

190th WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL MEETING**MARCH 22-24, 2022****STATE OF HAWAII, DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
DIVISION OF AQUATIC RESOURCES****REPORTING PERIOD: NOVEMBER 2021 – JANUARY 2022****1. FISHERIES****DEEP-7**

At five months into the 2021-2022 Deep-7 fishing season, 312 commercial fishers have reported 1,255 trips, and caught a total of 108,071 lbs. of mixed Deep-7 species (Figure 1). Catch as of the end of January is above that of the past two seasons. Though initially taking a slow start, catch in late October increased dramatically as the seasonal demand for bottomfish set in.

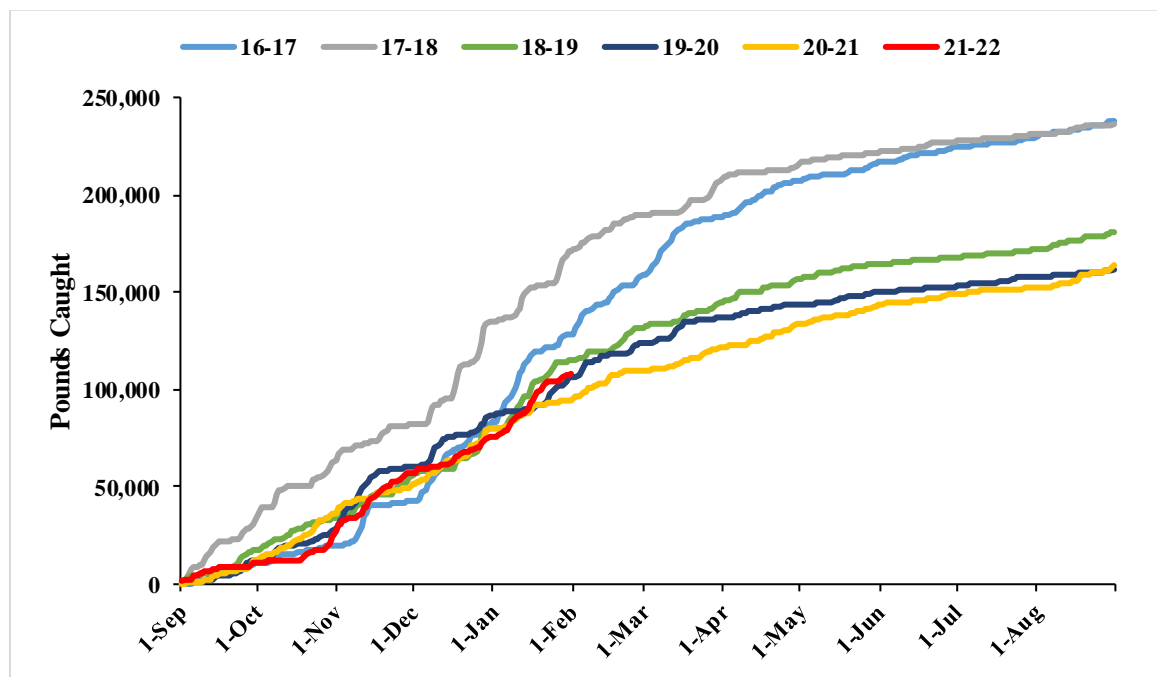


Figure 1. Cumulative Deep-7 catch, 2017-2022 seasons.

Whereas ‘ōpakapaka typically make up approximately 50% of all deep-7 landings in the MHI, during the 2020-2021 season they made up just 36% of the total catch (Figure 2). Among the contributing factors, fishers noted difficulty locating normal aggregations of ‘ōpakapaka. As of the end of January, ‘ōpakapaka catch in the current season appears to be more typical of the fishery making up 44% of the catch thus far (Figure 3). This is corroborated by the account of local fishers who have been noting more typical patterns of ‘ōpakapaka distribution. Catch contribution of the other six species is as of the end of the reporting period about average. Catch of gindai, which has been increasing steadily in recent years, is as of the end of January at about

92% of the 10-year average annual total catch. Though gindai catch appears to be increasing, total contribution to the total catch remains low as the species is not commonly targeted directly.

