Navigating the Waters

Community Voices from Hawai'i's Small-Boat Fisheries Meetings

BY THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

"Nuff burn rubbah, gotta get some traction!"

This sentiment, echoed by many participants at the Hawai'i small-boat fisheries meetings held across the state in April and May 2024, encapsulates the urgency felt by the local fishing community. While each meeting had its unique discussions and focused on different issues, a central concern emerged—the need to build trust between scientists, managers and the fishing community. Trust, they emphasized, is cultivated through consistent engagement and the reciprocal flow of information.

Across the Hawaiian Islands, these public meetings were designed to bridge the gap between the fishing community and those who manage the resources on which they depend. The gatherings, held on O'ahu, Kaua'i, Moloka'i, Hawai'i Island and Maui, provided a platform for participants to share their concerns, learn from experts and discuss the future of their fisheries.

A UNIFIED APPROACH TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Each of the eight meetings followed a consistent format designed to maximize interactions and understanding. The events featured informational booths from members of the Small-Boat Working Group and invited participants from organizations including the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, Pacific Islands Fisheries Group, the State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement (DOCARE) and Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR), NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center and Pacific Islands Regional Office, Poseidon Fisheries Research, Hawai'i Pacific University-Center for Marine Debris Research, Maui Cooperative Fishing Association, and the University of Hawai'i-Hawai'i Cooperative Fisheries Research Unit. These booths allowed community members to engage directly with science and agency representatives, learning more about their activities and having their questions answered in real-time.

The meetings kicked off with an icebreaker activity using the Kahoot! quiz platform, where participants answered questions about small-boat fisheries and contributed to a word cloud that captured their thoughts on fishing. The word "food" emerged as the most common response, highlighting the critical role that fishing plays in feeding the community. This interactive activity set the tone for the meetings, encouraging active participation rather than a passive, lecture-style format.

Presentations from the Council and DAR provided context on the roles and responsibilities of each agency, helping participants understand what was being asked of them and why their input was so important. The "meeting-in-the-round" setup, where everyone sat facing each other, fostered open dialogue and a sense of inclusivity.

O'AHU: STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND CULTURE

The meetings held in Kane'ohe and Honolulu had more than 30 participants, diving deep into discussions about the differences between federal and state management of fisheries. Central to these discussions was the federal mandate of using the best scientific information available (BSIA) and the tension between this requirement and cultural practices.

Participants stressed the importance of finding a balance between scientific data and cultural knowledge. They expressed concerns over the lack of information, particularly about imported seafood and noncommercial fishing. A significant sentiment was the fear that the more data they provided, the more they would lose access to their resources. This highlighted a critical need to build trust in how data is used, ensuring that it benefits, rather than penalizes, the community.

KAUA'I: THE STRUGGLE FOR ACCESS AND EQUITY

On Kaua'i, more than two dozen participants gathered to voice their frustrations with access issues. The safe, open areas for fishing, free from the constraints of protected species closures, privatized access points, tourists and the homeless, are increasingly rare.

The community emphasized that while each of these issues is problematic on its own, together they create a much larger crisis. They called for a fair exchange—if they are to provide valuable data, they should receive relief from these cumulative problems in return. Concerns also surfaced about protected species, with some advocating for a cultural harvest of green sea turtles and expressing skepticism about whether monk seals were naturally present on the island. The impact of increased fishing pressure since the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to crowded fishing spots and fluctuating market prices, was also a major topic of discussion.

MOLOKA'I: THE FORGOTTEN ISLAND

The Moloka'i meeting, though smaller in size with just over a dozen participants, was rich in focused discussions. A recurring theme was the sense of being overlooked or receiving inferior resources compared to other islands. The community expressed frustration with the State's fish aggregating devices (FADs), which they felt were poorly placed and short-lived.

The high costs associated with these devices, combined with the lack of convenient fishing methods like jet skis, were seen as significant barriers to successful fishing. Moloka'i's fishermen voiced a desire for equitable treatment and better resources, reflecting a long-standing concern that their island always seems to get the "leftovers" from the state.

