WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

CNMI SEEM Working Group Meeting
January 29, 2020
1:00 to 5:00 pm
Hyatt Chamolinian Room
Garapan, MP

Participants: Frank Villagomez (DFW), Trey Dunn (DFW), Jude Lizama (DFW), Mike Tenorio (DFW), John Syslo (PIFSC), Rey Tebuteb (Bottomfish fisherman, AP), Lawrence Concepcion (Bottomfish fisherman, AP), Perry Mesgnon (Bottomfish fisherman, AP), Paul Roberto (Bottomfish fisherman), Richard Farrell (Bottomfish fisherman, AP), Clay Tam (AP), Tony Flores (MES), Mike Fleming (Bottomfish fisherman, AP), Frank Aldan (DLNR), Lino Tenorio (Bottomfish fisherman)

Council staff: Marlowe Sabater, Floyd Masga

DRAFT REPORT

1. Introductions

The meeting started at 1:15 pm. Council staff highlighted the importance of the fishing community and local agency participation in the SEEM process because this provides the harvest level analysis after the P* analysis which would be considered by the Council in specifying the annual catch limits (ACLs).

2. Overview of the SEEM* process

Council staff provided the overview of the SEEM process. The SEEM dimensions were standardized in 2018 by the Social Science Planning Committee. This structured framework was published as an internal PIFSC report and will be used in future SEEM analysis (Hospital et al 2019).

The working group reviewed the various aspects of the social, economic, ecological and management. On the Social Dimension, whether it perpetuates cultural and traditional values, provides culturally important fish, contributes to food security, and if there are community concerns regarding a high or low ACL. On the Economic Dimension, if any ACL decision will compromise the financial security of the fishery and the participants, whether other industries will be affected, unexpected change in demands, importance to domestic and export markets, and imports would create displacement of local catch. On the Ecological Dimension, whether the target species have strong ecological importance, impacts of changing ocean condition will affect the fishery productivity, whether fishing pressure will shift to other species when ACLs are restrictive. On the Management Uncertainty Dimension, this was subdivided into two sub-dimensions: 1) monitoring uncertainty; and 2) management and enforcement uncertainty. On monitoring uncertainty, this would include availability of licensing and reporting requirements, fine scale reporting, duration of lag for data processing, in-season tracking, communicating landing to the community, and the ability to monitor changes in fishing effort not reflected in the assessment. For the management uncertainty, whether there are existing regulatory measures in place adequate to protect the

stock and in-season accountability measure and whether management can distinguish local catch from imported catch in the markets.

As a group, each dimension will be scored by consensus. The final score will be tallied and the sum will be the reduction score from the ABC. The catch associated with the resulting risk of overfishing will be the ACL.

3. **Scoring of the SEEM* Dimensions and Criteria Scores**
   a. **Social**

The working group noted that bottomfish is important for fiestas and the Holy Week season. It does not significantly contribute to the food security at the territory level but is still deemed important for family level subsistence. Majority of the people in CNMI are employment based and only a few people have the capability to fish for subsistence. Some fishes mainly for subsistence but would sell catch to recuperate the trip cost. Most people would buy their fish from the market but only buys what they needed for the day.

The working group agreed that there is a social importance to the bottomfish fishery but does not warrant further reduction in the score to account for the social uncertainties. The score for this dimension is **zero**.

   b. **Economic**

The working group noted that the average price for bottomfish is $3.15. Based on the average landing for 2015 to 2017 at 47,000 lbs, the ex-vessel value of the fishery in CNMI is $148,050. This is a relatively small fishery that caters specifically to hotels and restaurants. This is the preferred fish for the tourism industry and the special community events. Majority of the fishing participants are local fishermen and Filipinos. Most fishermen have regular land-based jobs and fishes to supplement the income or when they don't have work (e.g. in the construction industry). There are no large industries that rely on the bottomfish fishery like processing plants or the fishing supply stores. The fishery is mostly for local consumption and there is no large scale export to other areas.

The working group recognized that the commercial importance of the bottomfish fishery is moderate. This does not warrant further reduction in score to account for the economic uncertainty. The score for this dimension is **zero**.

   c. **Ecological**

The working group discussed the ecological importance of the bottomfish species. The shallow species are harvested in the coral reef fisheries as well. There are insufficient ecological studies done on these species to be able to score this dimension properly. Fishermen noted that the fishery is weather dependent and the peak fishing occurs during the calm summer months. The working group scored this dimension with a **zero**.

   d. **Management Uncertainty**

The monitoring sub-dimension was discussed thoroughly. There is a mandatory license and reporting regulation in CNMI which has the ability to track the catch in near

real-time. This would reduce the current lag time of 4-6 months after the fishing year ended. This would allow for in-season monitoring and in-season accountability measure. However, this has not yet been implemented and not for anytime soon. There was a question on whether there will be high compliance to these requirements.

The working group recognized that the monitoring sub-dimension warrants a score of **2.5 percent reduction**.

The management sub-dimension focused on the current regulations in place for the bottomfish fishery. The federal management applies only to federal waters. The territorial waters may still remain open even if the ACL is reached. There is a need to develop a parallel rule making between the territorial and the federal government to make this work. There are no local regulations that specifically pertain to bottomfish.

The working group recognized that the management sub-dimension warrants a score of **2.5 percent reduction**.

4. **Finalizing the SEEM* scores**
   The working group concluded that a **five percent** buffer is needed to account for the management uncertainty.

5. **General Discussion**
   The working group discussed the application of this risk level to the years that the ACLs are to be specified and not to the terminal year of the assessment. The risk level will be applied to the 2023 fishing year and applied retroactively to 2020-2022.

6. **Summary of scores and SEEM* recommendations**
   The following are the scores for the SEEM analysis:
   Social Dimension = 0 percent reduction
   Economic Dimension = 0 percent reduction
   Ecological Dimension = 0 percent reduction
   Management Uncertainty Dimension = 5 percent reduction

   The social, economic and ecological dimensions are used to determine the buffer for setting the ACL. Since these dimensions were set to zero then the ACL is equal to ABC.

   This would be deducted from the ABC of 39 percent resulting in a final risk level of 34 percent risk of overfishing applied to the 2023 fishing year. This would correspond as the Annual Catch Target since the uncertainty came from monitoring and management dimensions.