WPRFMC Pelagics Reports: *Pelagics Plan Team Meeting*

7-8th May 1997 Ilima Room Ala Moana Hotel 410 Atkinson Drive Honolulu, Hawaii Draft Report

7 May 8:30 am (Wednesday)

1. INTRODUCTIONS AND ASSIGNMENT OF RAPPORTEURS

The meeting was opened by Chris Boggs who reviewed the agenda and assigned rapporteurs for each session.

2. IMPROVEMENTS TO ANNUAL REPORTS MODULES

The plan team discussed the format revisions that the Council wished to see on the modules for the upcoming annual reports, that were first noted at the PPT meeting report in October 1996. Revisions 1 - 5 are all changes to the introduction of the report and this task is the responsibility of the Council Staff.

1. Adding columns showing percent changes (delta) from previous year to current year on Table 2 of the Introduction.

As the table is rather large, Dave Hamm suggested simply adding the percent changes (round integer numbers) in parentheses next to the values with a +/- sign to denote increases or decreases, as opposed to new columns for each area. Chris Boggs will be responsible for the changes.

2. Create a new Table 3 in the introduction containing total revenue, with deltas, for each species by area.

Self-explanatory, this was not discussed.

3. Expand regional summaries in the summary section of the Introduction, possible to include a table summarizing changes in each region (American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, CNMI).

Self-explanatory and not discussed.

4. Add a page of definitions to the Introduction.

Sam Pooley suggested a list of acronyms in the beginning (such as EEZ, PPMUS, etc.). The Plan team recommended that Council Information Officer Mark Segami go through the report and find all words that require further definition (as he is a new on staff), and that Walter Ikehara write the definitions.

5. Copy the Table of Contents from each module and append it to the annual report's Table of Contents.

The Plan Team recommended that the Table of Contents in the Introduction be followed (appended) by the Table of Contents from each module.

6. *Re-order elements on the Figure pages in the modules so that the graph comes first, followed by interpretation, source, calculation, and then table of data.*

Each area module has been changed accordingly by the appropriate island PPT member.

7. Other Issues

Walter Ikehara had given survey forms to the Council members to list three things they liked and disliked about the Annual Report modules. Although the responses were vague there was some feedback on a few issues.

Svein Fougner (NMFS SWFC) had remarked that there was no mention of the status of the stocks anywhere in the pelagic report. Fougner is aware that the Plan Team is not actually assessing the stocks, but thought that it would be useful to say something about stock status. John Sibert will obtain the information from the SPC Oceanic Fisheries Program Standing Committee meeting in June, which will be summarizing the status of stocks.

Some information can also be added from the FMP and the most recent (1994) review in Amendment 7. John Sibert recommended that part of the pelagic program should be a continual literature review of recent developments in stock assessment, and incidental catch reports. In the interim, for this year's report, Chris Boggs recommended using the last page from the NOAA report 'Our Living Oceans' concerning under and over exploited species.

Another issue, pertaining to the definition of over fishing, was criticism concerning the methods used to assess SPR; it is not made clear for each of the species which of the possible SPR methods is best for that species. This ought to be reviewed each year in the annual report. Chris Boggs and John Sibert will work on this task.

Paul Dalzell talked about improvements to the general aesthetics of the report (e.g. no tables should run over two pages as in the Hawaii report, and taking lines out of the tables).

The issue of whether to use Word Perfect 6.1 or WP7 was raised, as the Council is using WP7 and doesn't want to downgrade. It was decided that the Council will execute all of the figure updates to the Hawaii module, and will operate a machine with WP6.1, because the island modules are all created in WP6.1 and do not have access at present to WP7. Meanwhile, David Hamm will look into the possibility of upgrading the island modules to WP7. Additionally, whenever the Lab or Council upgrade, they should communicate it to the rest of the group.

Lastly, David Hamm volunteered to compile a new PPT member address list which includes email addresses.

3. 1996 Annual report modules

A. American Samoa

The most important change in the American Samoa fishery is the increasing importance of longline fishing for albacore. Changes in landings may not necessarily be due to increased availability of stocks, but a change in fishing method, i.e. the expansion of small scale longline fishing. This results in a change of expressing catch rate, from changing per hour and catch per trip to 'fish per hook' for longline.