HAWAI'I ISLAND: INTEGRATING ECOSYSTEM AND CULTURE IN FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Hawai'i Island hosted meetings in Hilo, Waimea and Kona, drawing more than 50 participants. These meetings covered most of the island, particularly its major boat-fishing ports and communities. A key discussion point was the importance of addressing ecosystem elements associated with fisheries, including habitat.

Participants argued that non-fishing impacts play a more significant role in the ecosystem and fish stocks than is often acknowledged. They called for a deeper understanding of how fisheries operate to improve the science used in stock assessments. Infrastructure challenges were also highlighted, with participants noting that while fish were plentiful, the lack of access for fishermen was a critical issue. The community voiced concerns about the disconnect between the culture of fishing and management practices, urging for a more integrated approach that respects and incorporates traditional knowledge.

MAUI: A CALL FOR INCENTIVES AND YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

The final meeting on Maui brought together about 20 participants, focusing on the benefits fishermen could receive from contributing data. There was a strong call for incentives and community give-back programs in exchange for data sharing.

Participants emphasized the need for scientists to observe the fishery firsthand to better understand how quantitative data reflects the reality of fishing operations. Validating this data to ensure it accurately represents the fishery was seen as crucial. The decline in full-time fisheries and the erosion of cultural and traditional values were also major concerns. With an aging fleet, there was a clear need for younger generations to become involved in the fisheries, ensuring that these traditions continue.

These meetings underscored the complex interplay between science, culture and community in managing fisheries. The voices of local fishermen and community members reflect a deep connection to their environment and a desire for a more balanced, respectful approach to fisheries management. As these discussions continue, it is essential that their concerns are not only heard but acted upon, ensuring a sustainable and culturally respectful future for Hawai'i's fisheries. The Council plans to hold engagement meetings with the community on specific issues later this year to "get traction" and start moving forward. For more information on these meetings and other issues facing Hawai'i's fishermen, check out www.wpcouncil.org.

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HISTORY OF PROTECTED SPECIES CONSERVATION
in US Western Pacific Fisheries

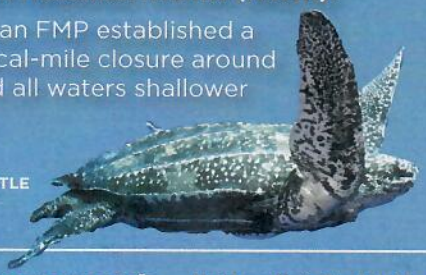
The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council implemented PROHIBITIONS ON DESTRUCTIVE GEARS throughout the region:

1986 Bottomfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) prohibited use of trawl nets, bottom-set gillnets, explosives and poisons.

1987 Pelagic FMP implemented a drift gillnet ban covering the entire 1.5 million square miles of US EEZ waters throughout the Western Pacific Region and ahead of the 1991 United Nations ban on large-scale drift gillnets on the high seas.

The Council implemented SPATIAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES in the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI):

1983 Crustacean FMP established a 20-nautical-mile closure around Laysan Island and all waters shallower than 10 fathoms.



LEATHERBACK TURTLE

1991 A 50-nautical-mile protected species zone around the NWHI was established under the Pelagic FMP to prevent longline fishery interactions with endangered Hawaiian monk seals.

LOGGERHEAD TURTLE

1992 A 25- to 75-nautical-mile longline exclusion zone around the MHI was established under the Pelagic FMP to prevent gear conflicts between longline vessels and other smaller fishing boats. The MHI longline exclusion zone eliminated any potential interactions between the long-line fishery and nearshore populations of sea turtles and marine mammals.

