



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

DRAFT REPORT

(version 2021.10.22)

Fishing Industry Advisory Committee Meeting

Tuesday, November 16, 2021

1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Webex:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mike Goto, Fishing Industry Advisory Committee Chair, opened the meeting at 1:00 p.m. FIAC members in attendance included: Josh Schade, Baron Miho, Vince Haleck, Lino Tenorio, Eric Kingma, Jonathan Hurd and Sean Martin.

Participating Council staff included Mark Mitsuyasu, Asuka Ishizaki, Mark Fitchett, Maria Carnevale, Floyd Masga, Diana Kitiona, Joshua DeMello, Marlowe Sabater and Zach Yamada. Public participants included Archie Soliai (DMWR), Bryan Ishida (DAR), Chris Hawkins (Lynker), Clay Tam (PIFG), Alex Castro (TTT), Diana Kramer (PIRO PRD), Erin Oleson (PIFSC), Heather Cronin (PIRO SFD), Justin Hospital (PIFSC), Mark Ladao (Star Advertiser), Sarah Severino (Pacific Monitoring), Selene Fregosi (PIFSC), and Tom Graham (PIRO IFD).

2. Status Report on Sept 2021 FIAC Recommendations

Staff referred members to the FIAC report from the September meeting. Goto suggested members contact staff directly for further information or questions.

3. Update on Fishing and Market Issues/Impacts (i.e. billfish, transportation, etc)

Goto invited member to provide updates on the status of the fishing, seafood and related industries, continuing and upcoming issues and changes that may impact the community. Goto reported that catch rates are starting to trend upward in the Hawaii deep-set longline fishery. Tourism is projected to return in the winter. The deep-set longline fleet is nearing 100% for mono transition from wire.

Kingma added that along with mono transition, HLA has invested resources to help implement shark conservation initiatives, including crew training website (handling guidelines, take short test, and receive certification of completion; crew receives T-shirt as incentive). They continue to work with NMFS Sustainable Fisheries Division to translate animated video (HLA may cover translation cost).

4. Modification of Seabird Interaction Mitigation Measures in the Deep-set Longline Fishery (Action Item)

Staff reviewed the Council's preliminary action taken at its September meeting and provided an overview of the proposed final action on modifying seabird interaction mitigation measures in the Hawaii deep-set longline fishery. In particular, staff called attention to draft tori line regulatory specifications, including discussion on whether materials for the tori lines should

be specified in regulations, as well as updated analysis on implementing revised offal management best practices under non-regulatory training or through a regulatory change.

FIAC members raised concerns with how compliance with tori line specifications would be monitored, and who would make the determination that tori lines are compliant with the specifications, and noted particular concerns if observers are assigned that role. It was clarified that existing seabird measures are monitored through observer data, but any potential violations are identified after the observers return to port and data are reviewed by the observer program, and any potential violations referred to NOAA Office of Law Enforcement for review and appropriate follow-up. HLA's position on the action supports the replacement of blue-dyed bait and strategic offal discards with tori lines, considering the cumbersome nature of the measures, difficulty with compliance, and the potential that the measures may be attracting seabirds. Members noted the successful trials using dyneema as the aerial section backbone, but supported the "other similar material" acknowledging supply chain issues or other unanticipated issues with procuring specified material if regulations are very specific. The FIAC supported continued refinement of the minimum standards if necessary. It was confirmed that these measures would apply to vessels that are not side-setting.

The FIAC recommended the Council adopt Alternative 2, which would replace blue-dyed thawed bait and strategic offal discharge measures required for stern-setting DSLV vessels with a new tori line requirement, and implement best practices training on offal management as part of the annual protected species workshop. The FIAC supported tori line regulatory specifications that identify appropriate aerial and drag section backbone material with the additional language "other similar material" to account for unanticipated issues with procuring the specified material. FIAC recommends that the Council periodically review the minimum standards and consider refinements if necessary.

5. Preparations for 18th WCPFC Regular Session

A. South Pacific Tuna Treaty Updates

Council staff provided an overview of the South Pacific Tuna Treaty, which is an international agreement on access fees for purse seine vessels in the EEZ waters of Pacific Island nations. The Treaty is a six year term with four years access fees fixed upon negotiation. The latter two years are negotiated ad hoc. The current access fee agreements are to expire at the end of 2022. The US purse seine fleet primarily fishes in the waters of Tuvalu, Tokelau, Kiribati, and Cook Islands. The US has had separate access fee arrangements with Cook Islands, Kiribati, and a group of other nations. Progress on renegotiation has been slow with only two meetings thus far. The next Treaty meeting is expected in January 2022. Committee member had no comments.

