

# Scientists Recommend Stronger Measures to Manage Fisheries in the Western Pacific Region

by Sylvia Spalding, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

■ The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), which advises the **Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council**, concluded its three-day meeting in Honolulu on June 14 with a variety of recommendations for **commercial and non-commercial** fisheries in federal waters (3 to 200 miles offshore) of the U.S. Pacific islands. Several of the recommendations aim to improve fisheries data through increased regulations. As one SSC member phrased it, **“If you catch them, you report them.”**

For the bottomfish fishery in the main Hawaiian islands (MHI), which is currently closed for seven deepwater species (known as the Deep Seven) due to overfishing, the SSC recommended that the Council undertake the following:

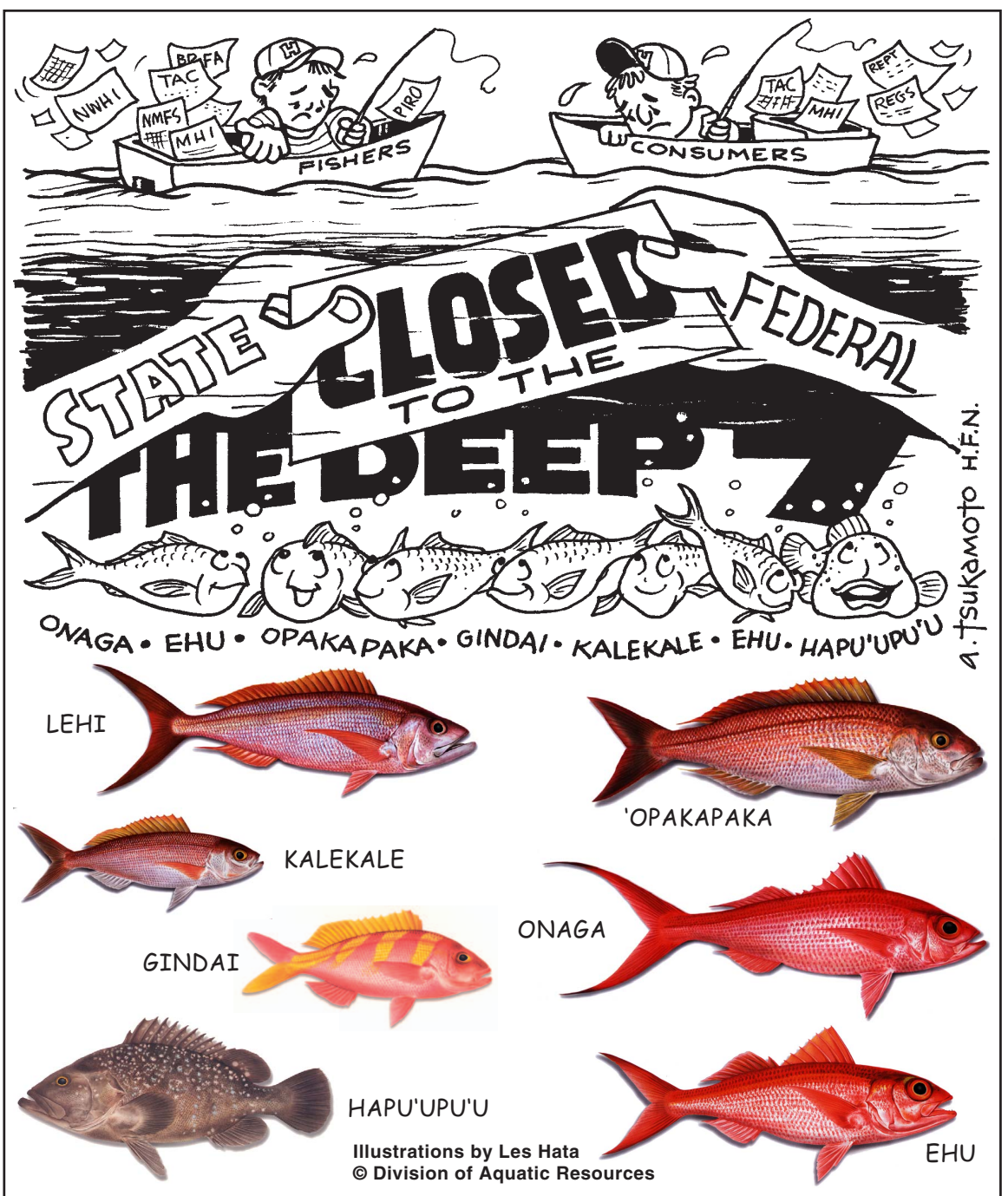
- **Encourage** the Hawai'i Department of Land & Natural Resources (DLNR) to implement regulations in state waters (0 to 3 miles offshore) to complement federal regulations that would require any **non-commercial** fisherman who catches managed bottomfish species to be subject to federal permit and reporting requirements.

