



Scientists Reiterate Recommendation to Open Hawai`i Bottomfish Fishing Areas, Suggest Revisions to Coral Reef Fisheries Annual Quotas

HONOLULU (15 March 2014) A group of 20 prominent scientists from throughout the Pacific concluded its three-day meeting Thursday in Honolulu with recommendations for the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council on federally managed fisheries in Hawai`i, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the US Pacific remote island areas. The Council will consider the recommendations of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and its other advisory bodies when it convenes March 17 and 18 at the Fiesta Resort, Garapan, CNMI, and March 20 and 21 at the Hilton Hotel, Tumon, Guam. Recommendations by the Council are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval. For the full SSC and Council meeting agendas and other background documents, go to meetings section of the Council's website at www.wpcouncil.org.

Hawai`i Bottomfish Restricted Fishing Areas

SSC member Alton Miyasaka from the Hawai`i Division of Aquatic Resources presented the State of Hawai`i's proposed plan to revise the State's bottomfish restricted fishing areas (BRFAs). The state BRFAs are located in both State and federal waters and were created in the 1990s when local depletion of some bottomfish species in the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) was a concern. Currently, the bottomfish stocks are considered healthy, with no overfishing occurring and no stocks overfished.

The State's proposed plan would open six BRFAs and keep six BRFAs closed. It would also increase the recreational daily bag limit for the seven deepwater bottomfish species from a total of five to a total of 10. A voluntary non-commercial reporting option may be included. Monitoring of the BRFAs would continue based on available funding.

The SSC also reviewed the recommendations of the MHI Bottomfish Working Group. It was suggested that the Council could open the portions of the BRFAs located within federal waters. Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds noted that this option was under review and that a number of the National Standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) justify the elimination of MHI BRFAs in federal waters.

A fisherman provided public comment noting that the Makapu`u BRFA creates economic burdens and safety concerns because fishermen have to travel further to alternate fishing grounds. He said keeping the BRFA closed due to the existence of a precious coral bed in the area is not justified because fishermen do not fish in the area of the Makapu`u BRFA that includes the bed.

The SSC noted that the Makapu`u and Penguin Bank BRFAs, which the State proposes to keep closed, are the most important fishing areas for fishermen from three islands. Their closures have created the greatest economic hardship of all the existing BRFAs for fishermen, as well social interaction issues through the crowding of effort into the remaining open areas. **The SSC concluded its discussion on this issue by reiterating the recommendation it had made in October 2013 that all BRFAs be eliminated in federal waters and the State be encouraged to remove all BRFAs in State waters as well.** The SSC said the utility of the BRFAs to manage the bottomfish fishery has been superseded by mandatory annual catch limits (ACLs) that have been established based on the best scientific information available. Miysaka opposed the recommendation.

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Coral Reef Fisheries Annual Quotas

The 2006 reauthorized MSA requires that all federally managed fisheries have ACLs. Exceptions include fisheries that are managed internationally, fisheries for species with life cycles of less than one year, and non-targeted species that are components of the ecosystem. The MSA also requires that the SSC determine the acceptable biological catch (ABC) and that the ACL recommended by the Council not exceed the ABC. Due to the data-poor situation of most coral reef fisheries in the Western Pacific Region and the MSA deadline for setting ACLs, the initial ABCs and ACLs for the federally managed fisheries in the region were based on the average of historic catch. The result was catch limits that are severely underestimated for most of the fisheries.

The SSC recommended the use of a model that determines maximum sustainable yield (MSY) based on historic catch augmented by biomass estimates from fishery surveys. The SSC reviewed the outcomes of a working group established to determine overfishing limits for coral reef fisheries in the region.

The SSC concurred with the working group and recommended the adoption of the Biomass Augmented Catch-MSY (BAC-MSY) model for coral reef fisheries because it provides a reasonable approach to estimating MSY-based reference points for these otherwise data poor stocks. The SSC noted that the BAC-MSY method makes more use of the available data than the current approach and that a similar model has been used to determine the quota for Hawai'i's deep-water bottomfish in the MHI. **The SSC also recommended using the 50 percent risk of exceeding MSY as a reasonable proxy for the overfishing limit; making multiyear rather than annual determinations of ABCs for coral reef fisheries so as to reduce the administrative and scientific burden of more frequent re-analyses; and, when comparing catch to ACL, basing catch upon an average of the three most recent years of catch data for a stock.** The latter factor would allow enough time to effectively address short-term trends in productivity and fishery dynamics while balancing random fluctuations in catch rates. (See page 3 of this press release for the SSC's recommended ABCs for 2015-2018.)

