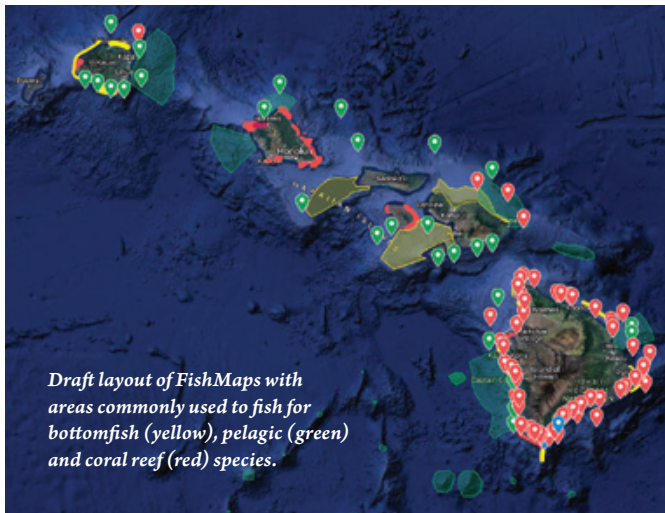


Hawai'i Advisory Panel Solicits Fishermen's Feedback



Draft layout of FishMaps with areas commonly used to fish for bottomfish (yellow), pelagic (green) and coral reef (red) species.

As COVID-19 restrictions have eased, in-person fishing tournaments in Hawai'i have started up again. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's Hawai'i Advisory Panel (AP) took advantage of this and developed a brief voluntary anonymous survey to take the pulse of the fishing community. Until mid-November 2022, there have been 37 responses (summarized below) gathered on Maui and the Big Island. Information was gathered on a range of topics including fishing ko'a, cultural take of honu (Hawaiian green sea turtle), fishing and access for the proposed Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) national marine sanctuary, fishermen observations, data collection and other fishery issues.

With new ocean spatial management actions and development on the horizon potentially further closing off areas to fishing, the Hawai'i AP launched a participatory mapping project called "FishMaps" to characterize Hawai'i's fisheries. The purpose was to document fishing ko'a (coral or traditional fishing areas) and other known fishing areas so that managers, developers and government agencies are alerted to the need to consult with fishermen. When asked on the survey, 84% of the participants said they are willing to share general information on their fishing grounds for this purpose. The best way to protect their fishing ko'a is by respecting it by leaving it alone (no development) and through proper conservation and management (52%), by not tracking the area and not telling others (28%), or through size limits, more fish aggregating devices (FADs) and better enforcement (20%).

In light of the Native Hawaiian Gathering Rights Association's (NHGRA) call for a cultural take of honu, participants were asked about perceived green sea turtle population changes during their lifetime, and reasons to allow harvest (if any). The majority (73%) said they had observed an increase in the number of turtles, while 27% observed a decrease or no change. The AP was surprised to see that more than three out of four respondents said that people should not be allowed to harvest green sea turtles, while 73% said harvest should be allowed for cultural purposes and home consumption.

NOAA is in the process of designating a national marine sanctuary in the NWHI and the Council has the opportunity to develop fishing regulations that comply with the goals and objectives of the sanctuary. Survey participants noted several types of fishing that should be allowed in the NWHI, including for cultural fishing practices (23%), customary exchange (34%), sustainable commercial fishing (9%), noncommercial (14%), recreational (3%) and sustenance fishing (3%). Some participants (14%) said that only research fishing should be allowed in the proposed sanctuary. In November 2022, the Council held public meetings in Hawai'i to review fishing regulations for the NWHI Monument Expansion Area, adjacent to the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument ("Fishing for Information on Regulations in the NWHI", page 1).

The Hawai'i AP recognizes that the Council is required to manage fisheries based on the best scientific information available, but is often faced with not having a complete dataset. Commercial fishers in Hawai'i are required to report their catch, but noncommercial fishermen are not. Most respondents were commercial or part-time commercial fishers (65%), with the remainder composed of recreational, subsistence, or traditional fishermen. The vast majority (82%) said they participate in two or more types of fishing (trolling, bottomfishing, shore casting, or spearfishing). Regarding data collection, 76% of noncommercial participants said they do not report their catch through an app like the Lokahi fishing app or Fishbox, nor do they keep a record of their catch. The AP continues to work on ways to improve the fishery data streams so that the Council is able to make sound management decisions that benefit the different sectors.

While fishing data can quantify the amount of fish taken out of the ocean or how many people went fishing, it still may not explain why the data looks the way it does. The AP recognizes that fishers on the ocean can see what is happening at sea and they have valuable input to better explain the data, such as why fishers have not been fishing or why the catch of a species may be variable. The majority of the survey participants said they have observed a decrease in the quantity and size of their catch. They have also seen effects from climate change like increased storms and natural disasters. In addition to observations, participants also described problems they are facing such as a lack of FAD management, and issues with enforcement, boat ramp maintenance and under reporting. They saw a need to address unnecessary fishing regulations and enforce stricter penalties on those who break the law.

We are still looking for more people to participate in this voluntary survey. If you are interested, please go to <https://forms.gle/zuhbkzJridmR2c7F7>. Contact AP Chair Clay Tam (hifish06@yahoo.com), Hawai'i AP Vice Chair Gil Kualii (fisha808@gmail.com), or Council staff Zach Yamada (zach.yamada@wpcouncil.org) with questions. 🐟