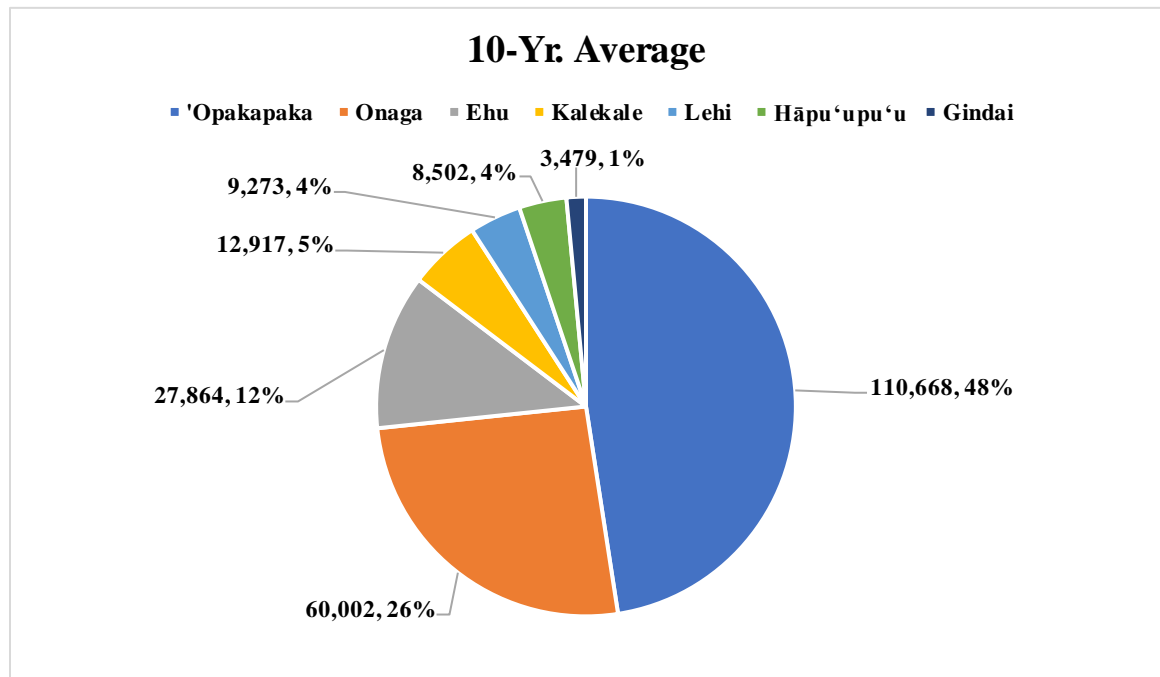


Figure 2. 10-yr. average annual catch and percent species composition for the Deep-7 fishery, 2012—2021 seasons.

