



Scientists Recommend Management Options for South Pacific Albacore, False Killer Whales, Hawai`i Bottomfish

HONOLULU (3 March 2013) The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) that advises the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council concluded its three-day meeting Thursday in Honolulu. The Council, which recommends management measures for federally managed fisheries in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the remote US Pacific Island areas, will consider the SSC and other advisory body recommendations March 12-14, 2013, at the Governor H. Rex Lee Auditorium (Fale Laumei), Pago Pago, American Samoa. Recommendations by the Council are transmitted the US Secretary of Commerce for final approval. The key recommendations made by the SSC include the following:

American Samoa South Pacific Albacore: The American Samoa longline fishery for South Pacific albacore is the second largest fishery in the US Pacific Islands. This highly migratory fish species is fished across the South Pacific on the high seas and in exclusive economic zones (EEZs). The American Samoa longline fishery lands 3,500 to 5,000 metric tons of this tuna, i.e., about 5 percent of the total South Pacific albacore catches. There is concern about potential risk of overfishing in this fishery. The current catch is at about 95 percent of maximum sustainable yield, and the catch per unit effort (CPUE) is in a long-term decline. There is also concern about maintaining the economic viability of domestic albacore fisheries in American Samoa and neighboring countries. A cost-earnings study indicates that the value of the American Samoa fishery was \$10M in 2010, slightly higher in relative value to a similar study undertaken in 2001. However, the return to captain and owners appears to have declined by 94 percent. Reasons for the apparent changes include decreases in the CPUE and decreases in the estimated landed price. The SSC recommended that the Council encourage American Samoa to cooperate with and possibly join the Te Vaka Moana (South Pacific Fisheries Cooperation) and to work with the international Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) to better manage the South Pacific albacore fishery.

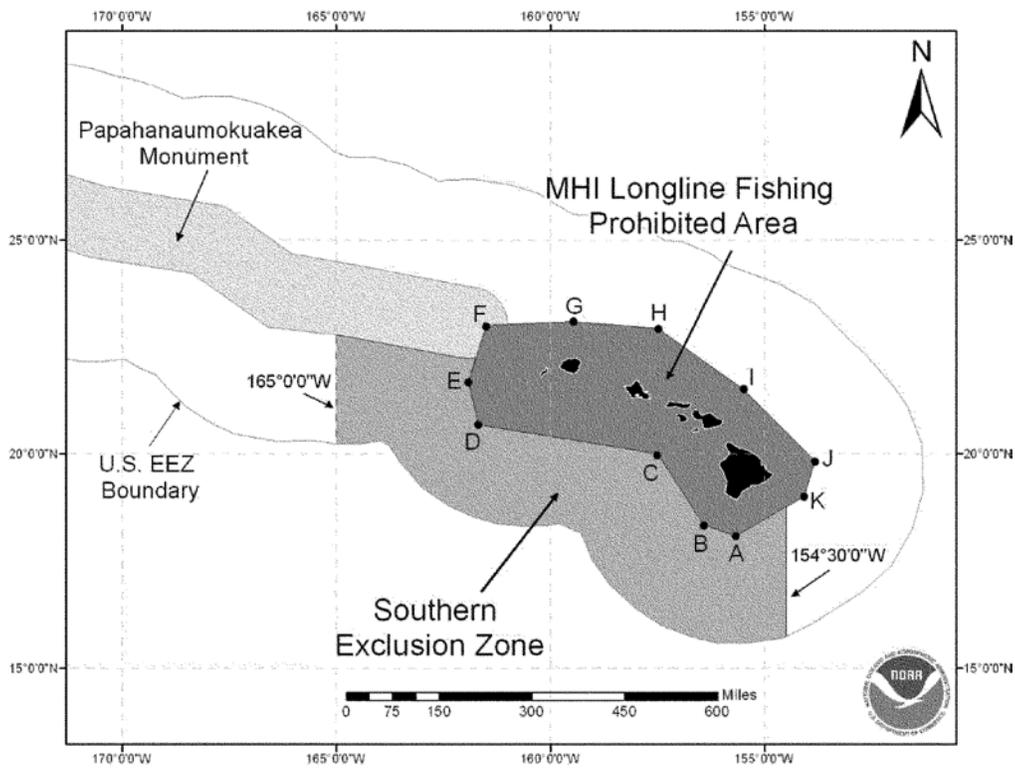
False Killer Whale Assessments: Under current guidelines and approaches for calculating allowable interactions between the Hawai`i longline fishery and false killer whales (FKWs), the Hawai`i deep-set longline fishery for tuna can interact with only two FKWs before it is restricted from fishing in an area known as the southern exclusion zone, which encompasses 112,575 square nautical miles (see fig. 1). This is in addition to the year-round longline exclusion zone from 0 to 50 or 0 to 75 nautical miles around the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI), depending on the location. The longline fishery has had one interaction with FKW this year. The SSC recommended that NMFS undertake numerous future actions regarding the allowable interaction calculations as well as the clarity and transparency of the process. They include a more comprehensive photo identification capture-mark-recapture analysis of the populations, a comprehensive spatial genetic structure analysis, an improved sampling approach, expanded membership of the serious injury working group, an improved observer training program to minimize the number of cases that are classified as “cannot be determined” and implementation of the 2007 Serious Injury Technical Workshop recommendations, as well as several recommendations regarding “blackfish” interactions (i.e., not clearly identified as FKWs).

