

WPRFMC Pelagics Reports: 66th Meeting of the 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

Pelagics

Status of the Hawaii longline fishery 1997

Dr Boggs presented an update of the Hawaii longline fishery for the first two quarters of 1997. Catch, effort and CPUE for most species is higher than for the corresponding quarters in recent years. It was noted that swordfish CPUE from swordfish trips has recovered from the low of 1994.

Status of NMFS pelagic research

Dr Mike Laurs presented a summary of NMFS pelagic fishery research, noting the priority given to swordfish research. The following activities were described:

- archival tag development
- swordfish biology
- stock assessment studies
- habitat studies
- database development
- economic research
- protected species interaction research

Status of PFRP

Dr Sibert briefly outlined the status of the PFRP, noting that due to funding cuts for the third year running, no new projects would be initiated during FY 1998. Currently, there are 25 active projects and 10 completed projects.

48th Lake Arrowhead tuna conference

The 1997 tuna conference was noteworthy in that about one third of contributed papers originated from the western and central Pacific region. NMFS Honolulu Laboratory will organize the 1998 conference (under Chris Boggs' chairmanship) and will continue to lobby for a future conference to be held in Hawaii.

IATTC meetings

Paul Dalzell presented a brief summary of the recent IATTC meetings, noting the concern expressed regarding the recent increase in bigeye catch by purse seiners in the eastern Pacific (from <5,000 t to approximately 50,000 t in 1996). IATTC are organizing a working group to consider possible management options.

SCTB/WPYRG

Dr John Hampton presented a report on the recent SCTB/WPYRG meetings in Nadi, Fiji. He noted that, in the wake of multilateral management initiatives in the western and

central Pacific, SCTB had decided to focus its role on research and data collaboration issues generally, and to de-emphasize its role as a review body for SPC's Oceanic Fisheries Program. This would give the committee broader ownership, and better position it as an appropriate interim scientific advisory body to the multilateral management arrangement currently under negotiation. A statistics working group and several species research groups were formed in order to provide a more efficient means of pursuing the committee's objectives. Dr Hampton summarized the status of stocks for the major tuna species of the region, noting that only bigeye was currently the subject of concern regarding possible overfishing. The next meeting of SCTB will be held in Hawaii in mid-1998.

Management of Western and Central Pacific Ocean Pelagic Fisheries

Paul Dalzell gave an overview of the recent Multilateral High-Level Consultation on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (MHLC). **The SSC concurred with the generally held view that HMS should be managed throughout their range. If possible it would be desirable for all currently designated pelagic management unit species to be included in the species to be covered by any future management arrangement.** On the issue of whether the Council should encourage the inclusion of Hawaii in the area of competence of this arrangement, the SSC concurred with the AP/PT recommendation on this point (see agenda item 2F).

SSC concurred with the PAP/PT recommendation that the Council continue its active involvement in international management developments in all parts of the Pacific.

Status of bycatch/incidental take assessments

Albatross: Beth Flint reported that the albatross incidental catch by Hawaii-based longliners during the first two quarters of 1997 had already exceeded the entire catch for 1996. The SSC is concerned with the lack of information on the application and effectiveness of possible mitigation measures. It looks forward to such information becoming available with the implementation of the revised observer log form. The SSC, concerned over current levels of incidental catch, encouraged the Council's efforts regarding research into mitigation methods, and applauded the USFWS for its initiative in organizing a workshop on albatross population dynamics. **For the next SSC meeting, NMFS was requested to provide information on the efficacy of bird poles as a mitigation device as used on the R.V. Townsend Cromwell, and a report on observer data regarding mitigation measures.**

The SSC concurred with the Plan Team and Advisory Panel recommendation that the Southwest Region send copies to the USFWS office in Honolulu of the material forwarded to the USFWS bird banding laboratory in Maryland. In addition, the SSC encouraged the Council to follow up on bird mitigation strategies through personal contact with the fishing industry.

Turtles: Mike Laurs reported that loggerhead interactions with Hawaii-based longliners increased in the first half of 1997, possibly due to increased turtle numbers. However, the take of leatherbacks also increased, while this population remains in poor condition. Dr. Pierre Kleiber described the methodology used to estimate turtle takes in the Hawaii longline fishery. Estimates of takes have high variance because they are rare events and sample sizes are small. **The SSC recommended that the observer coverage of**

Hawaii-based longliners be increased to a minimum of 20% in order to provide an acceptable level of confidence in turtle take and mortality estimates. An increased observer coverage would also provide better information on the factors that promote turtle interactions, and thereby identify possible mitigation measures. The SSC supports continued satellite tracking of turtles to estimate post-hooking mortality, and suggested that the numbers of turtles tracked might be increased in proportion to any increase in observer coverage.

Gene Nitta presented an update on the current section 7b consultation on loggerheads. He noted that while the take limit has been exceeded, the loggerhead simulation model suggests that take by the Hawaii longline fishery represents a negligible impact on the loggerhead population. **The SSC suggested that future take limits be set using criteria which are based on the turtle populations. Dr Laurs noted that a presentation on the turtle simulation model (TURTSIM) would be given by Dr Jerry Wetherall at the next SSC meeting. The SSC looks forward to hearing this presentation.**

The SSC noted its earlier recommendations regarding satellite tracking of turtles and increased observer coverage.

Sharks: Mike Laurs reported that 1997 shark catches by Hawaii-based longliners showed similar characteristics to the catches in 1995 and 1996. The SSC reserved comment pending further information on the economic feasibility and potential utilization of longline caught sharks.

Marine mammal interactions: Paul Dalzell briefly appraised the SSC of the Pelagics Advisory Panel request for clarification from NMFS on how commercial troll and handline fishing activities that interact with marine mammals in Hawaiian waters are classified with respect to the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Mr Dalzell informed the SSC that NMFS Protected Species biologist, Mr Gene Nitta had recently addressed the joint Pelagics Plan team and Advisory Panel meeting in Honolulu on this issue. Mr Nitta noted that interactions between commercial trollers and handliners were classified as low level harassment and commercial fishermen were not at risk under the law.

Small pelagic fisheries: Paul Dalzell reported that HDAR data on akule/opelu have been provided to the Council. Dr Sibert has arranged for the data to be analysed by a graduate student in the UH Oceanography Department.

American Samoa longline fishery

The SSC concurred with the PAP/PT recommendation that the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources produce a proposal for management of longline fishing in American Samoa for Council consideration.

Other Business

Mr Joe Dettling, a Kona-based fisherman, requested that the reporting requirement for the offshore handline fishery, based predominantly on seamounts and offshore weather buoys, be changed. Mr Dettling asked that this fishery be required to use a federal logbook reporting system, similar to the Hawaii-based longline fishery, and not the State of Hawaii's (HDAR) catch reporting form. Mr Dettling asserted that this would assist in greatly improving the quality of the data from the offshore handline fishery, particularly as now offshore handline vessels are extending their range to Palmyra Atoll. The SSC noted this request.