



Dramatic Reduction in Seabird Interactions Leads to Revision of Proposed Regulations for the Hawaii Longline Fishery

HONOLULU (2 November 2005) After being closed for three years, the Hawaii longline fishery for swordfish reopened in late 2004 under a set of strict fishery management measures that have led to a more than 90 percent decrease in interactions with seabirds. According to recent reports by federal observers who are required to be on all fishing trips conducted by the Hawaii longline fishery for swordfish, the fleet incidentally hooked 67 albatrosses during the first half of 2005. By comparison, between 1994 and 1999, the Hawaii longline fleet incidentally captured approximately 3,000 Laysan and black-footed albatrosses annually. The dramatic reduction in seabird catch rate has been attributed to three seabird avoidance requirements introduced in 2005.

- Bait must be dyed blue
- Fish offal (e.g., heads and guts) must be discarded away from fishing lines to distance seabirds from baited hooks
- Setting of fishing lines must occur at night, i.e., process must begin at least one hour after sunset and end at least one hour before sunrise

Due to the effectiveness of these measures, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council voted yesterday that it is unnecessary to require Hawaii longline vessels to also use bird-scaring lines, as it had proposed in 2004.

The Council also voted yesterday to revise another proposed regulation that would provide Hawaii longline vessels fishing for swordfish anywhere in the ocean or for tuna north of 23 degrees North latitude an alternative to utilizing these bird avoidance techniques. The proposed alternative would have allowed these vessels to set their lines from the side of the boat if they used 60-gram weights on their fishing lines. However, a new study has demonstrated that a 40-gram weight can sink a baited hook out of the reach of seabirds virtually as fast as a 60-gram weight, the difference being only one-tenth of a second. Because a 60-gram weight poses a significant safety risk to fishermen, the Council voted to require a 45-gram weight when side-setting instead of the initially proposed 60-gram weight.

Setting from the side instead of the stern of the boat minimizes seabird interactions as the hull of the boat serves as an obstacle that keeps birds at bay. This new technique, which is being promoted internationally as a seabird avoidance technique, was discovered by a Hawaii longline fisherman. Currently, about 40 of the 132 longline vessels based in Hawaii are side-setting, and another 30 vessels are considering or in the process of converting to side-setting, noted Sean Martin, a Council member and longline vessel owner.

For more information, contact the Council at (808) 522-8220, fax (808) 522-8226, info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or www.wpcouncil.org. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is the policy-making agency for fisheries management in offshore waters surrounding the US Pacific Islands.