

Program Planning and Research Standing Committee Meeting

October 20, 2015 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Sadies by the Sea Conference Room Fagatogo, American Samoa

DRAFT REPORT

1. ACL Specification for Territorial Bottomfish (ACTION ITEM)

a. P* working group report

Council staff presented on the hoghlights and results of the P* Working Group meeting held on September 23 & 24, 2015. The working group evaluated the scientific uncertainties around the 2015 Territorial Bottomfish Management Unit Species Stock Assessment updates for American Samoa, Guam and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The assessment was evaluated based on four dimensions: 1) Assessment information; 2) Uncertainty characterization; 3) Stock status; and 4) Productivitysusceptibility. The second and third dimension reduction scores were maintained because the assessment was a simple update and the stock status did not change. The assessment information dimension had a slight increase in the reduction scores due to better understanding of the quality of the data used in the assessment. The fourth dimension also increased in the reduction score due to adoption of a standard productivity and susceptibility criteria. The fishing community was involved in the scoring process particularly the susceptibility attributes.

The working group's evaluation resulted in the following reduction scores and the recommended risk of overfishing level to which the Territorial bottomfish fisheries will be managed:

P* DIMENSIONS	Am. Samoa	Guam	CNMI
Dimension 1: Assessment information	4	3.6	3.6
Dimension 2: Uncertainty characterization	5	5	5
Dimension 3: Stock status	0	0	0
Dimension 4: Productivity-Susceptibility	4.1	5.6	5.3
Total risk reduction score	13.1	14.2	13.9
Risk of overfishing level (P*)	37	36	36

b. SEEM working group report

Council staff presented on the Social, Economic, Ecological and Management Uncertainty (SEEM) working group. The working group met at the end of September. The social features of the fisheries indicated that fishing is very important to the local culture in all island areas. Bottomfish prices are highest among local fisheries, and in CNMI are more important than other species to the culture. Therefore, from an economic perspective, there was no basis to reduce the ACL. There was not enough information regarding forage species or other ecosystem factors to recommend reducing the ACL based on ecological factors. The working group was most concerned about management uncertainty in the fishery. There has been increased funding available in recent years to increase bottomfish participation and the effect of this is unknown. Additionally, there is limited local enforcement capacity and no real-time catch reporting. The working group recommended a 5% reduction in American Samoa; a 6% reduction in CNMI; and a 5% reduction in Guam of the ACL. The Council may accept, reject, or modify these recommendations.

Relevant discussions:

Gourley asked about the management uncertainty. Hawkins clarified that there is no real-time catch reporting, and the fisheries contrast from the Main Hawaiian Islands bottomfish fishery in that there is no local comanagement.

c. Options for Territorial Bottomfish ACL for fishing year 2016-2017

Council staff presented on the annual catch limit specification. He explained the process for setting the annual catch limits (ACLs) generally, and then the timeline for this particular specification. Following the delivery of the stock assessment to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in June, a Tier 2 WPSAR panel was convened. A special session of the SSC followed, and then the P* and SEEM working groups met. The stock assessments indicated that none of the stocks were overfished or experiencing overfishing. He presented three alternatives:

- Alternative 1 (Status quo) do not use the current stock assessment and set the ACL equal to the recommended levels from the 2012 assessment;
- Alternative 2 use the current stock assessment and set ACL equal to SSC recommended acceptable biological catch (ABC);
- Alternative 3 use the current stock assessment and reduce the ACL from the ABC by the SEEM working group recommended amount

The SEEM reduction may also be used to set the annual catch target, as opposed to the annual catch limit. There are relatively minor impacts associated with this action; applying the SEEM reduction will result in lower revenues for all jurisdictions than if the SEEM reduction is not applied.

Relevant discussions:

John Gourley asked the data source on the number of vessels. Sabater clarified that the data source was not the federal logbook, but was from WPacFIN through creel surveys. Gourley commented that the CNMI number of vessels (10) was likely too low, and Mike Duenas commented that the Guam number was too high (254). There was doubt that

there are even 254 boats on Guam, and Sabater reported that he confirmed with WPacFIN that the 254 vessels were uniquely identified.

Daxboeck prompted Sabater to explain why the ACL is higher than MSY. Sabater said there is a huge unexploited biomass compared to what the fishery has caught in the past. The uncertainty around the estimates is large within the third year. Technically, there is a virgin stock biomass and they are allowed to exceed MSY over a short term because it will normalize over the long term. MSY is the long term average while the catch limit is specified in the short term.