Suesan Saucerman requested the Plan Team's advice on how to report this new longline fishery, possibly reporting on the longline fishery separately, as in Table 1. Further, since American Samoan longliners use approximately 200 hooks, expressing catch rate as "per 1,000 hooks" as in Hawaii, may not accurately reflect the longline catch rates, and it was suggested that catch rates might be better expressed as 'per 100 hooks'.

A suggestion was made by Russell Ito to add a revenue and average price for the longline fishery and to differentiate between single and multi-day trips. Differentiating between single and multi-day trips may be important in the future if longlining evolves in to multi-day trips. Russell Ito will assist Suesan Saucerman with this.

Another suggestion was to compare the estimate of fishing effort obtained for the emerging American Samoa longline fishery from the creel surveys with that obtained from the NMFS longline logbooks. American Samoa could either obtain the logbook information from NMFS or process it themselves and make the comparison. Future reports should then have a one page summary on effort and catch from the logbooks on longline, and the results summarized as an additional table in the plan team report. A concern was brought up whether the creel survey encounters Western Samoan boats, and that Western Samoan fish may be included in the American Samoa creel survey. According to Suesan Saucerman, the American Samoan creel survey only includes licensed American Samoan boats. However, Western Samoan boats may catch in American Samoan waters and offload their fish at the cannery, and these will not show up in the creel surveys or NMFS logbooks. Few Western Samoan boats unload in American Samoa, and it was recommended that a 3-4 sentence synopsis describing this be placed in future reports.

Recommendations

1. The recommendation from the **1995** Annual Report, to 'continue efforts to monitor the pelagic fisheries in American Samoa' be continued

2. It was recommended that the following recommendation from 1995 that 'efforts continue to quantify the amount of fish being imported from foreign longline vessels' be dropped. American Samoa should decide what measures are to be taken to deal with this on-going issue. The interpretation section of the revenue section should be worded to reflect the potential effect on the local price of pelagic species from fish from Western Samoa as well as from cannery leakage.

2. The original recommendation to include a summary of landings for American Samoa's two canneries by distant water fleets to continue.

B. Guam

The off-shore creel survey in Guam will be re-automated with WPacFIN assistance in 1997 which will provide improved data for next year's module. Questions were raised about potential bias in the creel data due to the increasing presence of charter boats and their tendency to take shorter trips. The Team requested that Guam Department of

Aquatic and Wildlife Resources (DAWR) and WPacFIN investigate how to separate out these effects so as to produce a more consistent index.

The Plan Team requested that the Pelagic Fisheries Research Program or the South Pacific Commission consider a fisheries interaction study for Guam. The Team suggested that the interpretation of "commercial" fishing in the Guam module be strengthened by reference to the current PFRP socio-anthropological project on-going in Guam.

The Team suggested that a strong effort be made to understand problems with the estimation of the consumer price index issue in Guam. Dr Paul Callaghan, recently retired economist from the University of Guam, might be a good person to undertake this task.

Recommendations

1. The Team recommended that all module writers provide citations in their modules concerning data collection methodologies and estimation procedures.

C. Hawaii module

The report of the Hawaii pelagics fisheries was given by Sam Pooley who stated that there was nothing particularly outstanding or noteworthy about the performance of pelagic fishing in Hawaii during 1996.

Recommendations

1. The Plan Team recommended that NMFS insure that the implementation of the High Sea Licensing Act results in providing logbook and landings data from all domestic longline vessels harvesting pelagic in the Pacific. No information was available to the Team concerning progress in implementing the Act.

2. The Plan Team recommended that NMFS Enforcement make VMS longline data available on a confidential basis for logbook verification and research purposes. NMFS Honolulu Laboratory requested access to VMS data in September 1996. At the last Council meeting (April 1997), it was agreed to consider the Lab's request through the Council's VMS committee.

3. The Team recommended that NMFS should insure that longline logbooks be filed by all domestic longliners departing or landings in American Samoa, Guam, Hawaii, and the Northern Mariana Islands, and that a system should be developed to track movement of longline vessels between these ports, the mainland U.S. and South Pacific island locations. It was unclear whether western Pacific logs were required for longliners leaving western Pacific ports but landing in other ports (e.g., California).

D. Northern Mariana Islands

The most important change in CNMI fisheries for 1996 was an increase in yellowfin tuna landings which appears to be driven by an increase in demand in local markets through increased tourism from Korea.

New staff were finding it difficult to interpret creel survey data and requested some training in interpretation and guality control.