B. South Pacific Albacore Management Issues

Council staff presented issues regarding South Pacific albacore and anticipated action at the upcoming 18th WCPFC Regular Session. Poor performance with respect to the American Samoa longline fishery was discussed as well as a proposal by the United States to expand the conservation and management measure for South Pacific albacore to encompass the entire stock range. Other issues include proposals to reduce fishing effort in the South Pacific targeting the stock, noting that the stock has gradually declined and CPUE has declined even greater. Despite all of this, the stock is not overfished, nor experiencing overfishing. However, regional depletion

in waters around American Samoa persists and there is little to no chance of an interim target reference point for the stock being reached under status quo levels of catch and effort. Therefore, there is a need for the Commission to possibly revise the CMM 2015-02 for the stock and develop harvest strategies.

The Committee discussed access fees that are being paid by China. It was estimated to be approximately \$40,000 per vessel per year to fish in the zones of South Pacific island nation zones. NMFS staff noted that there are probably other factors to consider in addition to cash.

C. US Permanent Advisory Committee to the WCPFC

Goto provided an update on the US Permanent Advisory Committee to the WCPFC (PAC). The PAC agreed to propose an increase US longline catch limit for bigeye tuna and retain language on retaining the US position on the Effort Limit Areas for Purse Seine Fisheries (ELAPS). The PAC also made recommendations for the US delegation on South Pacific albacore, striped marlin, and proposal to remove wire leaders in WCPFC longline fisheries to reduce longline fishery impacts on sharks. The wire leader removal proposal was based on the Council's actions. Kingma commented that HLA, regarding the Hawaii longline quota, continues to request an increase in the quota as it has for more than 10 years. They've had to rely on the Territory quotas which are uncertain, the Hawaii fleet has the lowest depletion in the Pacific, the current quota does not meet domestic demand, US has the smallest quota relative to other countries and are subject to the highest standards. Kingma urged the US to support the fleet and increase the quota as its highest priority.

D. Proposed Revisions to WCPFC Tropical Tuna CMM

Tom Graham, PIRO International Fisheries Division, provided an update on the US proposal to revise WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure for Tropical Tunas, CMM 2020-01. US proposal includes a management objective that runs in concert with the WCPFC Chair's report of the Tropical Tuna workshops held in 2021 which recognized "... and excessive spatial unevenness in spawning stock depletion is to be avoided to support thriving fisheries throughout the Convention Area." The US proposal is centered on three parts: 1) Increase minimum longline observer coverage from 5 to 10%, 2) increase bigeye tuna catch limits in longline fisheries, and 3) recognizing American Samoa purse seine vessels as being eligible to benefits of small island developing states and territories afforded in the Convention. The focus of the presentation was on increasing longline catches of US longline fishery from 3,554 mt per year to 6,554 mt per year and retaining the privilege to have recognized specified fishing agreements between Hawaii-based US vessels and the three US Pacific Territories.

FIAC members discussed the proposal and asked if there was a plan in motion before the WCPFC meeting to consult with other members. Graham noted that on November 19, 2021 there will be a full US delegation meeting with reports on bilateral meetings. Informal meetings with FFA nations were held and a planned bilateral meeting with the official FFA contingent will be held before the US delegation meeting. To date, there have been consultations with the EU, Taiwan, and another planned meeting with Canada.

The FIAC recommended that the US delegation to the WCPFC work to ensure that the US longline catch limit for bigeye tuna is increased given that bigeye is not subject to

overfishing and that the area where the Hawaii fishery operates entirely had the lowest regional depletion estimated in the 2020 stock assessment. The US delegation should further note to the WCPFC that the Hawaii longline fleet is highly monitored, does not transship its catch at sea, and is not characteristic of a 'distant water' fishery (based on fleet capacity, limited range, and vessel size limits).

6. FKW acoustic study and TRT research priorities

Erin Oleson, PIFSC, presented on the FKW acoustic monitoring study in the Hawaii longline fishery. PIFSC Cetacean Research Program began deploying passive acoustic monitors on longline gear in 2012 in collaboration with the PIRO Observer Program and individual fishermen within the longline fleet. Recordings from the initial deployments indicate that FKW were heard near the gear more often than noted by fishery observer catch depredation records and were most commonly detected during the haul. Deployments of acoustic recorders on fishing sets have continued since 2014 through voluntary cooperation of longline captains and fishery observers. Acoustic data collected from 42 different longline boats during 59 trips revealed that within a subset of these recordings a mechanical sound was consistently detected at the start of the haul. On those sets with noise detected, 80% reported catch depredation as noted by the fishery observer. The current phase of this project aims to identify the source of this sound on the fishing vessel through collection of in-air recordings near suspected onboard equipment, as well as the distance at which false killer whales might be able to detect this noise using an array of underwater recorders deployed on the gear. A facilitator for the project is currently recruiting new participating vessels to deploy recorders.