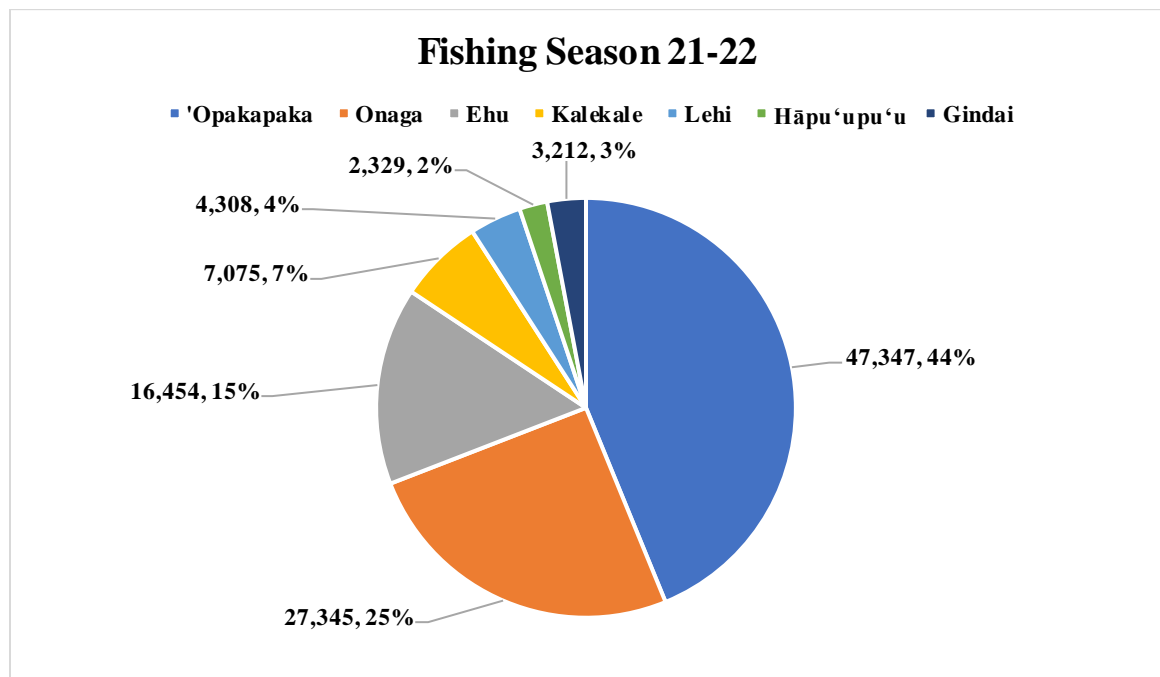


Figure 3. Species composition of Deep-7 catch during the 2020-2021 season, September-January.

On February 25th, the Board of Land and Natural Resources voted to immediately open Bottomfish Restricted Fishing Areas (BRFAs) A, B, D, E, G, H, K, and M. In addition to BRFAs C, F, J, L, which have been open since July of 2019, this means that all BRFAs are now open to commercial and non-commercial fishing. Subarea reporting is no longer required for commercial catch reports, though all other reporting and registration requirements remain.

KONA CRAB

The 2021 Kona crab season concluded with a total of 18 fishers reporting 69 trips and catching 3,946 lbs. of Kona crab (Figures 4 & 5). Though catch prior to the seasonal closure was relatively high, we did not see the trend resume following the September 1 reopening.