2001 Coral Reef Ecosystem FMP designated no-take and low-use marine protected areas in the NWHI and American Samoa.

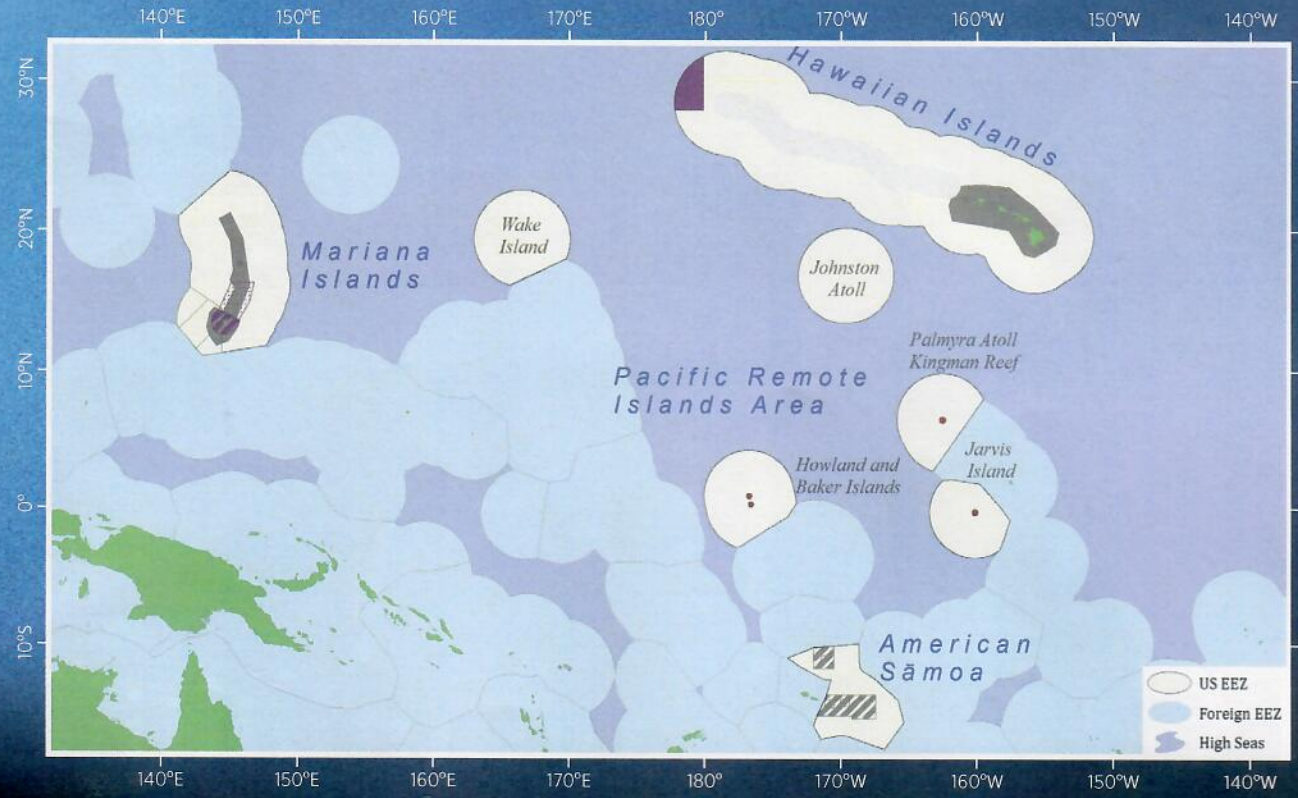
Compliance with spatial management zones in the Hawai'i longline fishery is monitored through a VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM.

Spatial Management Areas Established under Fishery Management Plans

Bottomfish Restrictions
- Bottomfish/Groundfish fishing prohibited
- Vessels ≥ 40 ft (opening pending)
- Vessels ≥ 50 ft

Pelagic Restrictions
- Longline Fishing Prohibited Area
- Large Vessel Prohibited Area
- NWHI Protected Species Zone

Other Restrictions
- Guam No-anchor Zone
- No-take MPAs



Spatial management measures implemented under the Council's Fishery Management Plans provide conservation benefits to protected species.