- Require all vessel owners, operators and other boat-based anglers fishing for managed bottomfish species to have permits and make one catch report per trip. Others on board may indicate their catches.

- Require all non-commercial trips taken by permit holders to be reported in the interest of gaining complete scientific information.

The SSC reviewed a reanalysis of the 2005 survey of MHI bottomfish fishermen, conducted by the Council and the state of Hawai'i. According to the reanalysis by two University of Hawaii at Hilo graduate students, recreational catch of the Deep Seven species (i.e., 'opakapaka, onaga, hapu'upu'u, ehu, kalekale, gindai and lehi) equals up to 25 percent of the MHI commercial catch of these species.

The Council will consider these and other SSC recommendations on the management of the MHI bottomfish fishery. **continued...**

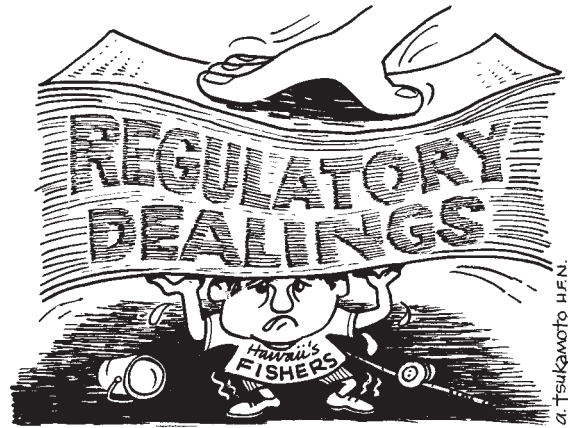
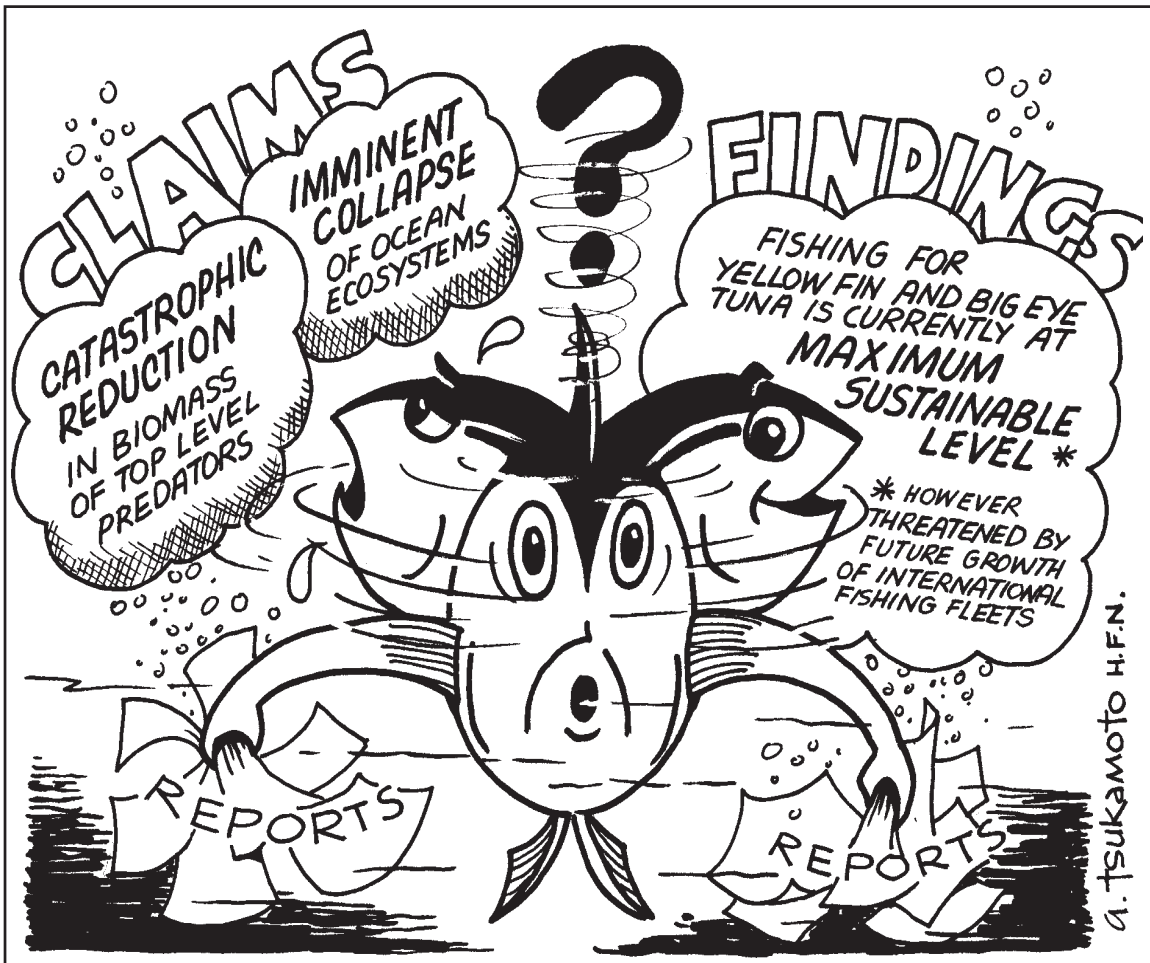