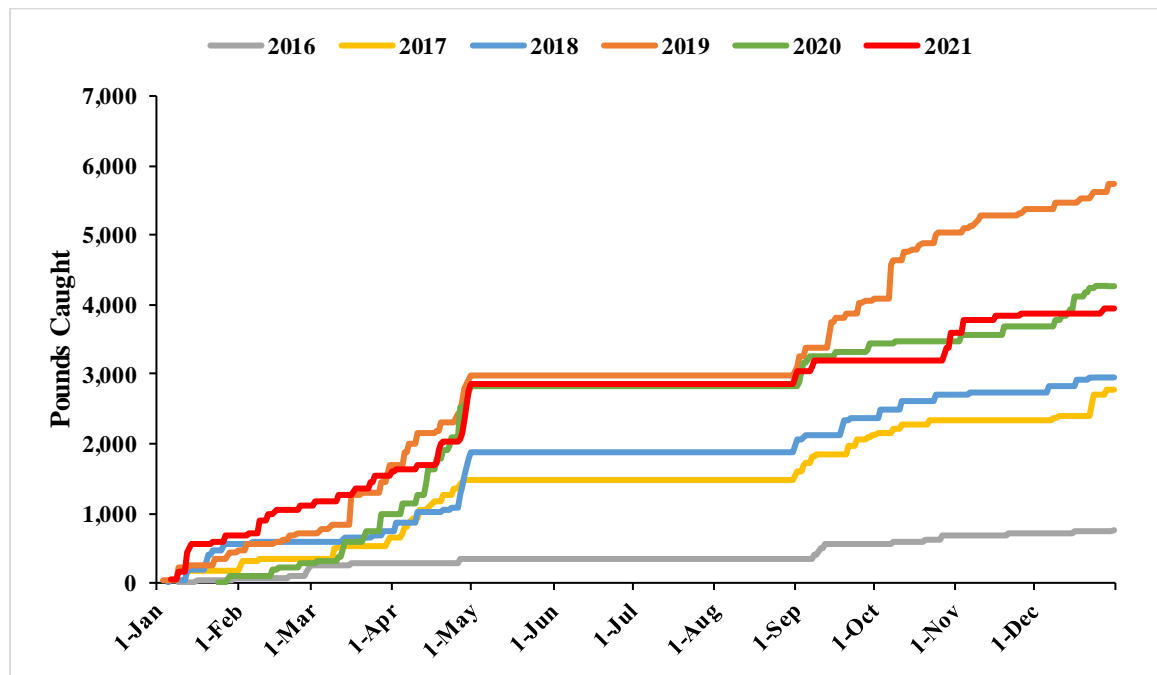


Figure 4. Cumulative MHI Kona crab catch, 2016-2021

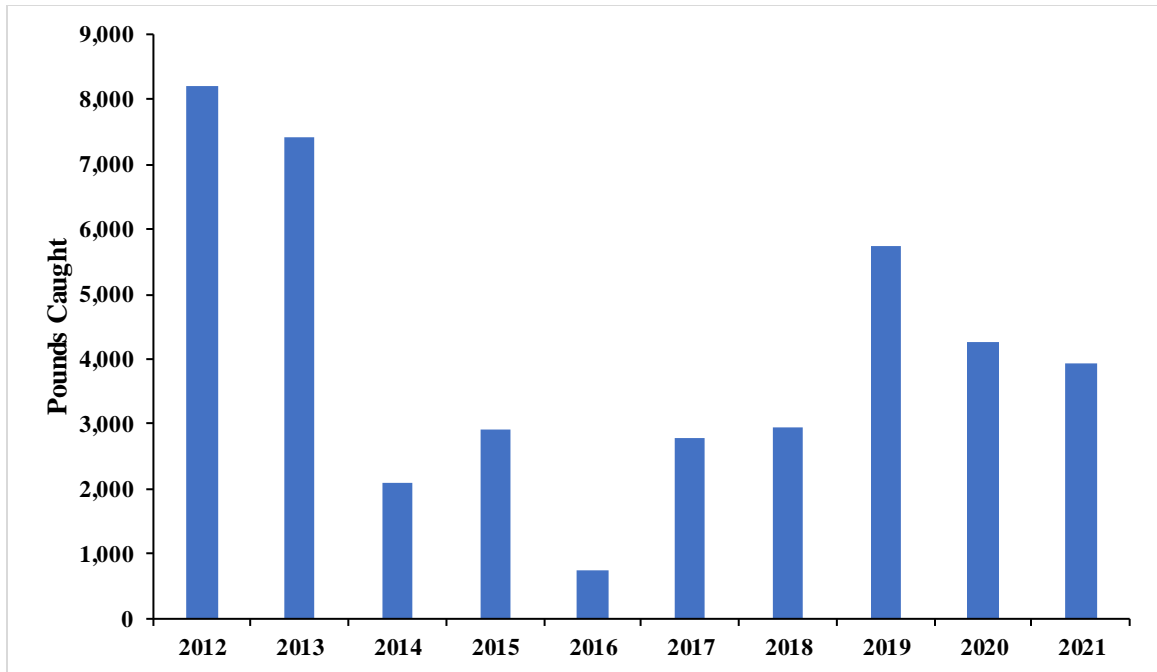


Figure 5. Annual MHI Kona crab catch, 2012-2021

As of the end of January, total catch for the 2022 season is 26 pounds of Kona crab. With only month into the season, it is far too early to predict the remainder of the season. Weather, competing fisheries, and market demand will all contribute to the catch and effort in coming months.

UKU

The 2021 uku fishing season concluded with 232 fishers reporting 999 trips, for a total of 60,351 pounds of uku catch (Figures 6 & 7). Total uku catch in 2021 exceeded 2020 catch by approximately 12,000 pounds, though falling below the 2016-2019 seasons.