Rice asked what the impact is for a potentially incorrect number of vessels. Sabater replied that the number of vessels only affects individual revenue. Duenas was fairly certain that the number of Guam vessels is incorrect, but the correct number is unknown. Members were surprised that the creel survey only captured information from ten boats. Gourley pointed out that calculating the individual revenue based on number of vessels is potentially biased anyway, in that the level of individual vessel effort is not accounted for.

Gourley asked Mike Tosatto about the potential federal logbook problems. Is NMFS considering revamping it? Tosatto replied that the amendment to revamp federal logbooks was disapproved. If your territory is one of those places, we rely on territory data. If there is a federal logbook, the Center and the jurisdiction work out how those data are collected. The data group is looking revamping all data collection systems. Gourley asked if the local government were to collect the same required information of a federal program, would the federal government back off. Tosatto responded that they would, unless regulations are already in place because they are very difficult to remove.

Sabater highlighted that the recent catch compared to fishery performance numbers indicates that American Samoa and CNMI are not even close to the minimum stock size or maximum fishing mortality thresholds. Current landings in Guam are within a sufficient buffer to preserve stock status.

2. Fishery Ecosystem Plan Modifications

Council staff reported on Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) modifications as a result of the fiveyear review process. The main themes that emerged from the review included that the management objectives are not specific or measurable enough; there is too much information in the FEPs; and ecosystem-based fisheries management components could be included. The revised FEPs include a new policy statement, goals, and objectives. Sub-objectives vary by FEP. Staff presented the revised objectives and provided examples of the minor changes in the FEPs. The remaining steps include working out living FEP issues, performing the consistency review, and ensuring that no regulatory language is affected by the FEP revision.

Relevant discussions:

Gourley asked if we were able to bring PIRO in before the draft. Hawkins replied that PIRO has been engaged in the process since the beginning. Tosatto commented that they have seen the pieces of the revision and the process is evolving.

Dax asked if there is a requirement of the MSA to add "in a sustainable manner" to the management policy. He suggested this addition, since it captures the spirit of the Act.

3. Integrated Stock Assessment Model for data poor stocks

Council staff presented on Steven Martell's integrated stock assessment framework for data poor stocks. The model is the next step from the biomass-augmented catch model that was used to specify ACLs through 2018 for data poor coral reef stocks. Martell refined that idea into a model that accepts catch, biomass, length frequency, and potentially tagging information as inputs. The method creates an initial guess of r and k pairs that are then tested to reject those from the sample that result in the population going extinct. Further inputs, such as depletion, further narrow the universe of r and k pairs to reasonable values. The new model yields an informed estimate of what that MSY might be and has the potential to move Tier 5 stocks to Tier 3 stocks.

4. Territory Science Initiative Project

Council staff reported on the project. The numbers of vendors reporting has vastly increased in American Samoa since the beginning of the project. There were no questions or comments.

5. Other issues

Gourley commented that the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center will be conducting a 3-4 day otolith workshop for CNMI DFW and Micronesian Environmental Services. Kimberley Lowe and Bob Humphreys will be sponsoring a biosampling workshop at the end of January for the Territories and Commonwealth that evaluates the success or failure of biosampling program to date.

6. Public comment

There was no public comment.

7. Committee Discussion and Recommendations

Regarding Annual Catch Limits (ACLs), the Program Planning and Research Standing Committee:

1. Recommends the Council, sets the ACLs equal to the Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs) for the Bottomfish Management Unit Species in American Samoa, Guam, and Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands for fishing year 2016 and 2017. The corresponding ACLs and probabilities of overfishing are as follows:

Jurisdiction	ABC	ACL	P*2016	P*2017
American Samoa	106,000 lb	106,000 lb	22.9%	37%
Guam	66,000 lb	66,000 lb	25%	36%
CNMI	228,000 lb	228,000 lb	24.2%	36%

The Committee considered the reductions recommended by the SEEM Working Group for the 2016 and 2017 fishing years, but determined that the difference between recent harvest levels and ACLs in all three island areas were sufficient to ensure the ACLs will not be exceeded. However, if bottomfish catch in a particular jurisdiction nears any ACL, the Committee recommends the Council to consider implementing the relevant SEEM Working Group recommendation in the future.

2. That in the event the catch exceeded the ACLs, the Council apply a downward overage adjustment in the following fishing year as the accountability measure. The Committee further recommends that the overage adjustment shall be determined using a three-year average of recent catch.

Regarding the Fishery Ecosystem Plan modification, the Program Planning and Research Standing Committee:

3. Recommends the Council approve the proposed changes to the Council's five FEPs and work with NMFS to finalize the document.