■ Scientific analysis of catch data for the Hawai'i Archipelago indicates that the amount of fishing for bottom fish is sustainable in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands but is not sustainable for the long term in the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI). In other words, if no action is taken to reduce the mortality of bottom fish caused by MHI fishermen, a continued decline is projected for the populations of seven commonly caught deepwater bottomfish species—'opakapaka, onaga, kalekale, hapu'upu'u, ehu, lehi and gindai (the "Deep Seven").

As an immediate initial response, state and federal fishery managers implemented a seasonal bottomfish closure from May 15 to September 30, 2007, in the MHI while longer term management measures are being developed.

To keep interested persons informed on this issue, state and federal fishery agencies have launched a new website at <[www.HawaiiBottomfish.info](http://www.HawaiiBottomfish.info)>. Here you will find information about the regulations being implemented and being considered, the science behind the measures, how to identify the various bottomfish species, ways to release bottomfish safely, consumer information and media resources. You can also find a schedule of upcoming meetings and links to the relevant fishery management and enforcement agencies.

State and federal fishery agencies are also working to organize statewide public informational meetings to be held at the end of August and early September. For more, stay tuned to *HAWAII FISHING NEWS* or visit <<http://www.HawaiiBottomfish.info>>. . . Sylvia



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**Stronger Measures to Manage Fisheries**

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Regarding pelagic fisheries, the SSC expressed its disappointment that Amendment 14 of the Pelagics Fishery Management Plan proposed by the Council was not approved in its entirety by the Secretary of Commerce. The Secretary passed sections on reducing international overfishing of bigeye and yellowfin tuna, but disapproved sections regarding protocols for dealing with tuna recommendations made by regional fishery management organizations and measures for federal permitting of and reporting by commercial non-longline pelagic fishing vessels in Hawai'i. One SSC member questioned how the United States expects accountability from countries like Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, when it can't even get its own act together. The SSC also noted that the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires implementation of annual catch limits by 2010-2011 and fulfilling this deadline will require adequate reporting of catch well in advance of that date.

Among SSC recommendations on pelagic fisheries were the following:

- That a trial longline operation be pursued in Guam under the auspices of the Community Development Program (CDP) as a training opportunity and to assess the commercial feasibility of the fishery. This CDP would operate outside a closed area of 25 miles around the island of Guam, with an additional southern extension to provide a 5-mile closed area around all southern offshore banks; implement turtle mitigation measures; be carefully monitored to document any conflicts with troll and charterboat sectors; and be subject to a sunset clause.
- That a longline exclusion zone be implemented around the islands and banks of the Northern Mariana Islands to avoid gear conflicts between longline vessels and the local artisanal fishing community.
- That the "use or lose" provision for Class A permits in the American Samoa longline limited-entry program be rescinded, because the alia longline fleet is experiencing economic difficulty due to low albacore tuna catch rates.

Regarding other fisheries, the SSC heard a report from Dr. Karl Brookings on catch and effort data for shoreline and reef fishing in American Samoa. The report indicated that these fisheries are clearly sustainable, and marine protected areas for fisheries management purposes are not needed as the fisheries are replenishing themselves.

All of the SSC recommendations plus those from other advisory bodies were considered by the Council. For more information on these and other fishery issues, visit <<http://www.wpcouncil.org>> or contact the Council at (808) 522-8220 or via E-mail at <[info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov](mailto:info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov)>. . . . Sylvia

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