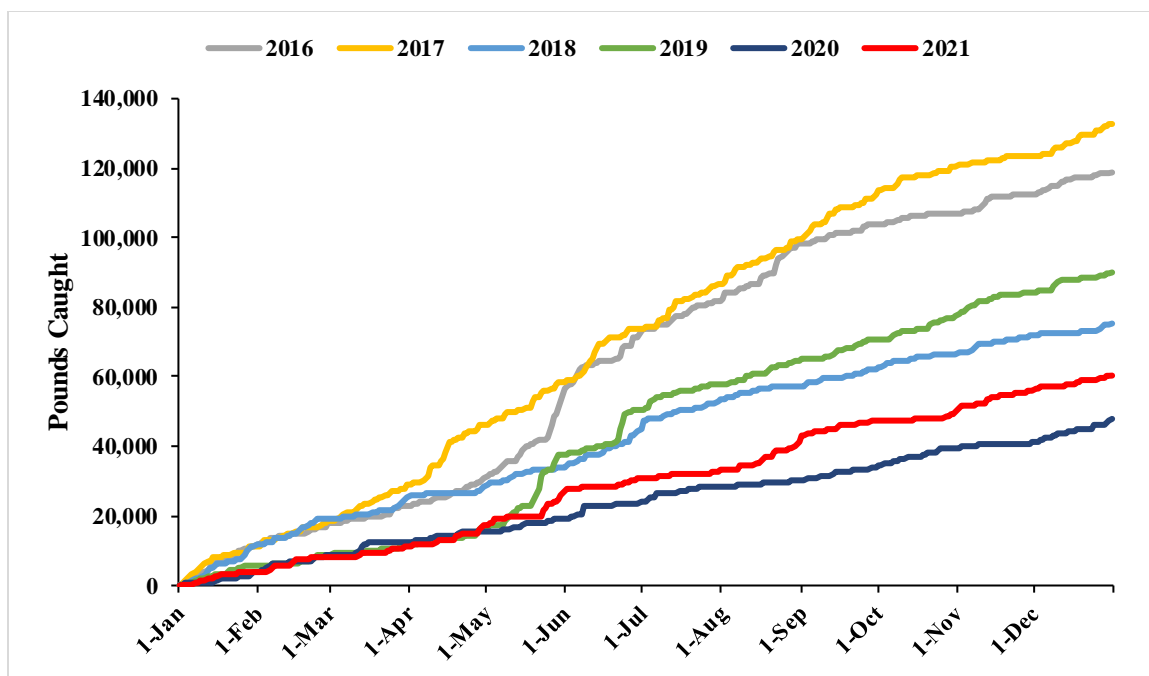


Figure 6. Cumulative MHI uku catch, 2016 - 2021.

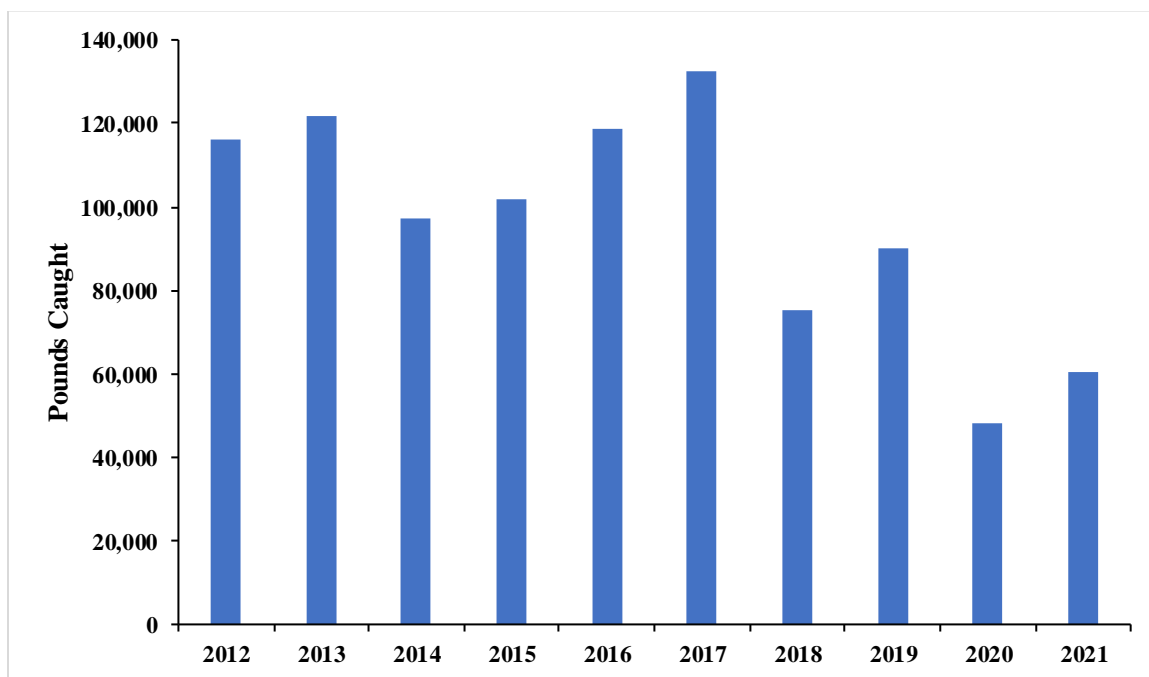


Figure 7. Annual MHI uku catch, 2012 - 2021.

