



Scientists to Evaluate Prohibiting Wire Leaders in Hawai‘i Longline Fishery, Consider Catch Limits

HONOLULU (11 March 2021) Scientists from throughout the Pacific will meet March 16 to 18, 2021, to discuss fishery management issues and make management recommendations for fisheries in the Western Pacific Region. The meeting of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will be held virtually and is open to the public. The full agenda, background documents and instructions for connecting to the meeting and providing oral public comments are available at www.wpcouncil.org/event/139th-scientific-and-statistical-committee-meeting. Among the agenda items are the following:



The Hawaii Longline Association proposed switching the Hawai‘i deep-set fishery’s gear from steel wire leaders (top) to monofilament nylon leaders (bottom) to increase oceanic whitetip sharks and other protected species’ chance of survival post-interaction. Source: Ward et al., 2008.

Wire Leader Regulatory Amendment for the Hawai‘i Longline Fishery

Most vessels in the Hawai‘i deep-set longline fishery use wire leaders in the terminal portion of the branchline between the hook and the weighted swivel to reduce the risk of crew injuries resulting from flyback. Wire leaders make it difficult to remove the terminal portion of the branch line from sharks or other protected species that cannot be brought onboard. Switching to monofilament nylon leaders would allow crew to remove gear closer to the hook and may facilitate a shark’s ability to break free by biting through the line. Tagging studies show that shorter trailing gear gives sharks a better chance of survival.

The Hawaii Longline Association announced at the December 2020 Council meeting that their member vessels will voluntarily eliminate the use of wire leaders by July 1, 2021, and use monofilament nylon leaders or other similar materials. The Council is considering a regulatory change to prohibit the use of wire leaders that would be implemented after the fleet’s voluntary transition. The SSC will provide scientific advice to the Council on potential impacts to target and nontarget stocks, ESA-listed oceanic whitetip sharks and other protected species, fishery participants and the range of alternatives under consideration.

Main Hawaiian Islands Deep-Seven Bottomfish Catch Limits

The Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) released an update to the main Hawaiian Islands deep-seven bottomfish stock assessment with catch-and-effort data up to 2018 and fishery-independent survey data up to 2020 indicating the stock remains healthy. The assessment provided alternative catch levels at different risk levels of overfishing from 2021 to 2025 to specify new annual catch limits. The SSC will consider the new information to determine if a change in the current acceptable biological catch (508,000 pounds) is warranted.

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Guam Bottomfish Rebuilding Plan

At the 184th meeting in December 2020, the Council received options to address the overfishing bottomfish stock condition in Guam based on a 2019 benchmark stock assessment. The Council selected a 31,000-pound ACL as its preliminary preferred alternative, which would rebuild the bottomfish stock within the required 10 years. Since then, Council staff received an updated biomass projection from PIFSC, which substantially changed the rebuilding timeframes of the options provided in December 2020. The SSC will review the new information, reconsider its preliminary preferred alternative and may provide recommendations to the Council regarding the rebuilding target as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA).

North Pacific Striped Marlin Catch Limits

The North Pacific striped marlin stock is overfished and experiencing overfishing, requiring the Council to take steps to reduce the United States' impact on the stock. The SSC will review alternatives and may recommend to the Council appropriate U.S. catch and/or effort levels for North Pacific striped marlin and international recommendations to move towards ending overfishing. U.S. Pacific fisheries, including the Hawai'i longline fishery, landed approximately 19% (about 796,000 pounds per year) of reported North Pacific striped marlin catch from 2013 to 2017. Japanese fisheries landed three and a half times that amount (almost 2.8 million pounds) per year over that same period, accounting for 60% of the total catch. Since 1975, U.S. fisheries have accounted for 6% of the historical North Pacific striped marlin catch, while Japan and Taiwan fisheries landed 83% and 9%, respectively.

Recommendations made by the SSC on these and other matters will be considered by the Council when it meets March 23-25, 2021, virtually with host sites at Tedi of Samoa Building, Suite 208B, Fagatogo Village, American Samoa; BRI Building, Suite 205, Kopa Di Oru St., Garapan, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI); and Cliff Pointe, 304 W. O'Brien Dr., Hagatña, Guam. Instructions on connecting to the web conference, agendas and briefing documents will be posted at www.wpcouncil.org/meetings-calendars. Host sites are subject to local and federal safety and health guidelines regarding COVID-19; check the Council website for updates.

Scientific and Statistical Committee: James Lynch (Sierra Pacific Industries) (chair); Debra Cabrera (University of Guam); Frank Camacho (University of Guam); Milani Chaloupka (University of Queensland); Erik Franklin (University of Hawai'i, School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology); Shelton Harley (Minister of Fisheries, NZ); Jason Helyer (Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources); Ray Hilborn (University of Washington); Justin Hospital (NMFS PIFSC); David Itano (fisheries consultant); Donald Kobayashi (NMFS PIFSC); Steve Martell (SeaState, Inc.); Domingo Ochavillo (American Samoa Dept. of Marine and Wildlife Resources); Graham Pilling (Secretariat of the Pacific Community); Kurt Schaefer (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission); Craig Severance (University of Hawai'i at Hilo, retired); Michael Tenorio (CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife); and Michael Seki (ex-officio) (NMFS PIFSC).

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Secretary of Commerce appointees from nominees selected by American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawai'i governors: Michael Dueñas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (vice chair); Howard Dunham, commercial fisherman (American Samoa) (vice chair); John Gourley, Micronesian Environmental Services (CNMI) (vice chair); Edwin Watamura, Wai'alua Boat Club (Hawai'i) (vice chair); Monique Amani, business owner (Guam); Roger Dang, Fresh Island Fish Co. (Hawai'i); and McGrew Rice, charter boat captain (CNMI). Designated state officials: Anthony Benavente, CNMI Dept. of Lands and Natural Resources; Suzanne Case, Hawai'i Dept. of Land & Natural Resources; Chelsa Muña-Brecht, Guam Dept. of Agriculture; and Archie Soliai, American Samoa Dept. of Marine & Wildlife Resources (chair). Designated federal officials (voting): Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office. Designated federal officials (nonvoting): Michael Brakke, U.S. Dept. of State; Brian Peck, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and RADM Matthew Sibley, USCG 14th District.

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