



DRAFT Report of the Hawaii Archipelago Advisory Panel Meeting

Friday, June 7, 2024

9 a.m. – 1 p.m. (HST)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Gil Kualii, Hawaii and PRIA Advisory Panel (AP) Vice Chair opened the meeting at 9:10 a.m. AP members in attendance included Abraham Apilado, Len Nakano, Nathan Tsao, Nathan Abe and Carrie Johnston. AP members Clay Tam, Eddie Ebisui, Amanda Padilla, and Khang Dang were excused.

Others in attendance included Zach Yamada, Joshua DeMello, Asuka Ishizaki, Mark Mitsuyasu (Council Staff), Adam Ayers (PIFSC), Domingo Ochavillo (AS Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources [DMWR]), Mattias Namur, and Roy Morioka.

2. Review of the Last AP Recommendations and Meeting

Zach Yamada, Council staff, provided a review of the last Joint Advisory Committee meeting held on May 19, 2024.

An AP member said the breakout sessions were well received and organized to the topic to allow members to speak.

3. Feedback from the Fleet

AP members provided their fisher observations from January to June 2024.

In Hilo, an AP member reported that there were plans to dredge the harbor in June 2024. Due to the status of the harbor, Hilo Trollers have canceled their 2024 tournament schedule to be fair to the small and bigger boats that may not be able to transit in and out of the harbor. He said this would have been the 50th anniversary of Hilo Trollers and would postpone the celebration to 2025. Fishers in Hilo reported that the ahi and ono were biting, and Suisan Fish Market has been limiting the amount of fish they could receive to prevent flooding. Sales of fish have been low, causing fishers to sell their fish on the roadside. Fishers reported that they have been catching ahi up to 190 to 200 pounds, although the ika shibit bite has been low. On Tokunaga's social media, they report that a fisher caught a 25 lb ahi with a net closer to shore. He reported that an East Hawaii fishing group was formed to create an open dialogue with the goal of representing and providing a voice on local fishery issues.

On Kauai, the AP reported that 2024 has been the best trolling year, with fishers and charters having up to 20 ono and mahimahi bites in a single fishing trip. The ahi bite has been steady on the east, west, and south sides with blind strikes with hours of boredom, with moments of chaos. Fish size has been better, with reports of ahi at 160 pounds, gill and gutted. On the North shore, fishers said the ahi were more aggressive by swallowing the whole lure and catching them at shallower depths. They reported that the ahi was spawning with gonads the size of two one-liter soda bottles. There has also been a steady bite of striped marlin and hebi. Gas prices on Kauai were at \$6.27/gallon, with three new state fish aggregating devices (FADs) not holding fish. The

uku were coming around at 20 pounds with a steady kahala bite nearshore. Regarding the uku catch, there was one fisher who had been pulling substantial numbers over a short amount of time. He said that the uku were spawning with sacks full of eggs. Regarding infrastructure, the State was working on providing a second access point for fishers higher up on the stream with funds provided by a doner to post no-swimming signs at the Anini boat ramp. At the Port Allen ramp, the septic waste machine was inoperable for boaters to dispose of their waste. Regarding participation, there have been more boats at the harbor, with old-timers taking younger kids fishing. Regarding thrill craft interactions with divers, there has been an increased amount of boats in known diving areas, and there was a need to prevent collisions in areas closer to shore. In Kekaha, the Kekaha Boating Association started a group of fishers to advocate for the harbor and discuss issues between boaters and charter operators.

In Kona, fishers reported there were a lot of otaru around at an average of 25 pounds and the uku bite was good in April nearshore. The ahi bite has slowed down with bites closer to shore and outside on the grounds. The palu ahi fishers caught ahi between 80 to 90 pounds. From March to April, fishers reported an increase in small marlins, around 200 pounds on average. Regarding infrastructure, the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) agents were turning boaters away that had out of date license plates and trailers that were not registered. An AP member reported that there were two aquaculture companies that were growing limu kohu for cattle emission mitigation, and they have plans to upscale their operations to 15 to 20-acre lots to sell their products to the cattle industry based on their agreements.

Regarding fish markets, the AP discussed the difficulty of flooding their local fish markets when the fish are biting. They said there was a need to promote fresh local fish and level the playing field when Oahu markets are selling ono at \$6.99/lb compared to lower prices on the neighboring islands.

4. Council Fisheries Issues

A. 2023 Annual SAFE Report - Hawaii

Thomas Remington, Council Contractor, presented the 2023 fishery highlights from the archipelagic and pelagic report for Hawaii.

