



Report of the Bottomfish Standing Committee

Draft Report

Review of 1996 Annual Report

Robert Moffitt provided an overview of highlights from the 1996 annual report by area: American Samoa, Guam, CNMI and Hawaii (Hoomalu Zone, Mau Zone and MHI) (see doc. 13A and SSC report for details).

Recommendations from the 1996 annual report were also summarized (see attached). Essentially all of the recommendations were repeats in some form from previous years.

The Standing Committee concurred with the SSC to recommend acceptance of the 1996 annual report and recommendations.

Overfished MHI onaga and ehu

Walter Ikehara provided an update of the State's draft management plan to restore MHI onaga and ehu. The draft rule did not go to the DLNR for approval in October as expected. The Chairman now plans to have it on the agenda for April 1998, when additional DOCARE officers are expected to come on line to enhance enforcement. The draft rule continues to be revised and should be finalized soon. The DLNR bottomfish task force will review and comment on the draft prior to its final version. Following approval of the Board and signature by the Governor of Hawaii, it will become law in ten days.

Ikehara summarized present and planned research on bottomfish. A meeting was held with DLNR, UH-HIMB and NMFS to collaborate on research priorities. HIMB's goal is to develop stock enhancement mechanisms for onaga and ehu. This will involve culturing the life cycle in captivity and raising them to a size suitable to restock the deep reefs. Related research will include submersible dives to identify locations of bottomfish juvenile habitat, and studies on genetics and resource monitoring. Baited camera drops will be used to assess populations in closed areas and outside.

Robert Schroeder voiced concern over the questionable economic feasibility of stocking the ocean with cultured bottomfish as a means to enhance the stock. Even if the technology is possible it may be cost prohibitive as bottomfish have life-history characteristics not conducive to aquaculture. Wilson said that stock enhancement is important so the fishermen can see that we are really trying to help them, but is also amenable to reconsidering research funding priorities.

Ikehara also presented a draft conceptual plan for enforcement of closed areas, developed by HDAR and DOCARE staff, and other components of the State plan (see doc. 13B1b for details). Mike Wilson reiterated his support for the State's bottomfish management plan and enforcement plan. He said that this is one of DLNR's highest priorities. He acknowledged the weakness of marine enforcement and noted plans to improve this. Wilson believes self-enforcement will work. The DLNR will also resubmit

a bill for civil penalties of fishery violations in the next legislative session, rather than the current criminal penalties that are difficult to prosecute.

Mike Tosatto (USCG) acknowledged that the conceptual enforcement plan is a step in the right direction. The USCG has models to determine how much coverage time is needed to serve as an effective deterrent. Dockside checks are also needed. Coast Guard has offered its assistance to DOCARE. Tosatto suggested that a letter could be sent from the CG Admiral to support the bill for civil penalties of fishery violations. He also noted the difficulty in enforcing the 18 very small closed areas around the MHIs. Tom Webster said there should be an easier way to distribute fishing licenses. Mike Wilson agreed but said the Department does not have money for this at present. Robert Schroeder presented plans by the Council for federal management which is now mandated by the listing of these two species in a report to Congress on the status of the stocks.

The preferred option is to submit the State's plan, provided it is sufficient to meet federal requirements. The Council's federal backup plan could take either of two approaches. One, as an independent backup plan (e.g., close federal waters in the MHI EEZ, or two, as a collaborative plan to help the State enforce its plan and possibly add a few additional small closed areas, to ensure effectiveness. The Council has also requested that a genetics analysis be conducted to determine stock boundaries for onaga and ehu. If results indicate that they are actually one archipelago-wide then SPR would be in the healthy zone for both of these stocks. Bob Moffitt provided further evidence of the one-stock theory, based on a computer model of larval dispersal. Council Members for American Samoa and CNMI offered support by their staff to help provide outer-area fish samples, required to complete the genetic analysis.

Regarding the MHI bottomfish issue, the Standing Committee concurred with the SSC on the following recommendations to the Council:

1) To encourage the Council to support resubmitted State legislation to change fishery

violations from criminal to civil. This would accommodate the ease of making cases in court and would be consistent with the level of federal penalties.

2) That the Council prepare an amendment that will include several options:

(1) No action;

(2) An independent plan for closed areas (and/or closed seasons) in Federal waters;

(3) A federal plan that is complementary to the State's plan for closed areas. This

could help the State's plan to be more effective in enforcement and enhance the State plan effectiveness through the possible addition of some closed areas and other measures.

3) That NMFS continue to refine the spatially stratified larval recruitment model to help

gauge the effectiveness of the State's bottomfish management plan. Consideration should be given to expanding the model by including movement of adult fish into and out of the closed areas.

4) Endorse the ongoing genetic research and research on laser ablation techniques to

determine stock boundaries of onaga and ehu. This may help determine whether we have a local depletion problem or stock overfishing (i.e., determine whether or not discrete MHI stocks exist.

NWHI bottomfish management system

Dave Kalthoff, Bottomfish Task Force Chairman, reported on the public hearings which were held in January 1998. Meetings were held on Maui, Oahu and Kauai to solicit public input on the draft Mau Zone amendment. The meetings were lightly attended but good comments were heard at all meetings. Mr. Kalthoff also reported on the 5 March 1998 Task Force meeting. The Task Force reviewed the draft amendment and addressed the comments heard during the public meetings.

Mark Mitsuyasu reviewed the time line and requested the committee to provide input on a few final details of the amendment.

Regarding the Mau Zone limited entry amendment, the Committee recommends that:

- 1) the Council direct staff to finalize the amendment for formal public review.**
- 2) Present this final draft document at the next Council meeting for approval and formal public review.**