



Scientists Okay Changes to Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Fishing Zones, Fishing Outside Monument Boundaries

HONOLULU (6 October 2006) The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council convened Oct. 3-5, 2006, in Honolulu to make recommendations on management of fisheries in federal waters (generally 3 to 200 miles offshore) surrounding the U.S. Pacific Islands. The Council will consider the recommendations of the SSC and its other advisory groups when it convenes Oct. 16-19, 2006, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu. Among the recommendations made by the SSC are the following:

- The SSC recommended that the Council explore options to enable the retention of uku, kamanu and kahala caught incidentally in the commercial pelagic troll and handline fishery operating outside of the boundaries of the newly created Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) Marine National Monument. The SSC concluded that the incidental catch of uku (grey snapper) outside the monument probably has little impact on uku stocks within the monument, and uku is not one of the State of Hawaii bottomfish species of most concern.
- Recent analysis indicates that a potential short-term effort increase in the Mau Bottomfish Permit Zone of the NWHI (i.e., federal waters surrounding Necker and Nihoa Islands) is not a cause for concern in regard to bottomfish stocks. Therefore, the SSC had no objections to a Council plan to combine the Mau Zone with the Hoomalu Bottomfish Permit Zone (the federal waters surrounding the remaining of the NWHI). The SSC noted that this action would have little impact on stocks within the five-year period when commercial fishing will be allowed by the monument by this fishery. This action would address the closing of the majority of the traditional bottomfish grounds in the Hoomalu Zone by the monument designation of ecological reserves and special preservation areas where commercial fishing is banned.
- The SSC reaffirmed its recommendation to the Council that the Hawaii longline fishery for swordfish be closed immediately when it reaches its annual allowable interaction level with either loggerhead or leatherback sea turtle species. Under current regulations, fishing is allowed to continue for seven days after the limit is reached. The Council is expected to take final action on this issue at the Council meeting this month.

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- The SSC decided that no management action was required for shark catches by Hawaii-based longline vessels at this time. Retention of sharks by the fishery has been minimal since the federal ban on shark finning in 2000. However, the SSC supported gear research to mitigate capture of sharks by the longline fishery.
- As for management of shark viewing operations, the SSC requested an improved study of this activity and suggested that any regulatory action of this activity be considered in context of a community-based ocean use plan following, for example, developments in French Polynesia.
- The SSC recommended that deepwater shrimp be included as a managed species, either under the current crustaceans fishery management plan or under the Hawaii Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan. Fishing for these shrimps is a pulse activity where stocks are fished until catch rates decline below economic viable levels. These shrimps are thought to be an important forage species for demersal or bottomfish and even pelagic species such as striped marlin.
- The SSC recommended that the U.S. delegation to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) should pursue policies that would include the administration of any U.S. tuna quota for the Pacific under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, implement effective conservation measures such as limited entry programs for longline fisheries across the WCPFC convention area and support the development of pelagic fisheries in the U.S. Pacific territories (i.e., the American Samoa and Mariana Archipelagos). Further, the SSC also recommends that some form of monitoring be implemented by the WCPFC that would report the number of bigeye tuna caught by purse-seine vessels so as to identify those vessels that are catching large volumes of juvenile bigeye tuna and to improve understanding of the ecosystem impacts of juvenile bigeye of fishing mortality.
- The SSC noted an upward trend in mahimahi catches in the Hawaii longline fishery and asked for further information on mahimahi catch per unit effort in the longline fishery at its next meeting.
- Regarding a request to the Council for action from recreational trollers for a longline exclusion zone around fish aggregating devices around Tutuila, American Samoa, the SSC had no recommendation as the issue was one of allocation and not of conservation.

For more information regarding the SSC meeting or the upcoming Council meeting, please contact the Council at (808) 522-8220, info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or www.wpcouncil.org.

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