In the Deep-7 bottomfish fishery, it was a good year for opakapaka, and there was an increase in catch to just over 197,000 lb, the highest seen since 2018, associated with increased CPUE. However, the uku fishery experienced continued declines in catch and effort, perhaps due to fishers not targeting them as frequently. There were upticks in catch for both Kona crab and deepwater shrimp, and the Kona crab fishery may experience increased catch in future years associated with the State of Hawaii revising its regulations to allow the take of female Kona crab. Priority ecosystem component species generally saw decreased catch from 2022 to 2023 except for lobster, kumu, and he'e. After being included for the first time last year, non-commercial data derived from the Hawaii Marine Recreational Fishing Survey (HMRFS) have been removed from the report as fishery scientists and managers continue to work with the State and fishermen to improve these data. The Hawaii deep-set longline fishery had increased catch, but other Hawaii pelagic fisheries experienced decreases. These fisheries had substantially decreased revenue due to a decline in average fish price per pound for pelagics. Socioeconomic data indicated stable fuel prices and protected species reviews showed no notable increases in interactions. Oceanic and climate indicators showed slight changes, with a shift from La Niña to

El Niño and increased sea surface temperatures, though these increased temperatures are not likely to be associated with coral bleaching or mortality.

An AP member said that fishing is an art and there were different stages of fishing. He said that uku was considered an advanced fishery since there has been less fishers chasing uku. The AP said it was important to monitor opelu and aku since these are indicator species for the amount of food available at the frontal zones. To understand the fishery, there is a need to follow the food. Regarding the decrease in fishing participation, he said one cannot simply build a fisher, ones needs to be born a fisher. Regarding locality of fishing spots on each of the islands, fishers know that certain species of fish prefer one side of the island compared to another. The AP discussed that fishing can create revenue for the people and could create a steady supply of food for the people.

An AP member asked why the recreational data from the HMRFS was not included in the Annual SAFE Report and asked for clarification on the management of uku. Remington said the uku fishery is managed through coordinated management between federal and state agencies by tracking the annual catch through the CML report and HMRFS estimates. There is uncertainty with the expansion model of the HMRFS data and the SAFE report will continue to track the catch. There is ongoing work to lower the amount of uncertainty, so the data from the HMRFS data could better represent the fishery. An AP member said the Council and State should consider the use of slot limits that are used in fisheries on the East Coast.

B. Options for Specifying ACL for 2024-2027

Zach Yamada, Council staff, provided a report on the results of the P* and SEEM working grup meetings on May 7 and presented options for specifying annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) for the MHI Deep 7 bottomfish fishery for fishing years 2024-2025 to 2026-2027. The best scientific information available is the 2024 benchmark assessment with catch projections to 2029. The P* and SEEM working groups evaluated the scientific uncertainty and quantified risks levels for the SSC and Council to consider. The options presented were: 1) No action; 2) Status quo, specify ACL of 492,000 lbs based on the 2021 assessment; 3) specify ACLs based on the results of the 2024 P* and SEEM analysis and benchmark assessment at 39% risk of overfishing at 493,000 lbs for fishing years 2024 to 2027; or 4) Specify ACLs lower than the results of the 2024 P* and SEEM and assessment. Options for accountability measures include: implement in-season monitoring using the Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources commercial marine license report; implement a single year post sason overage adjustment; and or specify the ACL to the acceptable biological catch and specify an annual catch target equal to the P* and SEEM analysis.

An AP member said the participants of the P* and SEEM working groups should also participate in the PIFSC research track project to understand how they could contribute to the next stock assessment.

An AP member said management should put the ecosystem into consideration for management. Under the current management, it is promoting that if the fish is not red then it is not good. There is a need to utilize a structure to utilize everything that may be caught by the fishery that would include kahala. He said that kahala is highly competitive with the Deep 7 species and if the fishery continues on promoting red fish, then it could lead to the downfall of the fishery.

An AP member asked if management's stance is to increase bottomfishing. Council staff said the Council continues to advocate for fishing to be in compliance with the MSA National Standard 1 to manage fishing to the maximum sustainable yield.

Another member said the Council has done a good job in maximizing fishing and not restricting fishing access. The AP discussed that there was a need to support the economy and ecology of the fishery to ensure its sustainability. Weather is an important factor for the bottomfish fishery, and to sustain a good price the fishery needs to remain consistent in providing fresh local fish to the market. With the close of the Northwest Hawaiian Islands (NWHI), the Deep 7 fishery in the MHI has not been able to fill in the gap that the NWHI bottomfish fishery provided.