As of the end of the reporting period, 66 fishers reported 99 trips, and caught a total of 6,771 pounds of uku.

LICENSE AND REPORTING

In total, DAR issued 3,264 Commercial Marine Licenses (CMLs) during the year 2021 for a total revenue of \$355,650 (Figure 8). CMLs issued in 2021 were below-average, though a slightly higher than the total issued in 2020.

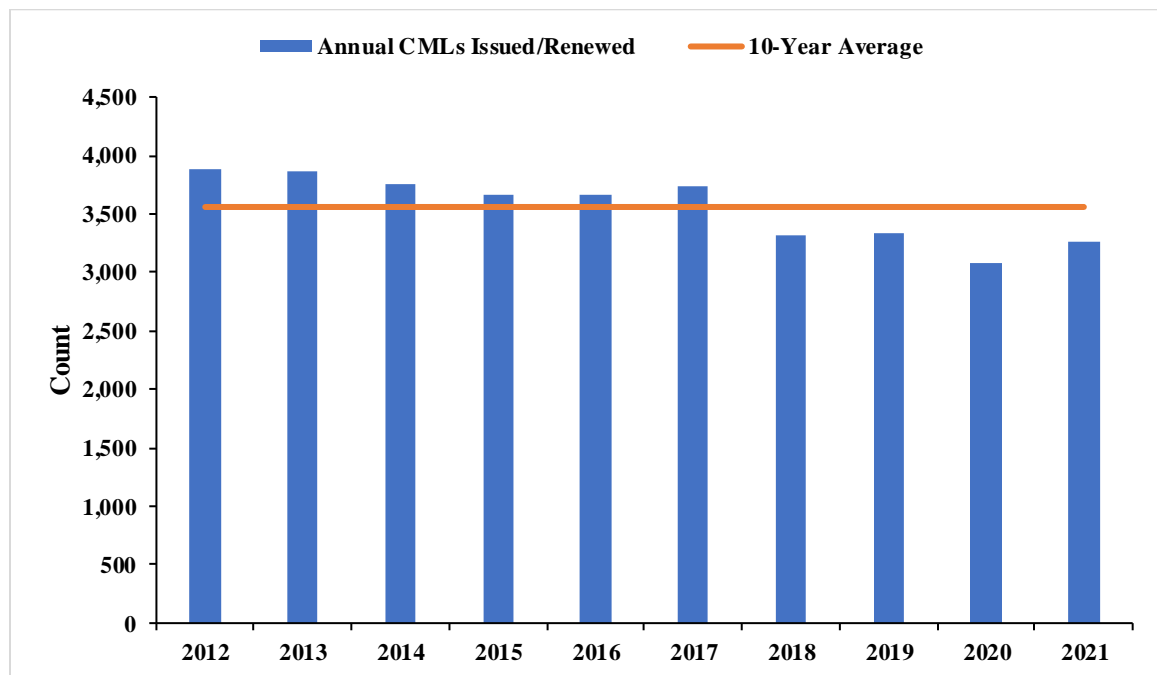


Figure 8. Annual CMLs issued/renewed, 2012-2021.

By the end of January 2022, 297 CMLs were issued for a total revenue of \$42,650. This number of requests for new or renewed licenses in the first month of the year is typical. The number of January license requests is not generally predictive of total CMLs issued in a given year.

