



Scientists Recommend Stronger Measures to Manage Fisheries in the Western Pacific Region

HONOLULU (15 June 2007) The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), which advises the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, concluded its three-day meeting in Honolulu yesterday with a variety of recommendations for commercial and non-commercial fisheries in federal waters (3 to 200 miles offshore) of the U.S. Pacific Islands. Several of the recommendations aim to improve fisheries data through increased regulations. As one SSC member phrased it, "If you catch them, you report them."

For the bottomfish fishery in the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI), which is currently closed for seven deepwater species (known as the Deep 7) due to overfishing, the SSC recommends that the Council undertake the following:

- Encourage the Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources (DLNR) to implement regulations in State waters (0 to 3 miles offshore) to complement federal regulations that would require any non-commercial fisherman who catches managed bottomfish species to be subject to federal permit and reporting requirements.
- Require all vessel owners, operators and other boat-based anglers fishing for managed bottomfish species to have permits and make one catch report per trip. Others on board may indicate their catches.
- Require all non-commercial trips taken by permit holders to be reported in the interest of gaining complete scientific information.

The SSC reviewed a reanalysis of the 2005 survey of MHI bottomfish fishermen, conducted by the Council and the State of Hawaii. According to the reanalysis by two University of Hawaii at Hilo graduate students, recreational catch of the Deep 7 species (i.e., opakapaka, onaga, hapuupuu, ehu, kalekale, gindai and lehi) equals up to 25 percent of the MHI commercial catch of these species.

The SSC also reviewed a model by John Brodziak that can calculate annual catch limits for the Hawaii bottomfish fishery based on various levels of risk of overfishing. The SSC asked Brodziak to run the model based on risk levels ranging from 0 to 50 percent.

The Council will consider these and other SSC recommendations on the management of the MHI bottomfish fishery on Wednesday, June 20, from 6:30 to 9 p.m., at the Ala Moana Hotel, Honolulu. The evening meeting will include a public hearing, and refreshments will be provided.

Regarding pelagic fisheries, the SSC expressed its disappointment that Amendment 14 of the Pelagics Fishery Management Plan proposed by the Council was not approved in its entirety by the Secretary of Commerce. The Secretary approved sections on reducing international overfishing of bigeye and yellowfin tuna, but disapproved sections regarding protocols for dealing with tuna recommendations

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made by regional fishery management organizations and measures for federal permitting of and reporting by commercial non-longline pelagic fishing vessels in Hawaii. One SSC member questioned how the United States expects accountability from countries like Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, when it can't even get its own act together. The SSC also noted that the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires implementation of annual catch limits by 2010-2011 and fulfilling this deadline will require adequate reporting of catch well in advance of that date.

Among SSC recommendations on pelagic fisheries were the following:

- That a trial longline operation be pursued in Guam under the auspices of the Community Development Program (CDP) as a training opportunity and to assess the commercial feasibility of the fishery. This CDP would operate outside a closed area of 25 miles around the island of Guam, with an additional southern extension to provide a 5-mile closed area around all southern offshore banks; implement turtle mitigation measures; be carefully monitored to document any conflicts with troll and charter boat sectors; and be subject to a sunset clause.
- That a longline exclusion zone be implemented around the islands and banks of the Northern Mariana Islands to avoid gear conflicts between longline vessels and the local artisanal fishing community.
- That the "use or lose" provision for Class A permits in the American Samoa longline limited entry program be rescinded, because the alia longline fleet is experiencing economic difficulty due to low albacore tuna catch rates.

Regarding other fisheries, the SSC heard a report from Dr. Karl Brookings on catch and effort data for shoreline and reef fishing in American Samoa. The report indicated that these fisheries are clearly sustainable, and marine protected areas for fisheries management purposes are not needed as the fisheries are replenishing themselves.

All of the SSC recommendations plus those from other advisory bodies will be considered by the Council when it convenes June 19-22, 2007, at the Ala Moana Hotel. For a draft agenda of the meeting and information on these and other fishery issues, visit www.wpcouncil.org or contact the Council at (808) 522-8220 or at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov.

Members of the SSC include Dr. Stewart Allen (NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center), Dr. Judith Amesbury (Micronesian Archeological Research Services), Dr. Brian Bowen (Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology), Dr. Karl Brookins (American Samoa Marine & Wildlife Resources Department), Dr. Paul Callaghan (University of Guam), Dr. Frank A. Camacho (Guam Community College), Dr. Milani Chaloupka (University of Queensland), Dr. Charles Daxboeck (BioDax Consulting Tahiti), Dr. Richard Deriso (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission), Dr. John Hampton (Secretariat of the Pacific Community), Dr. Pierre Kleiber (NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center), Dr. James Parrish (Hawaii Cooperative Fishery Research Unit), Dr. Dan Polhemus (Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources), Dr. Craig Severance (University of Hawaii at Hilo), Dr. John Sibert (Pelagic Fisheries Research Program), Dr. Robert Skillman (NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center retired) and Mr. Michael Trianni (Northern Mariana Islands Division of Fish & Wildlife).

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