Recommendations:

1. An Analysis of the creel survey data currently on hand to evaluate its utility for estimating total CNMI catches.

2. On the basis of the results of recommendation 1, redesign the creel survey to be more effective.

With respect to recommendation no. 1 in the 1995 Annual Report, it was noted that modifications were introduced into a current PFRP project to address these concerns.

E. International module

John Sibert presented the International or High Seas module and was commended by the meeting for this new initiative. Dr Sibert explained the data sources used to compile this module and included the US purse seine data, the SPC Tuna Yearbook and the SPC tuna database. All data are 'second hand'. Dr Sibert noted that the SPC data is probably incomplete, that no effort data were available and that no price/value data are included in the module.

Recommendations

1. To omit the sharks and other species from Table 3 and Figure 17 in the module

2. To explain that points suggesting fishing by distant water fishing nations (DWFNs) within US EEZs are centered on a 5 degree square and do not necessarily represent illegal fishing.

4. 1996 ANNUAL REPORT REGION-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Council should request the Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources (HDAR) to develop and implement a fish dealer permitting system, and should computerize and enforce its dealer reporting system. This will further document the total volume of fish sold in the state, and will provide a cross-reference validation capability for fishermen's reports.

Status: A bill submitted by the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to obtain authority to issue marine dealer permits was passed by the 1997 Hawaii Legislature. If it becomes law, the DLNR can implement a dealer permit system. Planning by NMFS and HDAR for computerizing the dealer report is underway.

2. The Council and/or other appropriate agency should seek funding to conduct a survey of Hawaii small-scale fisheries. This survey is needed to evaluate the

significance of non-commercial and part-time components of these fisheries.

Status: This long-standing recommendation was retained at the request of the Team because data are still not being collected on the Hawaii non-commercial pelagic fisheries. The State of Hawaii does not yet have a non-commercial fishing license and does not collect data from non-commercial fisheries on a regular basis. No funding has been available to conduct these surveys. A bill in the 1997 Hawaii Legislature to grant DLNR authority to issue recreational marine licenses was defeated.

3. The HDAR should continue to improve the collection of Hawaii fisheries data so that the data provide useful information on fishing effort.

Status: The HDAR is using a new database structure that includes the start and end dates of trips, if the fishermen report them. The HDAR is now considering substantial changes to the catch reporting system that should result in vastly improved catch and effort reporting from commercial fishermen.

4. Sam Pooley was asked by the Plan Team to provide a new reworded recommendation no. 4

5 The Council should support an analysis of trends in mahimahi and landings and catch rates, and other incidental catches, throughout the western Pacific region, including data from EEZ and distant-water fisheries.

Status: The team retained this recommendation because nothing specific had yet been done along these lines, and it is still an identified need. It was suggested that PFRP solicit project proposals for this work next funding cycle becomes available.

6. The Council should attempt to obtain data on discards from U.S. and other purse seine fisheries within the U.S. EEZ and on the high seas.

Status: A new "International Fisheries" module will be added to the 1996 Annual Report summarizing pelagic catches in the high seas of the North Pacific Ocean. Data for the South Pacific will be added next year.

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Data on discards from the U.S. and other purse seine, as well as other pelagic fisheries, are still missing.
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<u>8 May 8:30 (Thursday)</u>

5. CROSS SEAMOUNT INTERACTION ISSUE

Paul Dalzell presented the history of the Council actions dealing with the issue of interaction between handline and longline vessels on the Cross Seamount. Much of the discussion was concerned with specifying what subgroups of the handline and longline fleets are actually involved in the issue and in what ways.

A question was raised about what happened to the fishery data on the seamount area that the Council requested in response to the interaction issue. No in-depth analyses have been done with the data. A recommendation that such analysis should be conducted was deemed unnecessary because PFRP already plan to analyze this data as part of their tagging program on Cross Seamount. No further actions or recommendations from the Plan Team were suggested with respect to this issue.

6. BYCATCH

Paul Dalzell made a brief introduction to this topic area by emphasizing how important the issue of bycatch is for the management of the Hawaii-based longline fishery.

A. Albatross

Dr Beth Flint of the USFWS addressed the issue of the interactions of albatross with Hawaii-based longline vessels and the deployment of bird mitigation devices. She presented figures for the numbers of Laysan and Blackfoot albatrosses killed in the 1996 fishing season which suggested that catches of albatross were greatly reduced than in 1994 and 1995, while nesting populations of Laysan and Black-footed albatross in the NWHI appear to be stable or even increasing. The reasons for the decrease in interactions are presently unknown but are not thought to be due to adoption of mitigation techniques by fishermen. Bird mortalities appear to be mainly confined to vessels larger than 70 ft.