WESTERN PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

The Hawai'i longline fishery is considered a GOLD STANDARD in reducing impacts to protected species including sea turtles and seabirds and has implemented the following:

2001 Required using a suite of seabird bycatch mitigation measures since 2001, including **blue-dyed bait**, night setting, side-setting, weighted hooks and strategic offal discards, which are designed to keep seabirds away from baited hooks before they sink below the surface and out of reach. These measures enacted under the Pelagic FMP reduced interactions by over 90%.

2004 Pioneered the use of large circle hooks and fish bait in 2004 to reduce incidental interactions with sea turtles in the swordfish-targeting sector. These measures enacted under the Pelagic FMP reduced interactions by nearly 90%.

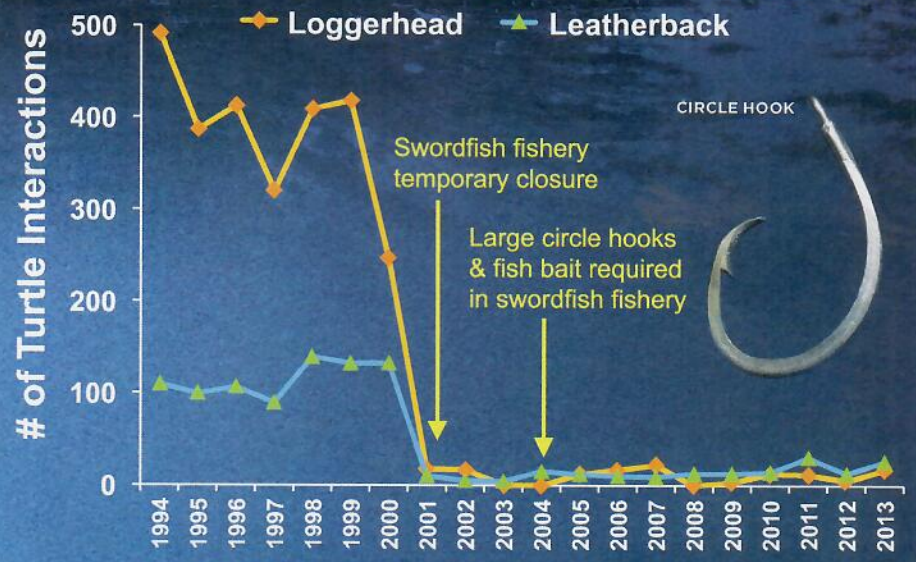
2013 Required the tuna-targeting sector to use circle hooks with a maximum wire diameter of 4.5 millimeters (0.18 inches) to reduce impacts to hooked false killer whales. This measure was enacted in 2013 under the Marine Mammal Protection Act False Killer Whale Take Reduction Plan.

The Hawai'i shallow-set swordfish sector is monitored with 100% federal observer coverage and the deep-set tuna sector at 20%. The international standard is 5% for all fisheries.

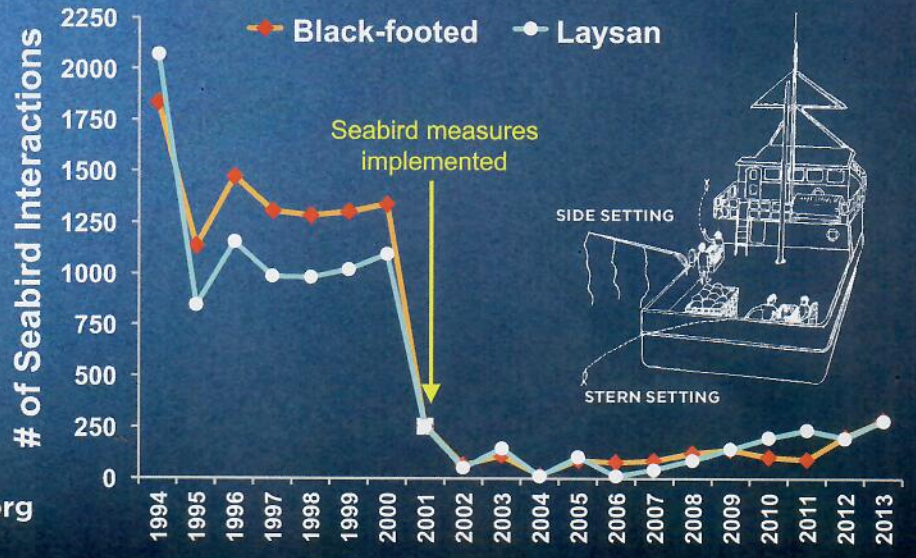
The American Samoa longline fishery is required to set hooks deeper than 100 meters (328 feet) to MITIGATE INTERACTIONS WITH GREEN SEA TURTLES. This measure was implemented under the Pelagic FMP in 2011. The American Samoa longline fishery is monitored with approximately 20% federal observer coverage.