Scientific and Statistical Committee: Dr. Charles Daxboeck, chair, (BioDax Consulting Tahiti); Dr. Judith Amesbury (Micronesian Archeological Research Services); Dr. Paul Callaghan (University of Guam retired); Dr. Frank A. Camacho (University of Guam); Dr. Milani Chaloupka (University of Queensland); Dr. Richard Deriso (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission); Dr. Erik Franklin (Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology); Dr. John Hampton (Secretariat of the Pacific Community); David Itano (NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office); Dr. Pierre Kleiber (NMFS PIFSC, retired); Dr. Donald Kobayashi (NMFS PIFSC); Dr. Molly Lutcavage (University of New Hampshire); James Lynch (K & L Gates), Dr. Todd Miller (CNMI Division of Fish & Wildlife); Alton Miyasaka (Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources); Dr. Domingo Ochavillo (American Samoa DMWR); Dr. Minling Pan (NMFS PIFSC); Dr. Craig Severance (University of Hawaii retired); Dr. John Sibert (Pelagic Fisheries Research Program retired); and Dr. Robert Skillman (NMFS PIFSC retired).

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Appointees by the Secretary of Commerce from nominees selected by American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawaii governors: Michael Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (Vice Chair) ; Edwin Ebisui (Hawaii) (Vice Chair); Richard Seman, education and outreach specialist (CNMI); ; William Sword, recreational fisherman (American Samoa) (Vice Chair); Michael Goto, United Fishing Agency Ltd. (Hawaii); Julie Leialoha, biologist (Hawaii); Dr. Claire Tuia Poumele, Port Administration (American Samoa); and McGrew Rice, commercial and charter fisherman (Hawaii). Designated state officials: Arnold Palacios, CNMI Department of Land & Natural Resources (chair); William Aila, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; Dr. Ruth Matagi-Tofiga, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources; and Mariquita Taitague, Guam Department of Agriculture. Designated federal officials: Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Bill Gibbons-Fly, US Department of State; RAdm Cari B. Thomas, US Coast Guard 14th District; and Susan White, Pacific Reefs National Wildlife Refuges Complex.

Annual Biological Catch Recommendations for 2015-2018

Family Group	American Samoa ABC (lbs)	Guam ABC (lbs)	CNMI ABC (lbs)	Hawai'i ABC (lbs)
<i>Selar crumenophthalmus</i> – atule, atulai, akule or bigeye scad	38,400	52,300	89,400	1,025,000
Acanthuridae – surgeonfish	133,800	101,700	324,600	367,900
Carangidae – jacks ¹	20,800	29,900	47,400	168,100
Carcharhinidae – reef sharks ²	To come	To come	To come	To come
Crustaceans – crabs	4,700	7,600	5,300	35,400
Holocentridae – squirrelfish	15,500	12,000	69,300	150,000
Kyphosidae – chubs/rudderfish	2,200	9,800	24,600	108,600
Labridae – wrasses ³	16,600	25,800	59,900	211,000
Lethrinidae – emperors	20,400	58,000	58,200	36,600
Lutjanidae – snappers ⁴	64,400	18,600	202,700	338,200
Mullidae – goatfish	12,000	15,600	29,200	173,100
Mugilidae – mullets	5,200	19,400	5,300	20,100
Mollusks – turbo snail; octopus; giant clams	20,200	25,000	11,600	38,200
Scaridae – parrotfish ⁵	280,100	75,000	157,300	251,700
Serranidae – groupers	27,300	23,700	92,800	132,200
Siganidae – rabbitfish ⁶	181	19,500	10,400	n/a
All other coral reef ecosystem (CRE) management unit species combined, i.e., other CRE finfish, other invertebrates and miscellaneous bottomfish, reef fish and shallow bottomfish	20,300	191,300	8,500	496,500
<i>Cheilinus undulatus</i> - humphead (Napoleon) wrasse ⁶	1,743	1,960	2,009	n/a
<i>Bolbometopon muricatum</i> – bumphead parrotfish ⁶	235	797	797	n/a
Algae	Not monitored	7,100	Not monitored	Not monitored
<i>Decapterus macarellus</i> – opelu or mackerel scad	Not monitored	Not monitored	Not monitored	459,800

¹ Carangidae in Hawai'i includes kahala (*Seriola dumeril*) since this species is not included in NMFS bottomfish stock assessments and is a reef associated species.

² The Scientific and Statistical Committee will address reef sharks at its next meeting as the analysis is not yet complete.

³ Family Labridae does not include *Cheilinus undulatus* (humphead or Napoleon wrasse).

⁴ Lutjanidae in Hawai'i includes ta'ape (*Lutjanus kasmira*) since this species is not included in NMFS bottomfish stock assessments and is a reef associated species

⁵ Family Scaridae does not include *Bolbometopon muricatum* (bumphead parrotfish).

⁶ Siganidae – rabbitfish, *C. undulatus* and *B. muricatum* do not occur in Hawai'i.