The AP said that based on the historical data, there was no need for a more conservative approach with the use of an ACT and agreed that their preferred alternative was Option 3.

Regarding the MHI Deep 7 bottomfish fishery, the Hawaii AP recommends the Council take initial action on option 3 to specify ACLs based on the P* and SEEM analysis at 39% risk of overfishing at a catch level of 493,000 lb for 2024-2027 with accountability measures to include in-season monitoring and a single year post-season overage adjustment. The AP notes the fishery has historically operated below the proposed ACL and there is no need for additional conservative measures through the implementation of an ACT.

C. Hawaii Small-boat Fisheries Project Update

Roy Morioka, Council contractor, provided an update on a project to engage the Hawaii small-boat fishing community. Small-boat fisheries in Hawaii include fishers that use non-longline gears to target uku, bottomfish, Kona crab, deepwater shrimp, and pelagic species. With funding from NMFS PIFSC, the Council coordinated a small-boat working group to secure commitments from NMFS PIFSC, PIRO, OLE, DAR, DOCARE, HFACT, and PIFG to engage Hawaii's small-boat fishing community to establish relationships and build trust. Eight meetings were held with open-house informational booths, presentations, and discussions. Morioka provided the results of the discussions with the community and potential issues for the AP to discuss.

The AP thanked Roy for his effort and for coordinating the meetings around Hawaii. They appreciated the structure and process of the meeting and emphasized the need to focus on engaging the community and the next generation of fishers. The small boat fishers are the backbone of the fishery and the AP said the next rounds of meetings could focus on pathways financial security that could include the formation of a fishers cooperative to allow the fishers to sell their fish at a liveable wage and the impacts from shark depredation. Morioka stressed the need for better communication with the fishing community to address issues like inconsistent fish supply and the impact of non-commercial fishers on commercial operations.

An AP member said that following the POP Fishing Expo in May, outreach to women small-boat owners was needed. Future outreach should be more gender-aware, and educational efforts should include new boat owners. Morioka emphasized the importance of maintaining a consistent presence in the community through various agencies and organizations to facilitate access to information and resources.

The AP asked if there was a discussion on implementing a non-commercial fishing permit to create a complete data set for the fishery. Morioka said that discussion did not happen during these initial meetings. The Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) may be considering a registry with reporting requirements. There are registries that exist including the DOBOR vessel registry and the Deep 7 Bottomfish registry. He said that this is an important subject going forward.

D. Status of PRIA and NWHI Sanctuary Proposal

Joshua DeMello, Council staff provided the status of the PRIA and Northwest Hawaiian Island proposed sanctuaries. The draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and management plan for the proposed Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuary was released on March 1, 2024 with a deadline for comments by May 7, 2024. During this time, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) held public hearing sessions around the state to collect comments from the public on the draft EIS. Council staff attended each of these public hearings and presented a poster on the different alternatives as well as the Council's fishing recommendations. ONMS is reviewing comments and working on final documents in Summer 2024. Once completed, NOAA will review and make a final determination if a sanctuary designation is appropriate.

The Pacific Remote Islands is undergoing the designation process for a National Marine Sanctuary. The area was nominated by the Pacific Remote Islands Coalition and President Biden issued a Presidential Memorandum (March 24, 2023) directing the Secretary of Commerce to consider initiating the designation process. A Notice of Intent to conduct scoping in preparation to draft an EIS was issued on April 17, 2023 with scoping meetings held in Hawaii, CNMI, Guam, American Samoa, and online. A separate workshop was held in American Samoa in September 2023 to gather additional information on impacts to American Samoa. Since then, there has been no known movement on the proposed sanctuary, although NOAA has been working to provide briefings to the White House on this issue. Draft documents were expected for public comment in spring 2024 but that has yet to occur.

There was no discussion.