Hawai'i and American Samoa longline vessels are required to carry TOOLS TO REMOVE FISHING GEAR from incidentally caught protected species, and owners and operators are required to attend annual PROTECTED SPECIES WORKSHOPS on how to handle and release animals to maximize their chance of surviving after their release.

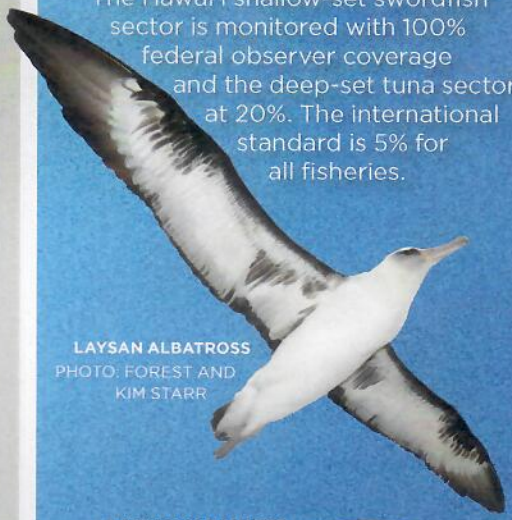
Total Sea Turtle Interactions Hawai'i Longline Fishery (Tuna and Swordfish)



Total Seabird Interactions Hawai'i Longline Fishery (Tuna and Swordfish)



Side setting illustration: Gilman et al., 2003.