2. RESOURCE PROTECTION

PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT (PMNM)

One (1) new permit and one (1) amendment to an existing permit were granted during this reporting period:

One (1) PMNM Conservation and Management permit (final permit issued in December, 2021; permit was presented at 12/10/21 BLNR Meeting);

One (1) PMNM Education amendment to the permit (final amendment was issued in November, 2021; No BLNR review was required for this permit, as all activities are taking place on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge (MANWR), which is outside of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine Refuge). Original permit was issued in April, 2021, for to access the PMNM to produce educational videos

NOTE – Correction from previous updates: One additional (1) PMNM Research permit was issued in October, 2021 (final permit issued on 10/17/2021; No BLNR review was required for this permit, as all activities are taking place on MANWR, which is outside of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine Refuge). Permit was issued for the purposes of conducting high resolution seafloor mapping and characterization of seamounts within the expansion area of the monument only; therefore no signature was needed from DAR/DLNR (authorization for expansion falls under USFWS – although reviews of all activities in expansion area are conducted by all co-trustees) – therefore there was a small error in logging this permit issuance – error has been corrected.

The decrease in the number of access permits requested in recent months was likely a result of fall and winter weather restraints (rougher sea states) and potentially also a result of the increase in COVID-19 restrictions on travel on research vessels and restrictions on work environments that require researchers, educators or managers to work in close proximity with each other, due to the increase in cases from the Omicron variant in Hawaii during November to January.

The Permit Coordinator's Group (PCG) is currently reviewing or processing an increased number of requests (nine (9) applications at this time) for the next application periods for early spring or summer of 2022, to conduct research, conservation, management, educational, cultural or special use activities. The actual conducting of the activities in the field are still likely contingent on the maintenance of COVID transmission/infection rates remaining low within the State of Hawaii.

The Permit Working Group (PWG) for the PMNM (group that works on BMPs, policy suggestions, etc.) and the PCG, met again in November 2021 and January 2022 to continue the revising of PMNM BMP # 020 (Best Management Practices (BMPs) to Minimize the Spread of *Chondria tumulosa*) in order to address activities where the algae *Chondria tumulosa* is present within areas of Pearl and Hermes Atoll and now also Midway (where *Chondria* was discovered by the Marine Debris cruise conducted by PMDP in August/September). This finalization of PMNM BMP # 020 is anticipated March 2022. In addition, these working groups will continue to provide feedback on additional protocols to address biosecurity issues with other activities not covered under the BMP including the transportation of marine debris (both terrestrial and marine – currently conducted by the Papahānaumokuākea Marine Debris Project – “PMDP”), which may potentially have *Chondria tumulosa* attached, from Pearl and Hermes Atoll and Midway, or other activities that may be proposed in the future.

3. ECOSYSTEM & HABITAT

FISH AGGREGATION DEVICES (FADs)

During the period of November 2021 to January 2022 activity was light for the FAD Program.

During November 2021, one FAD was reported missing;

CK – Makahuena Pt., Kauai (missing on 11/5)

No activity in December 2021

During January 2022, two FADs were recovered as detailed below:

JJ – Kamohio, Kahoolawe (recovered off Kahoolawe on 1/20)

GG – Nakaohu Pt., Maui (recovered off Kahoolawe on 1/20)

4. OTHER

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES (AIS) MANAGEMENT

The State of Hawai‘i has submitted final comments and supplemental information to the EPA regarding the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act (VIDA) of 2018. DAR now awaits additional information from the EPA and USCG regarding final standards of performance and enforcement, with an unclear deadline for either. USCG may or may not request state feedback on enforcement standards.

RULEMAKING

On February 25, 2022 the Board of Land and Natural Resources approved the reopening of all BFRAs, which had been closed to fishing since 2007. Registered bottomfish vessels are now allowed to fish for deep-7 bottomfish in all previously closed BRFAs.

LEGISLATION

DAR did not introduce any Administrative Bills this session. However, a number of fishing-related bills were introduced, which DAR is tracking and providing testimony on. Some relevant bills that are still alive include:

Senate Bill 2767, which would provide funds to DLNR to support the deployment, replacement, and maintenance of FADs.

Senate Bill 2065, which would prohibit the possession or use of unmanned aerial vehicles in state waters for purposes of fishing.

House Bill 1988, which would prohibit the sale, import, or export of coral products, with certain exceptions. The bill’s definition of “coral” includes state and federally managed precious corals.

CARES ACT

The application period for Round 2 CARES Act funding closed on September 30. 290 applications were received. The Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission is still in the process of reviewing applications for eligibility. At this time, DAR does not have an estimated time frame for disbursement of funds.