



WESTERN  
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MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL

## REPORT

### **Fishing Industry Advisory Committee Meeting**

February 27, 2023

2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Michael Goto, Chair of the Fishing Industry Advisory Committee (FIAC), opened the meeting and announced there would be no presentation under agenda item 6 (on the International Billfish Biological Sampling Project). Council staff would present on National Seafood Strategy under Other Business. Presenter order was moved around due to scheduling conflicts.

Members in attendance were Johnathan Hurd, John Kaneko, Sean Martin, Baron Miho, Kerry Umamoto, Josh Schade, Eric Kingma, Kenton Geer, Lino Tenorio, and Tony Guerrero. Public attendance included Bryan Ishida (HI DAR), Clay Tam (AP), Jason Helyer (HI DAR, presenter), Justin Hospital (PIFSC), Minling Pan (PIFSC, presenter), Caleb McMahan (Hawaiian Fresh Seafood), Kisei Tanaka (PIFSC), Ramon Tebuteb, and Tammy Harp. Council staff attending included Mark Mitsuyasu, Asuka Ishizaki, Mark Fitchett, and Josh DeMello

#### **2. Status Report on Previous FIAC Recommendations**

Council staff presented on a status report on previous FIAC recommendations. There was no discussion or questions on this update.

#### **3. Roundtable update on Fishing/Market Issues/Impacts**

Members from each of the 4 island areas discussed issues on each of the areas. The Holiday season pretty successful for Hawaii longline, going into new year, saw strong presence of swordfish in the shallow-set fishery but market not as strong due to imports primarily from Ecuador (through end of last week in February). Some vessels reconverted back to deep-set fishing as a result. The market started to rebound late prior to the FIAC meeting, hopefully an indication of slowing imports. Fresh imports should be down for the weeks following this report.

The Hawaii longline fishery reports catch rates for the deep-set sector have been below historical lows. Fishery seems to be acting as business as usual, though last five years have been slow.

The Hawaii inshore and offshore handline fleet has been having an exceptionally strong market, mainly due to lower volume.

Members from Guam and CNMI did not report on any news or recent trends since last meeting.

#### **4. Developing Options for Multi-Year Territorial Bigeye Catch and Allocation Limits (*Action Item*)**

Council staff presented on the possibility of amending the bigeye tuna catch and allocation limit framework, and presented options for specifying multiyear allocation limits without the need for a catch limit for each of the territories. These allocations would transfer catch from the territories to Hawaii-based U.S. longline vessels. Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) bigeye tuna comprise a stock that is internationally managed and assessed by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). The 2020 assessment indicated that the bigeye tuna stock is not subject to overfishing, nor overfished. Council staff presented analyses from stock projections that demonstrate the low impact of possible allocation limits on the WCPO stock. The tropical tuna conservation and management measure (CMM) 2021-01 assigned longline bigeye limits of six countries, including the U.S, which has the lowest limit of 3,554 mt. CMM 2021-01 does not establish a limit for Small Island Developing States and Participating Territories, including American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI. CMM 2021-01 will expire at the end of 2023.

The current domestic management framework requires catch limits applicable to the U.S. Participating Territories in order to establish allocation limits on a single-year basis. The Council previously recommended removing catch limits for the U.S. Participating Territories and establishing allocation limits for 1,500 mt per territory for 2020-2023, based on their marginal impact on the bigeye stock and the fact the stock is no longer experiencing overfishing. A new WCPO bigeye tuna stock assessment is expected in August 2023.

Kingma asked if there was a specification for 2023. There is a current single year specification for 2023 under the current framework. Kingma suggested that a single year specification be also considered for 2024, as a back-up plan in case the framework amendment is held up, but focus on the multi-year specification framework.

#### **5. Workshops on Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Tropical Tuna Longline Management**

Council staff will present on the workshop covered the following four themes: 1) Describing regional and operational characteristics of longline fisheries in the WCPO; 2) Zone-based longline management scheme; 3) Needs from scientific services provider; 4) Management objectives. The main goal of the workshop was to identify key areas of consideration towards developing new longline measures within the tropical tuna measure, taking into account best available information. The anticipated outcomes for this workshop can serve as a basis for a path forward for mutual objectives when the WCPFC tropical tuna measure is up for expiration. A tentative second workshop is pending late April 2023 in Honolulu

#### **6. International Billfish Biological Sampling Program in Longline Fisheries**

*No presentation on this item*

## **7. 2023 Hawaii Longline Cost Earnings Survey**

Minling Pan, PIFSC, provided an overview of the 2023 Hawaii Longline Cost Earning Survey. The survey will collect information on annual trip costs, fixed costs, and labor costs for calendar year 2022. Information collected from the survey help fulfill mandates for economic analyses under MSA, NEPA and other federal laws, and inform analyses needed for fishery management. Notification on the survey has recently been sent to the Hawaii longline permit holders.

