



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Pelagic and International Standing Committee Meeting

Friday, September 15, 2023, 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. (HST);
8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. (ASST); 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. (EST)
Saturday, September 16, 2023, 5:00 a.m. – 7:00 a.m. (ChST)

Council Office

1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400
Honolulu, HI 96813

Meeting Report

Roll-call: Manny Duenas, Archie Soliai, Roger Dang, Sylvan Iglisomar, Peter Itibus (new member). Present in audience were Chelsa Muna, William Sword, Judith Guthertz. Absent was Sarah Malloy and Colin Brinkman.

1. Hawaii and American Samoa Longline Fishery Updates

Russel Ito, PIFSC, will present on the fishery performance (catch and effort) of the Hawaii deep-set and shallow set longline fisheries and American Samoa through the first half of 2023. During the pandemic, swordfish boats transitioned as soon as they could out of the shallow-set sector. There were more shallow-set trips in the first half of 2023 than in the previous year. Slightly less deep-set effort this year. There was less effort this year so far inside the US EEZ around Hawaii. Total effort has gradually increased. The Standing Committee asked about the declines in the second quarter of the year, especially during the pandemic. 2023 is pretty close to 'pre-Covid' market conditions. An SSC member asked how this information can be verified with electronic monitoring. Slight decrease in yellowfin CPUE was observed, although long-term it has been stable. Bigeye tuna CPUE has gradually declined over the past decade. Swordfish CPUE has been stable over the past decade with seasonal variability. A member asked if striped marlin is still a concern. Ito went over market changes and patterns, including some increase in bluefin tuna catch in the Hawaii fishery.

American Samoa has less catch and effort, although catch rates have increased. Decreased catch and effort is likely due to fewer vessels participating - declining from 11 to 8.

2. 2024 US Territorial Bigeye Tuna Catch Limit and Allocation Specification (Action Item)

Council staff presented on specifications of longline bigeye tuna catch limits for U.S. Participating Territories and allocation with U.S. longline vessels. At its September 2023 meeting, the Council will consider taking final action on the specification of the 2024 U.S. territorial bigeye longline limits for American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI. The Council will also consider limits on the amount of catch

that could be transferred under specified fishing agreements by the U.S. Participating Territories to vessels permitted under the Pelagic FEP.

Members supported option for continuing the status quo option for territorial agreements.

3. Scenarios for Implementing Electronic Monitoring in Western Pacific Longline Fisheries

Council staff presented on goals and objectives of a pre-implementation plan for electronic monitoring (EM) in Pacific Island fisheries. Discussed were benefits and drawbacks of implementing EM as a priority in Hawaii (deep-set and shallow-set sectors) and American Samoa under key monitoring objectives. These objectives include a) protected species monitoring and estimation, b) retained catch monitoring, and c) discard monitoring. For executing a pre-implementation EM program, the Council and its advisory bodies may recommend and prioritize: (1) region, American Samoa and/or Hawaii; (2) fishery sector(s), deep-set and/or shallow-set; and (3) overarching monitoring goals, with primary and possibly secondary monitoring objectives. The monitoring goals and objectives will frame a ‘purpose and need’ for Council action in the future. The SSC may also provide guidance on what information is needed from a pre-implementation program to inform a future decision to implement EM in the U.S. longline fisheries in the PIR.

A member noted that EM can be scaled down to local island fisheries and request that these technologies be implemented in dockside fisheries using photos of catch.

4. Pacific Remote Island Areas Proposed Sanctuary Updates

The Council has existing fishing regulations for the Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIA) included in its PRIA Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP). These include requirements for permits and reporting, gear restrictions, vessel limits, etc. There are also additional fishing regulations for the PRI Marine National Monument (PRIMNM) that prohibit commercial fishing within 0-50 miles around Howland/Baker/Jarvis Islands and Palmyra Atoll, and 0-200 around Johnston Atoll, Wake Island, and Kingman Reef. These areas also permit non-commercial and recreational fishing. Interactions with protected species are well below ESA limits

SC members discussed if the existing fishing regulations are sufficient to meeting goals and objectives of the sanctuary and agreed that they are. An SC member noted that CNMI has been removed from consideration for an expanded National Marine Sanctuary, however, when it asked to be removed it was not met with a reply. However, when an NGO communicated with the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, it did get a reply. The reasoning for the lack of response to the territory but for the NGO, was that the NGO was the petitioner for the proposed sanctuary.

The Executive Director stated that NOAA is the scientific agency and should have vetted the proposal. Under the MSA, there are measurable objectives and goals. The goals and objectives did not have measurable benchmarks. There will be an oversight committee meeting on Monuments and Sanctuaries the following week. The meeting in American Samoa displayed a lack of coordination with scientific bodies, the territories, and stakeholders.

A SC member noted that the committee

5. Updates from the U.S. Department of State

There is no presentation

6. 19th Scientific Committee of the WCPFC

Council staff will present on outcomes of this meeting and implications on management

7. Issues Leading into US Permanent Advisory Committee to WCPFC

Council staff went over the upcoming tropical tuna workshops and timelines with the WCPFC Permanent Advisory Committee to be held October 1 and

8. Advisory Group Report and Recommendations

Council staff read off recommendations from the other advisory groups

7. Other Business

There were no other items discussed

8. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

9. Discussion and Recommendations

Regarding BET Specifications for 2024:

The Standing Committee recommends that the Council proceed with its previous specification of a 2,000 metric ton catch limit for each Participating Territory, of which each Territory may allocate up to 1,500 mt to U.S. longline vessels, but with total transfers not to exceed 3000 mt.

Regarding the Proposed PRI National Marine Sanctuary:

The Standing Committee agrees w/the SSC that existing fishing regulations are sufficient to meet the goals and objectives of the proposed PRI national marine sanctuary and are the best practices for fisheries in the Pacific. Based on scientific reports from the NMFS PIFSC, there appears to be no additional conservation benefits by designating a sanctuary over the current monument nor extending the monument to the full extent of the PRI EEZ. Therefore, the Standing Committee recommends that the Council recommend that no additional regulations are needed or necessary for the proposed PRI sanctuary.

Regarding Electronic Monitoring in Pacific Island fisheries:

The Standing Committee recommends that the Council proceed with a pre-implementation program and prioritize Hawaii longline fisheries, with hybridized approach between sectors. The primary goal should be for monitoring protected species with a secondary goal of estimating discards. The Standing Committee also recommends the Council and NMFS work to secure funding for electronic monitoring.