LAYSAN ALBATROSS
PHOTO: FOREST AND KIM STARR

LAYSAN ALBATROSS & CHICK PHOTO: DAN CLARK/USFWS

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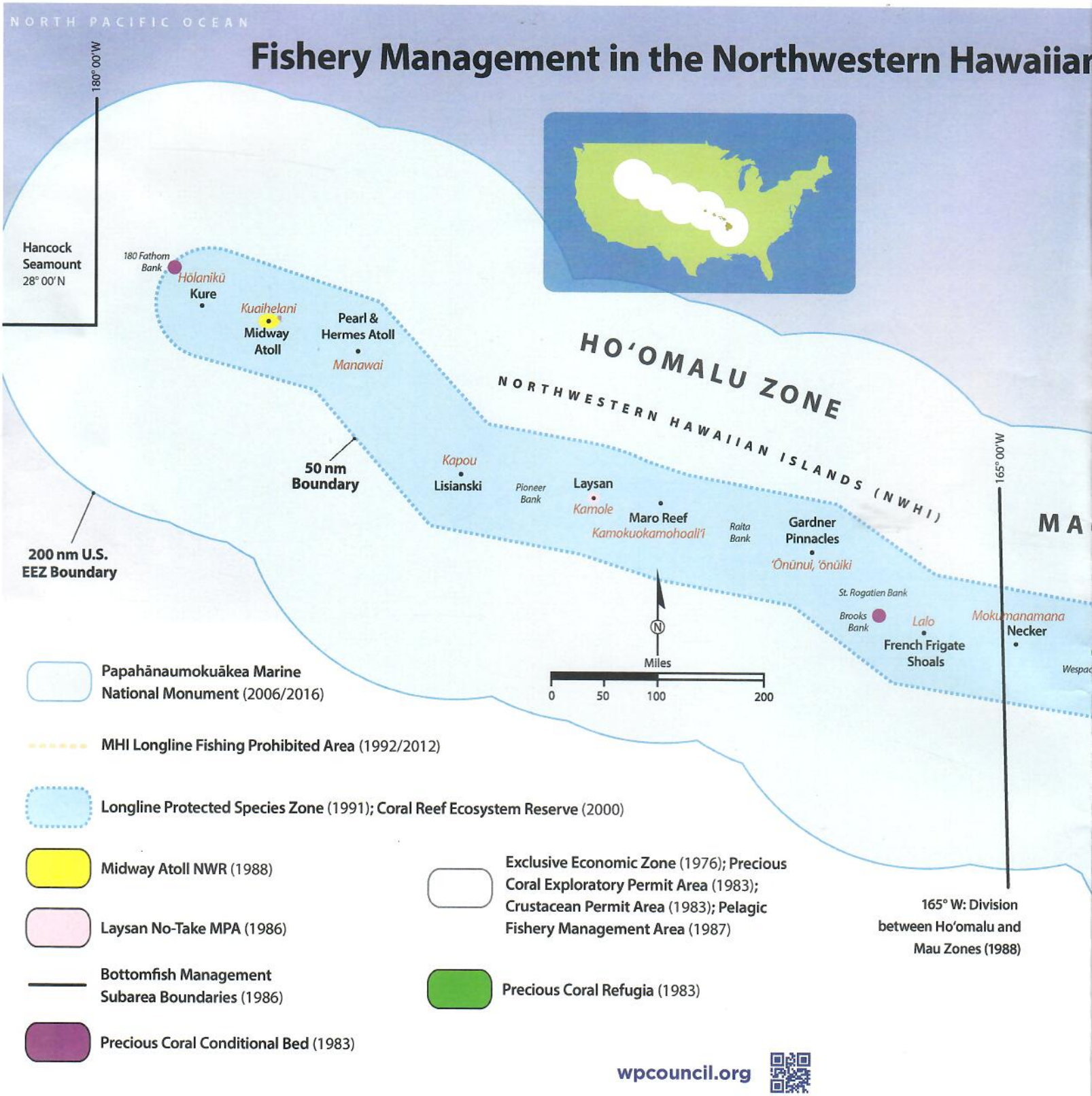
NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN
Fishery Management in the Northwestern Hawaiian
180° 00'W
Hancock Seamount 28° 00'N
180 Fathom Bank
Hōlanikū
Kure
Kuaihelani
Midway Atoll
Pearl & Hermes Atoll
Manawai
HO'OMALU ZONE
NORTHWESTERN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS (NWHI)
50 nm Boundary
200 nm U.S. EEZ Boundary
Kapou
Lisianski
Pioneer Bank
Laysan
Kamole
Maro Reef
Kamokuokamohoali'i
Raita Bank
Gardner Pinnacles
'Ōnūnui, 'ōnūiki
165° 00'W
MA
St. Rogatien Bank
Brooks Bank
Lalo
French Frigate Shoals
Mokumanamana
Necker
Wespac
N
Miles
0 50 100 200
Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (2006/2016)
MHI Longline Fishing Prohibited Area (1992/2012)
Longline Protected Species Zone (1991); Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve (2000)
Midway Atoll NWR (1988)
Laysan No-Take MPA (1986)
Bottomfish Management Subarea Boundaries (1986)
Precious Coral Conditional Bed (1983)
Exclusive Economic Zone (1976); Precious Coral Exploratory Permit Area (1983); Crustacean Permit Area (1983); Pelagic Fishery Management Area (1987)
Precious Coral Refugia (1983)
165° W: Division between Ho'omalu and Mau Zones (1988)
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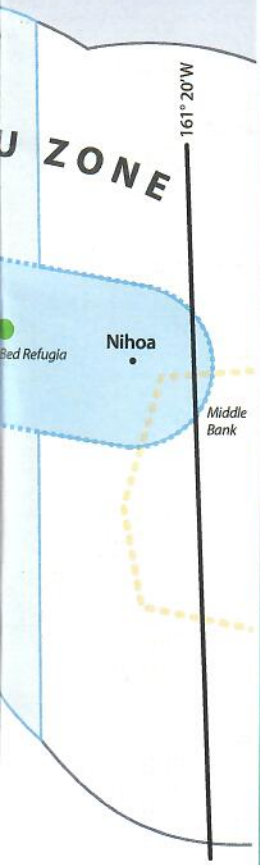
Islands