E. US Stakeholder Engagement on North Pacific Striped Marlin Rebuilding Plan

Mark Fitchett, Council staff, provided a review of the US stakeholder engagement on the North Pacific Striped Marlin and development of options for the Rebuilding Plan. On April 8, 2024, several stakeholders emphasized the importance of scenarios that account for unreported discards and disparities in bycatch reporting among WCPFC members. Concerns were raised regarding the effectiveness of managing the stock solely through a total allowable catch level, with calls for consideration of complementary measures such as circle hooks, size limits, and modifications to longline gear. Additionally, participants highlighted the need for greater equity in catch reporting, monitoring, and observer coverage across member states. The outreach also addressed science-focused concerns, including uncertainties in stock boundaries, stock mixing, and variations in life history characteristics. Participants noted observations of mixing between WCNPO and other Pacific stocks and questioned the adequacy of current stock boundaries. The stock status of North Pacific striped marlin may change with a new memo from PIFSC to PIRO indicating that the stock status determination criteria under the Pelagic FEP renders the stock not overfished.

The AP said that striped marlin is not commonly caught by the small boat fishery. Striped marlin is a small component of the fishery, and Hawaii is the only State that retains marlins for sale. Another member said on the East Coast, there has been an increase of marlins retained and there are moratoriums being lifted from location to location. An AP member said the last time he caught a striped marlin was in 2004.

An AP member said that humans are the only species that will live in an area where it is unsuitable compared to fish that will move with the bait. He said that as a member of the community, there is a need to engage the community better to ensure that their voices are heard. There should be a focus on keeping fishing access open compared to closing areas off to fishers.

5. Biological Opinion Implementation Working Group Reports

Council staff provided an overview of the Biological Opinion (BiOp) Reasonable and Prudent Measure (RPM) Implementation Working Group (WG) reports. The Council established the BiOp RPM Working Group at its 197th meeting in December 2023 to facilitate coordination for implementing the RPM Terms and Conditions (T&C) from the Hawaii deep-set longline (DSL) and American Samoa Longline (ASLL) BiOps, issued in May 2023. The BiOp includes requirements to implement crew training in the DSL and ASLL fisheries within two years, as well as a requirement to provide reliable observer coverage for estimating the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) insular false killer whale (IFKW) interactions with the Hawaii DSL vessels in the area of overlap within three years.

For the RPM T&C regarding crew training, a pilot training program was initiated in April 2024. The WG identified a list of issues for further consideration in developing a regulatory requirement for crew training, including crew certification, certification duration, training frequency, and methods to demonstrate compliance with the crew training requirement. The WG also presented a draft regulatory timeline for Council action, with final action targeted for June 2024.

For the RPM T&C regarding the MHI IFKW overlap area, the WG determined that 90% observer coverage would be needed to reliably estimate MHI IFKW interactions in the overlap area with a CV >30%, which is below the current coverage rate. The WG considered potential pathways for increasing observer coverage either through human observers or electronic monitoring, as well as additional considerations for research needs and spatial management.

An AP member said the overall interaction was very little. He said they are very smart and will eat everything to the lip. There is not enough information and there should be an effort to scrub the effort.

Regarding the Biological Opinion Implementation working group report on the insular false killer whale overlap area the Hawaii AP recommends that the Council take no action, noting that available information do not justify resources to increase observer coverage in the overlap area.

6. Electronic Technologies Steering Committee Updates

Mark Fitchett, Council staff presented an update on the pre-implementation of electronic monitoring (EM) in Hawaii longline fisheries. Delays in the first phase have arisen due to funding shortfalls and delays. The first phase initially was to review the 20 vessels with EM systems in the first year and to begin July 2024. However, that phase may change based on resources. A reduction in human observer coverage is starting in 2024 from 20% to 13%. Further reductions are imminent and thus, EM will be needed to fulfill some monitoring obligations of human observers. The ETSC presented the sampling efforts of observers and which those efforts EM can fulfill. In order for EM to be used to monitor statutory requirements while it is phased in and while it is a voluntary program, the Council will need to explore regulatory mechanisms, utility of experimental fishing permits, and outlining how EM can supplement human observer monitoring.

An AP member said the challenges identified like cost, regulatory review and phasing in EM needs to be explored. The AP acknowledged that there were issues with cost and if there is an effort to phase in EM then managers need to make it fair and implement the device on all of the boats at once. There should be a pilot state and if it is made mandatory, the federal government should pay to buy and install the equipment.

Regarding Electronic Monitoring, the Hawaii AP recommends the Council directs staff to prepare a document outlining regulatory challenges and considerations on implementing electronic monitoring.

The AP also recommends that any mandatory implementation of EM for the fishery to be at no-cost to the industry.

7. Other Business

Next informal meeting for Friday, July 12 from 9a - 11a.

8. Public Comment

There were no requests for public comment.

9. Discussion and Recommendations

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Meeting was adjourned at 1:24 pm.