Dr Flint reviewed a number of bird mortality mitigation measures which the longline fishery was being encouraged to adopt. She commented on the first deployment of a bird pole on the NMFS vessel the Townsend Cromwell, noting that the pole seemed effective but the data were insufficient to draw further conclusion. A possible sighting of a Short-tailed albatross was made from the Cromwell. Efforts will be made to encourage fishermen to return tags from dead birds caught on longlines and to note and report the numbers of tagged birds caught and released alive.

B. Turtles

Dr Mike Laurs, Director of the NMFS Honolulu Laboratory reviewed the interactions of turtles with the Hawaii-based longline fishery. Four species of turtle (Loggerheads, Leatherbacks, Greens and Olive Ridleys) are known to interact with this fishery. Dr Laurs discussed the statistical process that was required to estimate the number of encounters between longline gear and turtles and the number of turtle deaths attributed to longline gear, either through direct observations on dead turtles or from post-release mortality of turtles hooked from swallowing a baited hook.

Dr Laurs presented the results of the analysis of the turtle take and mortalities for the years 1994 to 1996. This analysis was an expansion of data from observer logbooks and showed that only the takes and kills of Loggerhead turtles exceeded the allowable levels as prescribed under Section 7b of the Endangered Species Act. Dr Laurs noted

that this biological opinion was a 'no jeopardy' opinion and did not mean that the fishery had to be shut down in the event of takes and kills exceeding prescribed maxima. Rather, a new biological opinion will be given that will discuss the likely effects of the longline fishery on Loggerhead populations and revise the allowable take and kill levels. Comments and discussion arising from this presentation touched on the accuracy of the expansion of the observer data, which amounts to only a 5% coverage of the fishery. Dr Laurs noted that turtle-longline interactions are rare events and the expansions are very sensitive to the number of animals actually observed dead. As with albatross, turtle interactions appear to be

mainly confined to vessels of over 70 ft in length. Questions were asked about the current status of turtle populations. Loggerhead and Olive Ridley populations were thought to be increasing in size as a result of protecting nesting populations, while Leatherback and Hawksbill turtles were acknowledged to be in poor shape. Dr Laurs also presented some preliminary results on a recent project to collect better data on post hooking mortality of turtles using archival tags. These tags monitor location and diving activity by turtles. Without indication of the latter activity, it is likely that the turtle can be assumed to have died and is drifting with the currents. This project will

allow more accurate extrapolation of estimated post hooking mortality for the whole longline fleet, from observer data

C. Sharks

Dr Laurs then briefly reviewed the incidental take of sharks in the Hawaii-based longline fishery which mainly targets swordfish and tunas. The data on shark catches and on finning is taken from the longline catch logbooks which the vessel captains are obliged to complete. About 100,000 sharks are caught annually in this fishery, nearly all of which (95 %) is comprised by a single species, the blue shark. About 60 % of sharks are released, and most of these are alive at the time of release.

Most sharks are taken by swordfish vessels, but these are mainly discarded due to the time take to process swordfish catches. Fewer sharks are taken by tuna vessels but the crew are more inclined to retain sharks. Nearly all retained sharks are finned and the carcasses are discarded. The incidental shark catch is thought to be worth about \$ 1,000,000/yr. Dr Laurs noted that finning activity has increased markedly over the past five years as the demand for blue shark fins had risen in response to declines in other shark fisheries.

Discussion on this topic focused on the perceived wastage of shark from discarding of the carcasses of finned sharks, and the confusion of the public between overfished neritic shark populations and the more productive oceanic populations.

The recommendations arising from the Plan Team following the three presentations on interactions and incidental catch were as follows.

The Pelagics Plan Team commended the NMFS post-hooking mortality study and recommended that NMFS continue tagging turtles with archival tags that were found to have ingested longline hooks.

The Plan Team recommended that a special report on shark landings and finning be added to the Hawaii module. The Plan Team also noted that information on observed turtle interactions was included in the 1995 report introduction, however the Team recommended that observed numbers be expanded to the fleet numbers of takes and kills. Similarly, the number of albatross observed to have been killed in the longline fishery and the expansion on a fleet-wide basis should also be described in the annual report.

