

Recommendations to the Council from the 74th Meeting of the Scientific and Statistical Committee

Crustaceans

Council Office Conference Room
Honolulu, Hawaii
16-18 May 2000

Draft 1999 Annual Report

The SSC reviewed the draft report and provided various editorial comments. The report is still a draft as complete information from one vessel has not been received.

2000 NWHI Harvest Guideline Chronology

The SSC heard a summary of events in determining this year's harvest guideline for the NWHI lobster fishery, which ultimately led to an emergency closure by NMFS. The proposed rule for the closure was published 28 April with a comment period that ended 15 May 2000. Comments were received from WPRFMC, Marine Mammal Commission, USFWS, and Earth Justice Legal Defense Fund. The final rule will be published by the end of May. A separate proposed rule to establish an experimental lobster fishery in 2000 is being proposed for consideration.

Decline in recruitment at Necker

Gerard DiNardo discussed with the SSC the assessment model used for the NWHI lobster fishery. An SSC member noted reservations with the use of limited tagging data on one species in one area to estimate harvestable populations at other areas for two species. Catchability is likely to be specific to an area and therefore such estimates should not be extrapolated to other areas and species.

DiNardo noted that NMFS will fulfill the Council's request to apply confidence limits to point estimates and to do power/trend analyses.

The Plan Team/Advisory Panel was concerned about apparent low lobster abundance in Area 4 and spiny lobster recruitment decline at Necker. Fishing in Area 4 has been patchy, and this area may provide recruitment to areas downstream. CPUE for Area 4 is very low.

The SSC noted that the way the NWHI lobster fishery is assessed needs to be changed, as it is not responsive to current needs. The SSC was generally concerned about getting a better handle on this fishery.

Consideration of amendment to replace lobster assessment model

Robert Schroeder reviewed the Council's request for a proposed amendment to develop a more integrated lobster assessment model. A meeting was held in late March to develop the amendment, but produced a mixed response to the need for an amendment. The SSC expressed concern over "locking in" formulas into an amendment where flexibility and different ways of managing the fishery should be considered. It was noted that the five-year review of the FMP is due next year and that the SSC should be involved.

Research Plans

Gerard DiNardo discussed proposed research plans with the SSC. NMFS plans to collect essential life history data on spiny and slipper lobsters, and conduct spiny lobster tagging in more than one area. The research plans assume that an experimental fishing program is established in the NWHI. The research plan document was not available for SSC review as it was still undergoing review by NMFS at higher levels. The SSC expressed concern over the non-transparent manner in which lobster research is being planned.

Possible additions to CMUS

Kevin Kelly briefed the SSC on plans to include deepwater shrimp and red crab in an amendment being prepared to incorporate CNMI and PRIAs under the Crustaceans FMP.

Status of litigation

Alvin Katekaru reviewed the status of the lawsuit to close the NWHI lobster and bottomfish fisheries, and the preliminary injunction to close the NWHI lobster fishery. A court hearing on the preliminary injunction was held on April 21, 2000 and several motions were considered. The judge's decisions on the motions are pending. A settlement conference is scheduled for June 21, 2000 on the original lawsuit.

Plan Team/Advisory Panel Recommendations

The SSC reviewed the Plan Team/Advisory Panel recommendations and endorsed recommendations 1, 3, 6, and 8, as modified below.

(PT/AP recommendation 1) Overfishing definitions (SFA amendment revision): Approve the control rule and threshold levels for maximum fishing mortality as 0.72 and minimum stock size as 71 mt and fishing mortality at optimal yield as 0.14, which are essentially the same as those approved by the Council last year. The definition of overfishing should be tied to the

development of a new population assessment model, and considered together as a consistent package.

(PT/AP recommendation 3) That the NMFS-HL produce an annual status of the stocks report, which would be combined with the annual report to produce a SAFE report. As additional information on the status of the stock becomes available, produce a comprehensive stock assessment.

(PT/AP recommendation 6) Research needs were identified as: 1) improve stock assessment models, 2) life histories and population dynamics, 3) variables that affect catch and CPUE, 4) fishery monitoring, 5) observers to record coral in traps and lines. The SSC additionally noted the tie-in of this recommendation with recommendation 8, and that collaboration with industry is necessary to accomplish these objectives.

(PT/AP recommendation 8) That the NMFS-HL explore the development of a new population assessment model for review prior to determining if an amendment is needed.

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