Martin said one of the high expenses is labor and asked Pan if she was prepared to collect information on expenses for bringing foreign crew to the fishery, noting that is a substantial amount of cost for the fleet. Pan said there is a question about initial cost of getting crew to work on the vessel. Martin added that there is a need for discussion on lost fishing time associated with a vessel going to pick up crew, which can include 30 days of transit time with no fishing operations. Martin said there is no commercial service that can bring crew to Honolulu.

Hurd asked when the data or information can be made public. Pan said this report will be made available with non-confidential data, including averages over time.

## **8. Update on MHI Small-Boat Fishery Plans**

Council staff provided an update on the Council's plan to work with the State of Hawaii and PIFSC to address small boat data gaps as IDed in Roy Morioka's presentation to the Non-Commercial Fisheries Advisory Committee. Funds to support this effort are being pursued through PIFSC. Council staff will update the FIAC as the plans are developed. The Council and PIFSC staff may need support as public scoping meetings are planned and held throughout the Main Hawaiian Islands.

## **9. Report out on Shortline/Seamount Fisheries**

Jason Helyer provided a presentation on the data and fishery on seamounts, including catch and effort of shortline and handline fisheries. Shortline is defined as a fishing using horizontal mainline, less than or equal to one nautical mile in length and suspended from the ocean surface with floats from which leaders with baited hooks are suspended. Shortline gear started being recorded in the CML database in 2002. Participation is low, 5-16 fishers annually reporting shortline effort. Landings have been between 50,000-300,000 lbs, with recent uptick since 2016 to current. In general there is difference in offshore fleet that use shortline and inshore. In earlier years, there were decent number of fishers deploying shortline in nearshore (0-20nm), with number of trips increasing in more recent years. Majority of the effort occurring in offshore fleet are by a small number of fishers. In terms of catch, nearshore fleet is catching mostly YFT, whereas offshore fleet is reporting mostly BET and YFT. In the nearshore fleet, shortline gear is used exclusively and trips are usually single days, whereas in the offshore fleet, multiple gears are used with shortline accounting for roughly half of the catch and trip length typically being multi-days.

The offshore tuna handline fishery targets juvenile tuna at seamounts and weather buoys. They use a combination of hybrid (palu ahi, ika shibi & danglers) and shortline gear. There is uncertainty in gear types used due to the lack of appropriate gear category in the CML reporting form. Helyer provided a summary of the catch and effort data for the cross seamount fishery, with recent catch primarily

dominated by bigeye tuna.

Kenton Geer provided his perspectives on the shortline fishery, noting that in the 20 years he has fished using shortline gear, he has not had interactions with marine mammals, sea turtles or seabirds. He indicated that someone had previously contacted him about putting cameras on the gear, but he told them that he would not be the right person for the project because he has not caught any protected species in his experience. Geer discussed the benefit of using shortline gear in terms of the high quality nature of fish caught, noting that buyers prefer shortline fish compared to handline fishery due to the quality. He suggested promoting shortline fishing rather than regulating it to provide a benefit to the market.

Martin described that in the late 80's, there was a developing swordfish fishery that used shortline gear nearshore within 12 miles, noting that could provide additional opportunity for fishery development. He also noted ongoing development of buoy gear targeting swordfish in coastal waters of West Coast and East Coast.

In response to a FIAC member question about the depth of gear on shortline gear, Geer indicated that some of that information is proprietary, but shared that only about two baskets of 13-19 hooks can be set for less than one mile of mainline. The belly of the line (i.e., deepest part of the basket) would be at about 135-150 fathoms once the gear settles (which takes about 30 minutes). He would normally set much less than one mile because more hooks means more tangles, and also noted that he would usually soak gear much less than 4 hours to prevent tangles. He also shared that when tuna are at the surface, he will use shortline gear to catch tuna at the surface and let the fish dangle on the line at some depth (shallower than typical DSLL gear) to cool off the fish for about 2 hours to produce fish quality similar to that of normal shortline gear-caught fish.

