



Guam SEEM Working Group Meeting

January 31, 2020

1:00 to 5:00 pm

Micronesia Room, Hilton Resort and Spa

Tumon, Guam

Participants: Chelsa Muña-Brecht (Dept. of Ag.), Tino Aguon (DAWR), Tom Flores (DAWR), Brent Tibbatts (DAWR), Debra Cabrera (SSC), Judy Amesbury (AP), James Borja (Bottomfish fisher, AP), Ken Borja (Bottomfish fisher, AP), Eric Cruz (PIFSC)

Council staff: Marlowe Sabater, Felix Reyes

DRAFT REPORT

1. Introductions

The meeting started at 1:30 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 has importance to the social fabric of Guam communities. However, it is not as profound as in Hawaii. It is important to have red fish available during fiestas and the Lenten Season (especially during Fridays where fasting is observed). The demand for red fish during Christmas and New Year is not as strong compared to Hawaii. The social demand for fish is mostly filled by skipjack tuna.

The working group raised the social issues resulting from a conservative ACL. This would create a social damage to the fishing community if the fishery is severely restricted. The goal of ACL management is to provide a long-term sustainability of the stock despite a short-term restriction. The goal for management is not to exceed ACL as much as possible.

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 economic contribution of the bottomfish fishery in Guam is related to the hotels and restaurants. Bottomfish is not a significant component of the commercial markets. Fishermen deliver the fish directly to the hotels and restaurants aside from the Guam Fisherman Cooperative Association. The local tackle shops do not depend on the bottomfish fishery. There is a significant amount of imports coming in frozen from Southeast Asia and other Micronesian islands. There is no domestic or international export of bottomfish,

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. Current data collection does not allow for in-season tracking of catch. If the commercial receipt book system was

used, this only comprise about 10 percent of the estimated total catch. There was a concern that if the fishermen self-report their catch when the conservative ACL is in place then the ACL will be exceeded because the data is near-real time and is more accurate. Staff responded that the assessment was based on creel data and therefore it should be used to track the catch unless there is a way to calibrate the new data with the old. The three-year average accountability measure should be able to dampen the annual fluctuation effects and would buffer the exceedance of the ACL.

If the working group utilizes the same level of uncertainty as CNMI then the difference in the catch would only correspond to a few trips of the AP members in the group. This does not provide enough buffer because the difference in catch between risk level is small. Might as well maximize the ACL level and depend on the three-year average to dampen the effects of high fluctuations in catch.

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

Staff clarified that ACL specification is a federal action and affects only federal waters. In order for ACLs to be effective, the territorial fishery management agency must develop a management framework that mirrors the federal action. DAWR Chief stated that DAWR will have to modify its processes via the legislature. It may take a couple of months. There must be a public hearing, an announcement, and no sooner than 10 days after the public hearing then file with the Attorney General. Barring any interference from the legislature – there is a grace period before actual implementation. Framework is already in place with the Guam Annotated Rules & Regulations (GARR).

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

4. Finalizing the SEEM* scores

The working group concluded that a **zero percent** buffer. This would set the ACL equal to the ABC.

5. General Discussion

The fishermen will be willing to cooperate with the self-reporting as long as the data will be used to improve the assessment. There should be transparency on how these data sets are used for science and management. The working group deliberated on not having a buffer from the SEEM dimensions. The concern regarding the very low ACL will result in an exceedance from the beginning. By setting the ACL equals to ABC, this leaves some room for the fishery to operate at the same level as it is now without causing overfishing. Even is a buffer is applied this would only constitute a few trips by commercial fishermen thus in reality the buffer is ineffective.

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 = 0 percent reduction

This would set the ACL equal to the ABC at 31 percent risk of overfishing. This would be applied to the terminal year of the risk table.