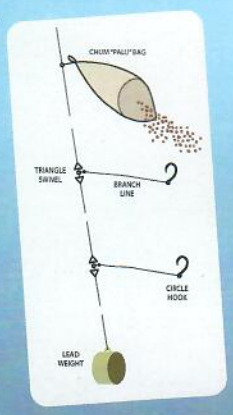


161° 20' W:
Division between NWHI and MHI (1986)
Division between Mau Zone and MHI (1988)

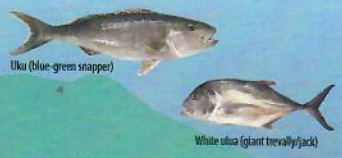
BOTTOM FISHING IN THE NWHI

SUSTAINABLY MANAGED FISHING • PERMITTED & REGULATED

Handline is the most common type of deep-slope bottomfishing. The basic structure of the terminal rig (kaka) looks like this:



Uku and Ulua (25 fathoms)



The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council has managed bottomfish in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands since 1986. If fishing restrictions under the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and Sanctuary were lifted, **fishing regulations are still in place.**

Hawaiian bottomfish are a collection ("complex") of deep-slope snappers, groupers and jacks.

The fishery features vessels from 40-60 feet due to range and safety (maximum 60 ft) that fish in deep water (200-1,200 ft or ~30-200 fathoms) using vertical hand-lines (hook and line - **NOT longline, traps, nets or trawls).**

Existing Fishing Regulations

- Area-Based Management (Mau Zone, Ho'omalu Zone, Hancock Seamount)
- Almost 100% of habitat in federal waters (outside of 3 nm offshore)
- Permits and reporting required Max permits = 17 (7 for Ho'omalu, 10 for Mau)
- Up to 20% (2 permits) in the Mau Zone set aside for Native Hawaiians through Community Development Program
- Limited Access - qualifications to fish in each zone; permit not transferrable
- Use it or lose it (3 trips of 2,500 pounds in Ho'omalu, 5 trips of 500 pounds in Mau)
- Notification of landing required (24 hours prior to U.S. Coast Guard)
- Federal observers required when directed by NOAA Fisheries (in 50 nm protected species zone)
- Annual Protected Species Workshop required

Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Fisheries

Hawai'i Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan

1. Mainline hundreds of feet long
2. Terminal rig varies in length (see detail above)
3. A palu/chum bag at the top of the terminal rig (optional)
4. Several circle hooks, each fixed to a short branch line connected to attachment points along the terminal rig
5. A weight, 3-5 pounds according to the strength of the current

Deep-7 bottomfish and butaguchi images courtesy DAR/Les Hata

10 ftm
20 ftm
30 ftm
40 ftm
50 ftm
60 ftm
70 ftm
80 ftm
90 ftm
100 ftm

Fishing Methods not allowed in the NWHI

TRAWL NET FISHING

GILLNET FISHING

Other gear restrictions include traps, poisons and explosives

OTHER BOTTOMFISH SPECIES

KAHALA
amberjack

TA'APE
bluestripe snapper

YELLOWTAIL KALEKALE
yellowtail snapper

DEEP-7 SPECIES

This includes Ehu, Gindai, Hapu'upu'u, Kalekale, Lehi, Onaga, and 'Ōpakapaka. 'Ōpakapaka are generally targeted at night at depths about 70 fathoms. Onaga are targeted during the day at about 100 fathoms.

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