Analysis of Hawaii MUS catch for possible ecosystem component classification

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The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires each regional fishery management council to a develop fishery management plan for each fishery under its jurisdiction (i.e., federal waters) that requires conservation and management. The Magnuson-Stevens Act also requires the councils to establish annual catch limits (ACL) for each fishery and accountability measures (AM) to ensure adherence to the ACL. The NMFS guidelines for National Standard 1 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act do not require ACLs and AMs for fishery resources that meet the ecosystem component (EC) classification criteria.

Currently, the Council's fishery ecosystem plans (FEP) include literally thousands of species, many of which are harvested predominantly in state or territorial waters. The Council and NMFS annual specify ACLs and AMs that cover all of these species despite the lack of a federal fishery. Since many of these species are not harvested in federal waters, they may not be in need of federal conservation and management, and could potentially meet the EC criteria, or removed from the FEPs.

At its 151st in June 2011, the Council directed its staff to assess the federal management unit species (MUS) of the FEPs and evaluate their catch history for possible EC reclassification or removal from the plans. The Council made similar recommendations again at its 154th meeting in June 2012, and its 157th meeting in June 2103.

In January 2016, PIRO hired a contractor (HT Harvey and Associates) to analyzed Hawaii commercial catch data for each individual bottomfish, crustacean, precious coral and coral reef ecosystem MUS to determine the proportion of catch in state and federal waters. The contractor is also reviewing NMFS advisory guidelines for National Standards 1, 3, and 7, which provides several factors for councils to consider when determining stocks to include as federal MUS.

This project would help PIRO and the Council potentially reduce the number of federal MUS by identifying those stocks that are in true need of conservation and management in federal waters from those that may qualify for reclassification as EC species or removal from the FEPs. The contractor will provide a status update on the project to the SSC and Council at their respective meetings.