



**GUEST COLUMN** *Dean Sensui, executive producer, 'Hawaii Goes Fishing'*

## Papahanamokuakea And Our Fishermen

There is a wealth of substantiated facts that fishery managers rely upon when it comes to the management of a pelagic stock as big as the Pacific's bigeye tuna fishery. Sadly, most people are unaware of them.

National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS) goes through great lengths to gather, analyze and produce careful scientific studies that are subject to harsh peer reviews. What comes out on the other end is information that is as accurate as possible, and that's what Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WesPac) uses to make its

fishery management recommendations to NMFS.

The people who are supporting the expansion of the Papahanamokuakea Marine National Monument have chosen to ignore all of this carefully acquired data. Instead, they are promoting a position based on a document produced by academics, who haven't provided any of this carefully vetted data. WesPac and NMFS thoroughly examined and fact-checked that publication, *Pu'uhona — A Place of Sanctuary*, and every assertion was found to have no firm scientific basis.

It should be noted that WesPac is one of eight re-

gional fishery management councils across the U.S., and all are mandated by Congress under the Magnuson Stevens Act to ensure sustainable fisheries, protect marine habitats and protect the environment as a whole. Contrary to some claims, WesPac's primary duty is not about promoting fishing. But in the necessary pushback against those who don't like the idea of fish being eaten, it certainly seems that way.

It's sad to see fishermen regarded as villains by modern society. Despite the long lines at popular poke shops, and how the prices of prized ahi and onaga skyrocket ev-

ery new year, fishermen are accused of being greedy and "taking it all" out of the sea. But it's a good bet that if anyone ever had the chance to meet these fishermen, they would never think that way. It's a hard and dangerous way to make a living. One of the longline fishermen provided an open invitation to anyone who wants to come along for a ride to see what it's like. Just be sure to tell your boss and your family that you'll be back in about 20 days or so. And be sure to bring a full bottle of Dramamine.

I've written this elsewhere and it's worth repeating here: Hawaii's longline fleet har-

vests less than 2 percent of all the bigeye tuna caught in the Pacific. Reducing or even completely eliminating the fish that longliners bring to our docks isn't going to do anything at all to help increase the tuna stocks. To make any measurable difference, one would have to urge Japan, China and the other nations fishing around us to significantly reduce their quotas, because they're taking more than 98 percent of the bigeye tuna. Our fleet barely makes a dent in the total take. Everyone in fisheries management, and anyone who understands basic math, agrees that Hawaii's quota is insignificant.

Reducing what fishermen bring to our markets would deprive hundreds of thousands of Hawaii residents the fish they rely upon every single day.

That's you and me. Thousands of pounds of this nation's best fresh fish would be missing from market shelves and the price would go up with the demand. Construction workers picking up a poke bowl for lunch would have to settle for canned tuna instead. Is that OK?

Based on long-term studies by NOAA regarding protected species in the area, if the PMNM is expanded, a perfectly sustainable fishery would

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## Hawaii's U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone

be hobbled for nothing. You will pay the price for that decision every time you buy fresh fish from Tamashiro Market. And this would happen just because a few people want to take credit for helping to create the world's largest marine monument. This is regardless of what good, peer-reviewed science has indisputably shown will provide no real additional protection for the habitat or the ecosystem.

When it comes to line-caught fish, it's extremely difficult to wipe out a stock with a hook and line. If catching fish with a hook and line were that effective, then I'd challenge anyone to deplete the ponds at Ala Moana Park of all its tilapia using as many hooks as they want. Take a whole year

to try to do it. I'd be willing to bet good money that it's not going to happen.

Of the 3,000 hooks deployed on a typical set, a longliner will catch about a dozen bigeye tuna in 18 hours. It takes six hours to deploy and 12 hours to retrieve, while carefully processing and burying each fish in crushed ice below deck. Then that cycle is repeated every single day for the next two or three weeks on a boat that's constantly rolling in rough seas. Anyone who thinks that job is lucrative should sign up as a crewman tomorrow.

So why not raise fish in farms? Because there are economic and environmental costs to keeping them in oceanic pens. The fish have to

be fed 2 to 3 pounds of feed for each pound of fish. And guess what they'd have to be fed: mostly fish products that someone else has to catch. And even if you did manage to breed and raise bigeye tuna, the quality of the fillets depends upon what they're eating and the temperature of the water. The best bigeye comes from northern latitudes. Want to raise premium bigeye in cages? The pens would have to be about 500-1,000 miles north of Hawaii, and probably several hundred feet down. If it were easy, everyone would be doing this by now.

On the other hand, wild-caught fish feed themselves. We don't have to produce a resource to create a resource. The ancient Hawaiians knew

this, and the fishponds they had were almost self-sustaining. Sunlight and freshwater seeps created a habitat for certain types of algae, which the mullet fed upon. Very little input had to be added to produce thousands of pounds of mullet each year.

Hawaii is an ocean state, the most oceanic in the Union. Its top primary produce is wild-caught fish. By analogy, we wouldn't close down the majority of wheat production in Kansas or shut down hunting and fishing in most of Alaska. Yet we are being bullied into accepting a massive closure in Hawaii, where we are being asked to accept losing 60 percent of our own U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone on a baseless promise.

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