species.

Council Chairman James Cook commented on the need for PFRP to improve communications especially with council members. He will set aside time on the agenda of the next council meeting to provide an opportunity for PFRP investigators to "educate" council members. He also stated that the recently published PFRP Newsletter is a good step forward.

Status of NMFS pelagic research: Robert Skillman summarized NMFS-HL research projects on 4 major programs: 1) Fishery Management and Performance Investigation, 2) Stock Assessment Investigation, 3) Ecosystem and Environmental Investigation, and 4) Fish Biology and Ecology Investigation. **Chairman Callaghan requested that NMFS provide a written synopsis at the next SSC meeting.**

Pelagics Annual Report:

Walter Ikehara, PPT Chairman, presented the 1995 Annual Report of the Pelagic Fisheries and reported results from the recent PPT meeting.

The SSC recommends that a scientific editor be provided to help the PPT enhance the Annual Report for a wider audience.

Pacific-wide control date:

The SSC identified several difficulties with the Council establishing a Pacific-wide control date for pelagic fisheries, although the SSC believes that there are important

reasons for harmonizing domestic Pacific pelagic fishing policy, especially for longline fisheries
(e.g., mitigation of protected species interactions, effort control, mandatory reporting, observers). It was also viewed as important that any US Pacific pelagic fisheries policy be consistent with international fisheries agreements. The SSC identified the difficulty of using a control date set years in advance of implementation of specific management measures (e.g., limited entry). **Therefore, the SSC does not support the setting of a Pacific-wide control date at this time.**

Draft pelagics data amendment:

Richard Shomura presented the SSC with a brief summary of the updated "Data Center" concept, drafted as part of a proposed regulatory measure to the Pelagics FMP (Item 9A). Mike Laurs (NMFS) then presented the SWR's intentions and progress towards establishing itself as the data center for Pacific pelagic fisheries information. He also indicated that NMFS strongly objects to the establishment of a separate data center, as provided for in the above draft amendment.

Considerable discussion concerning both the pros and cons of NMFS vs. a separate data center ensued and the questions of long-term, large sum financial commitment and data access were raised. The SSC noted that NMFS was making progress in establishing itself as "Data Central," and recommended that NMFS keep us abreast of progress in center implementation with a report at each SSC meeting. The SSC would like to be informed as to what NMFS envisions as its "Data Catalogue" as well as some sense of its planned standard procedures for data access, in a timely fashion.

It was the consensus of the SSC to let the NMFS "Data Center" evolve over the next year, with progress reports as requested, while at the same time keeping in mind that the proposed draft amendment is available for implementation should NMFS progress be deemed inadequate. The draft amendment should be modified to address the issue of data access methodology and policies in some detail for its data center provision, and be presented to the SSC at its next meeting.

Status of bycatch assessments:

Observer Methodology: Tim Price, NMFS SWR, described data collection procedures by observers on Hawaii longline vessels. **The SSC noted the report, and made the following recommendations for changes to the observer forms: 1) On the longline gear and set data form, the proportion of the set actually observed should be noted. This would allow unbiased interpretation of information provided on interactions with sea birds and other species during the setting operation. 2) On the same form, the full range of mitigation options (streamers, poles, etc) should be shown (rather than just bombs and other), so that future analysis of the effectiveness of all options can be undertaken. The SSC endorsed the PPT's suggested definitions for bycatch, incidental take and interaction.**

Albatross: Beth Flint, USFWS, presented a report on the use of observer data for monitoring sea bird take by the Hawaii longline fishery. **The SSC noted the report, and requested to be kept informed of future results of this work.**

Turtles: Bob Skillman, NMFS Honolulu Laboratory, reported that Pierre Kleiber has been assigned the task of leading by-catch investigations at the Honolulu Laboratory. He noted that a recent report on turtle population modeling by Jerry Wetherall (et al) has

been released and will provide valuable input into future NMFS determinations of allowable take.

Sharks: Mike Laurs presented a report on shark incidental catch in the Hawaii longline fishery. Greater than 90% of the shark catch is blue shark, around 30% of which is finned and the trunks discarded. Of the sharks not finned, approximately 85% are released alive. The SSC discussed several issues regarding incidental catches of shark, including a request from the Center for Marine Conservation and the American Elasmobranch Society that the Council ban the practice of finning because of "waste" and "cruelty".

There appears to be no available market for blue shark trunks in Hawaii, so their retention for sale is not an option at this time. It is not uncommon in fisheries for only a small portion of a marine organism to be suitable for marketing (e.g. lobster tails, roe fisheries); shark finning is not fundamentally different to these sorts of marine products in this respect.

The SSC understands that most of the sharks that are finned are already dead, and so finning should not be considered an inhumane practice. However, the SSC noted that it would be desirable to confirm this by observer observations.

The SSC agreed that the main problem regarding incidental longline catches of shark was to assess the impact of such catches, particularly of blue sharks, on the population Pacific-wide. While statistics for the Hawaii longline fishery are available, it is not known whether data for other longline fleets operating in the Pacific are similarly available. **The SSC therefore requests NMFS and/or PFRP to look into the matter of catch statistics, and to provide the SSC with a summary of its findings, along with other biological information on blue shark, that would assist in a preliminary assessment of susceptibility to over-fishing.**