



Scientists Recommend Stronger Measures to End Overfishing of Bottomfish in the Main Hawaiian Islands

HONOLULU (22 February 2007) Recent analyses by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center of 2004 catch data indicate that landings of bottomfish harvested in the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) need to be reduced by 24 percent to end overfishing of the stock. That figure is up from a 15 percent reduction touted by NMFS in 2005, based on analysis of 2003 data. Today, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), which advises the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, concluded a three-day meeting in Honolulu with the suggestion that an even greater reduction may be needed to maintain stock health as the previous analyses do not consider landings by recreational fishermen.

Unlike commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen in Hawaii are not required to report their catches so data for them is lacking. However, that may soon change as the SSC is recommending that the Council, when it meets mid-March in Honolulu, consider a combination of measures that will place tighter restrictions on both commercial and recreational bottomfish fishermen:

- **Commercial total allowable catch (TAC):** Commercial harvests would be limited to 178,000 lbs of MHI deepwater bottomfish per year, which represents a 24 percent reduction of the fishery's 2004 fleet-wide MHI catches. The bottomfish year would begin September 1. The fishery would be closed once the TAC is reached. The seven deepwater species are ehu (or 'ula'ula), onaga (or 'ula'ula koa'e), 'opakapaka, hapu'upu'u, kalekale, gindai (or 'ukikiki) and lehi (or lehe).
- **Seasonal closure.** Both commercial and recreational fishermen would be prohibited from harvesting deepwater bottomfish from May 1 to August 31, the peak summer spawning period for bottomfish.
- **Recreational permit and reporting:** Recreational bottomfish fishermen would be required to obtain a federal permit and report their catches on federal logbooks.

These proposed federal regulations would be in addition to current State of Hawaii bottomfish regulations, which already include recreational bag limits and bottomfish restricted fishing areas. They would also replace the Council's recommendations made last year that would have closed bottomfish grounds in federal waters (beyond 3 miles) at Penguin and Middle Banks.

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In addition to the above measures, the SSC is recommending that the Council consider a more precautionary management reference point than maximum sustainable yield, which is the level of fishing that theoretically could be maintained without harming the health of the stocks.

The SSC also reiterated its long-held view that fishermen should report the locations of their harvests by longitude and latitude rather than by the State's current catch reporting grids. To encourage compliance, the SSC recommends that fishermen report the geo-references to at least a resolution of one minute, even though reporting to the second would be scientifically preferred.

These and other recommendations by the SSC will be considered by the Council when it meets March 13-16, 2007, in Honolulu. The public is invited to provide comments at the Council meeting as well as during the Fishers Forum to be held March 14 at the Ala Moana Hotel.

The Council is the policy-making organization for fisheries management in federal waters (generally 3-200 miles offshore) of the U.S. Pacific Islands. Recommendations approved by the Council are forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for approval. For more information, visit www.wpcouncil.org or contact the Council at (808) 522-8220 or at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov.

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