

History of the Fisheries in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands



500–1500 AD Polynesians migrate to Hawaii. According to legend, the chiefess Pele and her family first land at Mokupapapa, a flat reef-like island, where her brother Kanenilohai is left. The next island is Nihoa, where her brothers Kaneapua and Kamohoalii (the shark god) are left. A study of Nihoa and Moku Manamana (Necker Island) in the 1920s uncovers numerous shrines and a fishhook of the type used with a *kaka* rig to fish in the *kialoa* (deep waters) for bottomfish. Carbon-dating indicates the islands were settled about 1000 AD.



1700s–1800s Native Hawaiians from Kauai and Niihau make regular canoe trips to Mokupapapa, an island west of Kaula, for turtles and seabirds. Nihoa is occupied each summer by Native Hawaiians until the late 1800s. Olona fiber fishing lines of 300-foot length suggest bottomfish fishing took place as several of the lines could be tied together.



1800s–1900s Western sailing ships exploit the area for seals, whales, reef fish, turtles, sharks, birds, pearl oysters and sea cucumbers. Queen Kaahumanu visits and annexes Nihoa for the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1822. Guano extraction begins in 1859. Several islands are leased to North Pacific Phosphate and Fertilizer Co., which has a base at Laysan (1891–1910). Japanese harvest bird skins and feathers. King Kalakaua takes possession of Kure in 1886. Following the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom (1893) and its annexation to the United States (1898), President Theodore Roosevelt in 1909 designates the NWHI as the Hawaiian Island Bird Reservation to protect seabirds. The area is eventually transferred to the Interior Department and designated the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge.



1910–40s In 1917, public officials deny requests to establish a fishing station and cannery at French Frigate Shoals (FFS). *Daikoku Maru* nets inshore species in the shoal until it is lost at sea in the 1920s. In the 1930s, *Katsuren Maru* fishes for inshore species and turtles as far as Maro Reef and Lanikai and Islander fish throughout the NWHI for pearl oysters, ulua, mullet, weke, akule, lobster from the reefs and shoals and onaga, uku, ehu, opakapaka and hapuupuu from the deep seas. *Lanikai* establishes a fishing station at Pearl and Hermes Reef. *Reliable* nets inshore species and captures turtles in the mid 1940s. *Simba* is a mothership for three to four smaller sampans fishing for akule, moi, weke, lobsters, turtles and other inshore species. Capt. Jake Hoapai and 11 crewmembers are lost at sea in the late 1940s.



1940–44 World War II leads to the development of a US Navy base at Midway Atoll. At FFS, the 11-acre Tern Island is converted into a 42-acre naval airstrip. A Coast Guard LORAN station is established at East Island, FFS.

1946–59 Nine large commercial vessels fish the NWHI. By 1946, two fishing bases at Tern Island airship trapped fish and turtles to Honolulu. The Pacific Oceanic Fishery Investigation in 1948 begins research of potential commer-





cial fishery yield. In 1950, Leo Ohai, owner and captain of *Sea Queen*, transports a small aircraft to FFS to support akule fishing and Buzzy Agard flies catches in a DC-3 cargo aircraft from FFS to Honolulu and captains *Koyo Maru* to catch akule at Nihoa. *Sea Hawk* and *Osprey* fish Lisianski for shoal and deep-sea species. *Osprey* is lost at sea in the 1950s. All hands are rescued off FFS. *Elaine* and *Brothers* fish for lobster and inshore species at FFS. *Koyo Maru* fishes for deep-sea and inshore, shoal species and is lost at sea in the 1960s. *Kaku* fishes to Maro Reef for shoal and deep-sea species. *Taihei Maru* fishes to Lisianski for ulua from the shoals and onaga, opakapaka and other species from the deep. A limited local market causes the fishery to eventually decline.

1964 Wilderness Act is passed, prohibiting commercial enterprise within a National Wilderness Preservation System. NWHI is twice proposed to Congress as a wilderness area, but the State of Hawaii strongly opposes any prohibition of commercial fishing.

1965–77 Japanese longliners annually expend up to 2,170 vessel days in the NWHI, harvesting up to 2,204 mt of tuna and 1,260 mt of billfish. Japanese pole-and-line vessels targeting skipjack tuna, Japanese dragners for precious corals and Japanese and Soviet trawlers targeting groundfish are observed in NWHI waters. A Governor's Task Force recognizes that fishery resources on the main islands are taxed and recommends developing NWHI fisheries. An expanded local market causes NWHI bottomfish and troll landings to increase. In 1973, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) begins NWHI reconnaissance cruises. In 1976, Congress adopts the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, establishing the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council to manage fisheries in federal waters around Hawaii and other US Pacific Islands. Foreign vessels are forced from NWHI waters.

1978 Following a Governor's Advisory Committee recommendation, NMFS, US Fish and Wildlife Service, State of Hawaii and University of Hawaii begin a five-year cooperative research program to identify NWHI marine resources.

1980–86 The Council establishes the Precious Coral Fishery Management Plan (1980), Crustaceans FMP (1983) and Bottomfish and Seamount Groundfish FMP (1986). A Crustaceans FMP amendment creates no-take zones 20 nmi around Laysan and landward of the 10-fathom curve in all other NWHI areas.

1987–91 The Council establishes the Pelagics FMP (1987), NWHI Hoomalu Zone bottomfish limited entry program (1989) and Protected Species Zone, 50 nm around NWHI, within which longline fishing is prohibited (1991).

1995–2000 Council contractors complete *Review of coral reefs around American Flag Pacific Islands and assessment of need, value and feasibility of establishing a coral reef fishery management plan for the Western Pacific Region* (1995) and *An assessment of the status of coral reef resources, and their patterns of use, in the US Pacific Islands* (1997). The NWHI Mau Zone limited entry program is established (1999). Following public scoping hearings, the Council submits the draft Coral Reef Ecosystem FMP and preliminary draft EIS to NMFS. Preferred alternatives identify all federal waters 0–50 fathoms in the NWHI as marine protected areas and recommend 24 percent of the total NWHI as no-take zones.