Listing of MHI Insular False Killer Whales as Endangered: NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) discussed the justifications behind the final action listing the MHI Insular FKWs as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). A new stock of FKW associated with the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) has been recognized, which reduced the estimate of the MHI insular FKW

—more—

population from about 170 to 151. Factors used to determine the discreteness of the MHI insular stock are genetic evidence, discrete “culture” (e.g., learned feeding behavior) and discrete behavior (no interbreeding with the pelagic stock). The SSC questioned the assumption that pelagic FKW would not colonize vacant territory should the insular stock be extirpated. It was noted that aggressive territoriality may be the reason the pelagic stock does not venture closer to the islands and interbreed with the insular stock. It was also pointed out that the ecological factors supporting discreteness are heavily influenced by genetic considerations, which the SSC asserted is grounds for a comprehensive review of the genetic evidence.

Figure 1. Main Hawaiian Islands Longline Fishing Prohibited Area and Southern Exclusion Zone. Inflection points are lettered as per the final regulations.



Observer Coverage in the Shallow-Set Swordfish Fishery: The SSC reviewed a NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) report on sea turtle interactions, with the goal of identifying optimal level of observer coverage below the current 100 percent coverage for the Hawai`i shallow-set longline fishery for swordfish. The report indicated that error did not change substantially with observer coverage at about 20 percent while below this level the error rate increases rapidly. The SSC recommends that PIFSC examine the level of observer coverage required to provide an early warning trigger (relative to management under a hard cap scenario) and develop this into a simple risk assessment tool to advise management.

—more—

American Samoa and Hawai`i Longline Fisheries: PIFSC presented third quarter 2012 reports for the American Samoa and Hawai`i longline fisheries. The primary species caught in American Samoa was albacore tuna (61 percent by number). The Hawai`i report indicated that the opah catch rate variability needs more attention. The SSC recommended that the Council request that PIFSC develop a short research project centered on fishermen's knowledge of opah.

Methods for Specifying Annual Biological Catch: Under the 2006 revised Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, federally managed fisheries are to be managed under annual catch limits (ACLs). The ACLs cannot exceed the annual biological catch (ABC) as determined by the Council's SSC. The SSC reviewed four models for estimating ABC for data poor stocks, which includes most reef fish stocks in the US Pacific Islands and agreed on a modified version of one of these models. It noted the importance of moving quickly to input and analyze the data in order to have ABC recommendations by June. It recommended that the modified model be developed and implemented and the results presented to the SSC at its next meeting in June. It further recommended the formation of a working group to decide upon the appropriate risk of overfishing to be used to determine the ABC. Improving the science is important as catch limits affect the livelihoods of fishermen.

Hawai`i Bottomfish: The SSC discussed the relevance of the State of Hawai`i's Bottomfish Restricted Fishing Areas (BRFAs) given that the federal component of the fishery in the MHI is now managed under bottomfish ACLs and that the NWHI may not function as a source of larval recruits for the MHI. The SSC recommended that the Council continue to engage in discussion with the Hawai`i Department of Land and Natural Resources regarding the utility of BRFAs in federal waters. The Council has previously questioned the utility of the BRFAs and has noted that the State-regulated BRFAs are not enforceable in federal waters as there are no federal regulations for them. The SSC also recommended that the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology continue genetic studies on the connectivity of the bottomfish populations among the NWHI, MHI, offshore banks and Johnston Atoll and that a research project or survey be developed to estimate the ratios of noncommercial catch and effort to commercial catch and effort in the bottomfish fishery for the most popular seven deepwater species. A comment from the public noted the need for researchers to consider the insights of fishermen on research and the impact of fishery regulations on their livelihood and culture.

Proposed Rule to List 66 Species of Coral as Endangered or Threatened: NMFS PIRO reported that 66 coral species of an initial 82 are proposed for listing under ESA and demonstrated a "determination tool" used to indicate listing or not, depending on a number of key items of information. The SSC determined that the tool is flawed for several reasons and recommended the Council suggest that NMFS consider an alternative determination tool.

For a complete agenda of the SSC and Council meetings, go to www.wpcouncil.org/meetings or email info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov; phone (808) 522-8220, or fax (808) 522-8226.

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); Todd Miller (CNMI Division of Fish & Wildlife); Dr. Domingo Ochivallo (American Samoa DMWR); Jim Lynch (K&L Gates); 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).