

WPRFMC Crustacean Reports: *66th Meeting of SSC*

Recommendations to the Council from the 66th Meeting of the Scientific and Statistical Committee

5-7 August 1997
King Kamehameha Hotel
Kailua-Kona, Hawaii

Crustaceans

NWHI Lobster fishery

The SSC heard descriptions of the fishery and voluntary observer program for the 1997 Northwestern Hawaiian Islands lobster season from Alvin Katekaru, the NMFS research program from Gerard DiNardo and Jeff Polovina (larval transport simulations), and the fishing industry's experience from Jim Cook. The fishery is changing in a number of ways. Nine boats participated this year (up from five last year). A new VMS ruling enabled the boats to spread out across several banks and to target slipper lobster at Maro reef (about 40% of the total catch). Several boats also landed a considerable amount of live lobster for higher value. Six of the vessels carried data observers that recorded discards and size-frequency data. NMFS conducted similar research this season as in past years, with some expanded sites. CPUE was highest for spiny lobster at Necker (1.7 per trap-haul) and for slipper at Maro (2.4 per trap-haul). NMFS plans three NWHI lobster research cruises for 1998. Objectives are 1) stock assessment, 2) life history parameters, and 3) cooperative tagging program. Larval transport simulation experiments (inferred from satellite altimetry data) confirm Necker as a larval sink. **The SSC joins the Hawaii Crustacean Plan Team (HI-CPT) in thanking the observers for their excellent work and professionalism, the vessel owners, captain and crew for their support and cooperation, and staff at the NMFS Pacific Area Office and Honolulu Laboratory for timely program coordination and training.**

Alvin Katekaru described the use of VMS by all boats this season, its advantages and remaining needs. **The SSC recommends that the Council request that the NMFS allow lobster boats to proceed directly to home port after the close of the season without avoiding waters of fishable islands as long as they carry vessel monitoring systems (VMS).**

Hawaii State vs. Federal Regulations

Jo-Ann Kushima described inconsistencies (e.g., closed season, legal gear, reporting) found between State and Federal lobster regulations which produced concern when a fishermen applied for a permit to fish in Federal waters off the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI). **The SSC joins the HI-CPT in recommending that the Council supports the Department of Land and Natural Resources during the 1998 legislative session to facilitate passage of a bill to amend the existing state regulations for nets and traps to give DLNR authority to make modifications to the existing gear regulations through administrative rule. The SSC also joins in recommending that the Council should seek exemptions from the State for the few boats that wish to use legal Federal traps in the MHI EEZ.**

Areas of Region not in FMP

Jo-Ann Kushima also mentioned that some areas, such as Johnston and Palmyra, where Hawaii fishermen have voiced an interest in fishing, are not listed in the Federal regulations as permitted areas. **The SSC joins the HI-CPT in recommending that CNMI and the US Pacific Island possessions be included in Permit Area 3 (with Guam and American Samoa). The SSC also supports the HI-CPT's recommendation that the Council request the State to grant an exemption to fish these areas and land crustaceans in Hawaii, similar to the provision that allows fishermen to land NWHI lobsters in Hawaii during the State's seasonal closure.** [However, the SSC recognizes that the landing of live lobsters raises other management concerns.]

These inconsistencies are due to changes in the Federal situation (such as CNMI becoming an active participant in Council matters) and changes in State of Hawaii regulations after Federal management regulations had been set. To keep up to date with such changes, **the SSC recommends that the Council require each FMP plan team in their respective annual reports to include a review of the consistency of State and Federal regulations.**