



## WPSAR Steering Committee Meeting Report

**Logistics:** The 2026 Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review (WPSAR) Steering Committee (SC) meeting was held on February 4, 2026 from 1:00-3:00 pm at the Honolulu Service Center, Pier 38 conference room.

**Attendees:** All three SC members were in attendance: Sarah Malloy (PIRO), Kitty Simonds (Council), Charles Littnan (PIFSC). The Coordinating Committee (Mark Fitchett, Marlowe Sabater, and Brett Schumacher) and other participants (Felipe Carvalho) were also present.

### Review of the WPSAR Schedule

American Samoa Bottomfish Management Unit Species (BMUS) update: The SC agreed to have the American Samoa BMUS update stock assessment ready by May 2026 for WPSAR review. The SC agreed that the terms of reference (ToR) will be reviewed by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) at the March 2026 meeting.

- The American Samoa BMUS update will be held in the first two weeks of April 2026. The Council recommended a revised list of species focusing on the deepwater snappers and the update will cover the new six species. The annual catch limits (ACLs) for the other species will be using the most recent benchmark assessment. The delivery of the assessment and review will be in May 2026 due to availability of the lead assessment scientist.

Main Hawaiian islands Deep 7 bottomfish complex update: The update is scheduled for December 2026 and the SSC will review the ToR during the September 2026 meeting cycle.

Guam BMUS benchmark assessment: The next Guam benchmark stock assessment needs to incorporate the last year of data in the bottomfish survey and thus needs to be held in 2028.

- While Guam data collection is progressing well, CNMI has experienced some delays in initiating data collection.

No other benchmark assessments planned for 2026: The Deep 7 research track will have a CIE review in 2027.

**New BMUS assessment framework + updates to WPSAR framework:** The SC agreed that no new changes to the WPSAR Policy are needed.

The SSC and Council endorsed this assessment framework in September 2025. The SC discussed the roles of the SSC members and chair, along with CIE reviewers. The framework developed by PIFSC for the SSC establishes a process to evaluate what level of assessment is required for the BMUS complex (i.e., a complex, sub-complex, or singles species, and determine which would be indicator species). This framework is part of the pre-assessment or a preparatory activity that will guide the development of the benchmark assessment. Since the BMUS assessment framework is applied to the pre-assessment phase, it does not affect the WPSAR framework and will not preclude the SSC member who participates in the pre-assessment preparatory work from chairing the WPSAR review panel.

### **Other Business**

- The SC discussed the need to work closer with CNMI and have discussions during the March 2026 Council meeting to reconcile some of the barriers and issues inhibiting data collection. The Stock Assessment Program noted that the greatest barrier to the fishery's status is the current data collection paradigm.
- Regarding the NMFS prioritization framework using risk and value, the SC can make decisions on stock assessment prioritization and periodization of stock assessments without a policy change.
- Regarding the MHI Bottomfish Deep 7 Research Track Assessment, the CIE will review the assessment in 2027 and 2029. The first module for CIE review will focus on non-commercial data incorporation. The following modules for CIE review include life history and other data, BFISH surveys, etc. The next module for review in 2029 will be decided by the fishing community, similar to the process in 2027.

### **Public Comment**

- There was no public comment.