The Plan Team also recommended seeking fishermen's help in banding albatross recovered alive from longlines at sea, and using specially colored bands to denote at-sea banding. The Plan Team also supported the SSC recommendation for an explanation of the determination of the allowable level of take and kills for turtles in the Hawaii-based longline fishery.

The Plan Team made a general recommendation for more research to understand the population dynamics of turtles and seabirds, and at least maintain the current level of coverage, recognizing that the only way to increase accuracy or understand important variation is to increase the level of observer coverage. 7. DETERMINATION OF TOTAL ALLOWABLE LEVEL OF FOREIGN FISHING (TALFF) FOR PELAGIC FISHERIES

Paul Dalzell reviewed the estimation of TALFF for pelagic fisheries in the Council's insular areas (Guam, CNMI and American Samoa). This is one of the necessary steps in the development and implementation of a Pacific Insular Area Fishery Agreement (PIAFA) under the revised Magnuson Act. Dalzell reviewed the various options from the simplest, where TALFF is defined in non-numeric terms to the most complex where TALFF is defined in economic terms and the interaction between domestic and foreign fishing is estimated. Dalzell noted that the preferred option of the recent SSC meeting was to use the non-numeric TALFF, but with sufficient safeguards such as closed areas, careful monitoring and an annual review and recommendations in the Pelagics Annual Report.

In the discussion that followed, Paul Dalzell noted that at the recent inter-governmental fisheries consultation between Japan and the US, Japan expressed an interest in negotiating access to the CNMI EEZ for its long-range fishing vessels. It was also noted that pole-and-line fishing is the most selective method of pelagic fishing, with minimal bycatch and protected species interactions. The discussion also focused on the possible use of the uninhabited US Pacific Islands for PIAFA agreements or for use as refuges where all forms of fishing were banned.

The use of closed areas in PIAFA agreements to protect local indigenous fisheries was also discussed and this led to consideration of a recent recommendation from the Council's Native and Indigenous Rights Advisory Panel. The AP recommended allowing only the indigenous people of American Samoa and permanent residents, who are currently active participants in the local commercial fishery, to fish commercially within 50 nautical miles of the islands of the Territory of American Samoa, and limiting the size of the fishing vessels allowed to fish within 50 nautical miles to 10 gross tons or less. The Plan Team had some concerns about this recommendation and in turn recommended that the NOAA General Council review the wording of the Native and Indigenous Rights AP resolution and that other mechanisms be explored to achieve the same intent.

8. CANADA/US PACIFIC COAST ALBACORE TUNA VESSELS AND PORT PRIVILEGES TREATY

Don Schug summarized the history and details of the 1981 Albacore Treaty and the Canadian proposal to include Honolulu as a designated port. This would allow Canadian fishermen to off load their catches and tranship them through the port of Honolulu.

However, under the terms and conditions of the Treaty, Canadian fishermen would also be able to fish within the US EEZ up to 12 miles from shore, employing any form of fishing gear. The Treaty would have precedence over the Pelagics Fisheries Management Plan, meaning that while US longliners can not fish within the 50-75 nmi MHI exclusion zone, Canadian vessels would be at liberty to do so. Apart from this obvious concern, the Plan Team had a number of questions about the Treaty.

1. What happens to the incidental catch of other species (e.g., yellowfin tuna)? Can those be landed or must they be released?

2. Does the Treaty bind the Canadian albacore trollers to the same conservation requirements as domestic vessels operating in the EEZ? (The Plan Team noted that the Treaty was drafted in 1981, before tuna were included in the MFCMA.)

The Plan Team noted that the landing and sale of albacore would be in direct competition with the local longline fleet and with the limited entry program which prohibits expansion of that fleet. The Team requested information on the current pattern of Canadian albacore trolling in the North and South Pacific, in terms of number of vessels, seasons, etc. One positive outcome of the Treaty, should Honolulu be added to the list of ports is that it may lead to re-opening of a cannery in Hawaii.

The Plan Team recommended that Honolulu should not be listed as a port for Canadian albacore trollers until the Treaty had been reviewed to account for current management provisions under the Pelagics FMP.

8. Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements

Paul Dalzell referred to the re-authorized Magnuson Act, which required that all FMPs and amendments be reviewed to bring them into line with the definitions and provisions under the new Act. The Plan Team was divided up into sub-teams to accomplish the various topic area reviews. The agenda for these revisions was for the definitions to be completed in draft form by July in preparation for the August Council meeting and for the provisions to completed in draft form by October for consideration at the November Council meeting.