FIAC members discussed the need for an updated fishery characterization, noting that it has been over a decade since the Council last produced a report on the shortline fishery. FIAC members agreed that shortline gear produces high quality fish similar to that of longline-caught fish, and discussed the potential for the shortline fishery to reinvigorate the dwindling local small boat fleet, potential for shortline-caught fish to fill in market gaps at the auction when longline catch is low, and interest in the gear type to be applied in the Marianas.

## **10. Exploratory Longline Fishing in the CNMI**

Council staff gave a brief discussion on plausible options for exploratory longline fishing in the CNMI under a new administration. This may entail foreign fishing, which could be joint ventures or Pacific Insular Area Fishery Agreement (PIAFA). Council staff will discuss needs and tradeoffs. Council staff will be in CNMI in March for the Council meeting which will provide further opportunity to explore this topic.

Guerrero said he was looking forward to discussing further next month. There could be a lot of interest, especially with the pandemic fading and tourism starting to pick up, leading to increased demand for fish. Most tourism is coming from Korea and some from Japan. Bottomfish supply cannot keep up with demand. Weather and currents have been different the past year and many of the local fishermen are staying close to shore. Gas prices are still high (\$5/gallon) and diesel even higher (over

\$6/gallon)

## **11. False Killer Whale Take Reduction Team**

Council staff provided a brief background on the False Killer Whale Take Reduction Plan (FKWTRP) process and the status of developing potential modification of measures under the FKWTRP to reduce interactions in the Hawaii deep-set longline fishery. The Take Reduction Team (TRT) met in November 2022 to review and consider implications of latest data and studies related to false killer whale interactions, assess effectiveness of current FKWTRP and brainstorm potential management and other measures, and identify additional data and analysis needed to support follow-up TRT discussions. Potential changes discussed include modification of the weak hook measure (strengthening branch line and/or using weaker hook), development of a combined fighting line and cutter device to improve potential for straightening weak hook and associated handling, improvements handling guidelines and training, modification of the Southern Exclusion Zone, development of depredation deterrents, effort controls, and implementation of electronic monitoring. The TRT formed a number of work teams to further explore key issues in advance of the next meeting in late March 2023, where the TRT is expected to reach consensus on recommendations to modify the FKWTRP. In addition to measures that would apply to the longline fishery, some TRT members have expressed concern about the potential impacts to FKWs from shortline gear, and the work team has discussed inviting shortline fishery representatives to the March 2023 meeting. The FIAC was asked to provide preliminary input on these topics at this meeting, and will continue the discussion at the joint meeting with the Hawaii and American Samoa Advisory Panels on March 16.

Kingma provided additional background on the industry-led development of a fighting line device that would slip over the weight on the branch line near the hook to increase the chances of straightening the hook. The device addresses the safety issues associated with the weak hook strategy, which has only been successful in about 8% of the interactions. If hook straightening does not work, the device would allow for easier cutting of the line below the weight. If the false killer whale is only hooked in the lip, the interaction may be categorized as a non-serious injury if trailing line is removed.

Geer said that concerns about shortline fishing comes up every 5-10 years, and that he has been offering to take an observer on his trips so that misconceptions about the fishery can be dispelled but no one has taken him up on the offer. FIAC members suggested Geer attend the March FKWTRT meeting.

## **12. Status of Deepset & American Samoa Longline Biological Opinions**

Council staff provided a brief background and update on the status of the Hawaii deep-set and American Samoa longline draft biological opinions (BiOps). The Council is expected to receive a draft BiOp for review prior to the SSC meeting (March 14-16). To provide opportunity for FIAC to weigh in on the draft BiOp review, the FIAC will reconvene jointly with the Hawaii and American Samoa Advisory Panels on Thursday, March 16 from 5-7pm (HST) virtually.

### **13. Other Issues**

Council staff will discuss the National Seafood Strategy. The comment period ends March 16 for the public to provide their views. Council staff will provide a letter on this. Schade offered to provide some ideas and thoughts as well.

Regarding the Young Fisherman's Development Act, Geer had been wanting to participate and have reached out, but with no response from the federal agency. Council staff also tried to help get some response for Geer, but to no avail.

The FIAC asked Council staff to put together a comment letter for the National Seafood Strategy, due March 16, 2023.

### **14. Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

### **15. Discussion and Recommendations**

- 1. Regarding Options for Multi-Year Territorial Bigeye Catch and Allocation Limits, the FIAC recommends the Council proceed with implementing Amendment 11, and recommends specifying a multi-year limit starting as early as 2024 with no catch limit for US Participating Territories and up to 2,000 mt allocation limit per territory.**
- 2. Regarding shortline fisheries, the FIAC recommends that members work with staff to develop a document characterizing the shortline fishery.**