A FIAC member suggested keeping track of vessels that use hydraulic mufflers, which makes the noise from the hydraulics quieter. Members noted industry support for the acoustic study, recognizing that there may be significant economic impacts from false killer whale depredation. In response to a FIAC member's question as to whether individual whales can be identified with acoustics, and whether such information could be used for population assessments, Oleson clarified that whales cannot be identified down to the individual animals at this time, but PIFSC is working to use other datasets to identify relationship between the number of whale calls produced and the number of animals in the group. If such relationships can be identified, that information could be used to generate group size estimates, but estimating density for population assessments would require development of statistical approaches.

Diana Kramer, PIRO PRD, provided a brief update on the FKWTRT research priorities. Recent TRT recommendations from the FKWTRT include priorities for crew training, depredation research, post-hooking mortality research, and data synthesis. Kramer also provided an overview of projects funded under the FY2021 appropriation funds for false killer whales. The FIAC supported a recommendation that PIFSC and PIRO continue to work with HLA, TRT and the Council to identify research priorities for false killer whales to inform projects to be funded through any future congressional appropriations.

7. Research Needs and Priorities

- A. BREP Proposal
- B. Saltonstall-Kennedy Program

The Chair noted that research projects as funded through these programs were already discussed in the prior agenda items. Therefore, he suggested the group move on to the next agenda item.

8. Report on American Samoa Gear Diversification Project

Due to conflicts in schedule, Haleck was unable to present on the American Samoa gear diversification project.

9. Report on CNMI Bottomfish Fishery Development and Training

Lino Tenorio reported on the CNMI bottomfish training project that was supported through two SFF awards from 2019 through 2021. DLNR contracted with the Saipan Fishing Association and Tenorio & Associates to provide training to CNMI fishermen. Classroom training workshops provided participants hands-on training with bottomfishing gear, tackle, equipment, bait, fishing handling and storage and strategies for targeting bottomfish species. Workshops were followed by at-sea training on vessel operations, safety, gear operations, anchoring, and use of electronics. Vessel maintenance and operations workshops were held by a certified Volvo mechanic providing vessel maintenance and repair training to CNMI agency representatives and members of the CNMI Fishing Association. Training was conducted on the island of Rota to include participants from Tasi to Table. Micronesian Ecological Services conducted Bio-Sampling during the 2 day training on Rota.

Tenorio noted that the participants learned how to use GPS, gear and bait during at-sea training events where trainees were able to catch various types of bottomfish. Catch-it Log-It outreach and training was also conducted during these events and participants were recruited to participate in the online data program. Tenorio added that through the training program, seven (7) individuals who have completed the training have been able purchase their own vessels and begin bottomfishing. Up-coming projects include the non-profit organization, 500 Sails, which included further bottomfish training in their grant proposal.

Hawaii FIAC members complimented Tenorio on the value and success of the training program. They recognized the advantage of gathering individuals to offer such training to help build future capacity in the fisheries. They added that the program should be replicated in other parts of the region, including Hawaii. Federal funding for such training is going to be available through the Hawaii Sea Grant program and should be further explored.

10. Other Issues

No other issues were raised.

11. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

12. Discussion and Recommendations

The FIAC discussed and endorsed the following recommendations:

1. The FIAC recommended the Council adopt Alternative 2, which would replace blue-dyed thawed bait and strategic offal discharge measures required for stern-setting DSLL

vessels with a new tori line requirement, and implement best practices training on offal management as part of the annual protected species workshop. The FIAC supported tori line regulatory specifications that identify appropriate aerial and drag section backbone material with the additional language “other similar material” to account for unanticipated issues with procuring the specified material. FIAC recommends that the Council periodically review the minimum standards and consider refinements if necessary.

2. The FIAC recommends that the US delegation to the WCPFC work to ensure that the US longline catch limit for bigeye tuna is increased given that bigeye is not subject to overfishing and that the area where the Hawaii fishery operates entirely had the lowest regional depletion estimated in the 2020 stock assessment. The US delegation should further note to the WCPFC that the Hawaii longline fleet is highly monitored, does not tranship its catch at sea, and is not characteristic of a ‘distant water’ fishery (based on fleet capacity, limited range, and vessel size limits).
3. The FIAC recommends PIFSC and PIRO continue to work with HLA, TRT, and the Council to identify research priorities to address false killer whale interactions in the Hawaii longline fishery.