



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Contact: Sylvia Spalding 522-6044, or Paul Dalzell, 522-6042

Scientists Criticize Seabird Biological Opinion

HONOLULU (5 Feb. 2001)—Scientists, meeting in Honolulu Jan. 30 to Feb. 1, criticized a biological opinion by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) designed to protect short-tailed albatross. Issued Nov. 28, 2000, the biological opinion requires Hawaii longline vessels fishing north of 23°N latitude to use blue-dyed bait and strategic offal discards and adhere to other specific measures. Longline vessels setting shallow must set at night while vessels setting deep must use a line shooter and at least 45 grams of weight at least three feet from each hook. The biological opinion measures are based on those adopted by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council to mitigate interaction between the Hawaii longline fishery and black-footed and Laysan albatrosses. The Council measures apply to vessels operating north of 25°N latitude and allow fishermen to choose two out of six mitigation devices, including those mentioned above as well as towed deterrents.

The scientists, who meet about three times a year as the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to provide advice to the Council, said the biological opinion is scientifically flawed and will not foster a cooperative effort among fishermen for the long-term recovery of the species. The assumed biological distribution of short-tailed albatross and interaction rate with the Hawaii longline fishery are contrary to all evidence, they noted. According to National Marine Fisheries Service data, there have been no recorded interactions between a short-tailed albatross and a Hawaii longline vessel and only one sighting of a short-tailed albatross by an observer on a Hawaii longline vessel.

Among other recommendations made by the SSC are the following:

- Establish a control date of Jan. 1, 2001, for the handline fishery at Cross Seamount, located 150 miles southwest of Honolulu, to eliminate speculative entry into the fishery and in light of potential changes in participation levels after longline effort reductions are put in place.
- Define "vertical longline" as a fishing gear in the Pelagics Fishery Management Plan. Redefine "longline" gear to refer to horizontal longline gear whose total mainline length, either in one continuous length or multiple lengths, exceeds one nautical mile.
- Require adequate insurance of all vessels operating in all marine protected areas identified in the draft Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan. These include federal waters 0 to 50 fathoms depth surrounding the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and US Pacific island possessions, such as Kingman Reef, Wake Island and Johnston, Midway and Palmyra Atolls. Federal waters are generally 3 to 200 miles offshore but extend to the shoreline around US possessions.
- Conduct an experimental fishery of sufficient intensity to support a lobster tagging program in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands in 2001.

Recommendations from the SSC and other advisory groups will be reviewed by the Council at its next meeting, Feb. 12 to 15, 2001, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu. For more information, call the Council at 522-8220 or view the Council Web site at www.wpcouncil.org.

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