



Hawai'i longline vessels.

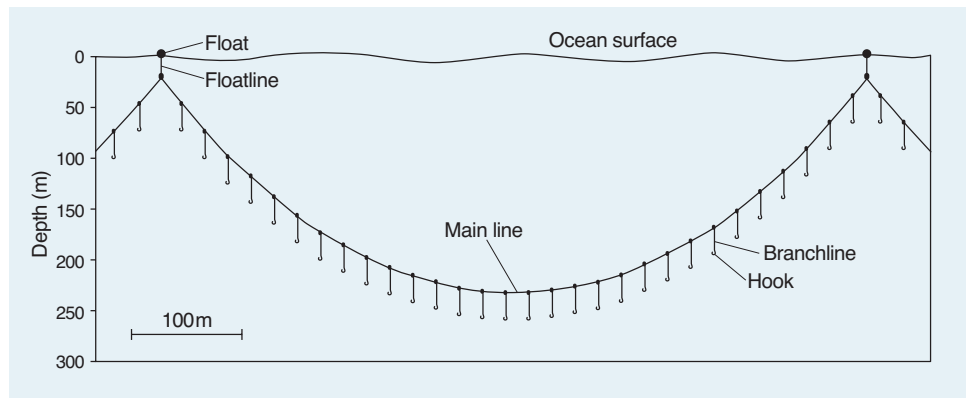
NMFS Determines Hawai'i and American Samoa Tuna Longline Fisheries Not Likely to Threaten Survival of Protected Species



At its March 2023 meeting, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council reviewed the draft biological opinions (BiOps) for the Hawai'i deep-set longline fishery targeting bigeye tuna and the American Samoa longline fishery targeting albacore tuna. The documents, released by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) earlier in the month, analyzed the impacts of the two fisheries on species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that may be accidentally hooked or entangled during fishing operations.

NMFS concluded the fisheries are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of ESA-listed sea turtles, sharks and rays, and the main Hawaiian Islands insular population of false killer whales. This means that the number of incidental interactions (hooking or entanglement) of ESA-listed species in the two fisheries is not likely to appreciably reduce the likelihood of survival or recovery of those species. The impacts are not likely to cause significant changes to the species' numbers, reproduction or distribution.

In its review, the Council considered input from its advisory groups, including the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), Advisory Panels and Fishing Industry Advisory Committee.



A general depiction of the Hawai'i deep-set longline fishery gear configuration. It shows the distribution of hooks in a typical set that deploys from 25-30 hooks between floats.

Over the four years leading up to these draft BiOps, the SSC evaluated statistical models that looked at how the two longline fisheries affect loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles at the population level. The SSC at its March meeting received the updated assessment that evaluated the impact of the Hawai'i deep-set fishery on the leatherback turtle population. The committee concluded that the models continue to represent the best scientific information available and show that the two fisheries did not have a significant effect on the population projections when compared to scenarios without fishery impacts. Based on the SSC's review, the Council agreed with NMFS's no-jeopardy findings for all ESA-listed species.

Both draft BiOps included two Reasonable and Prudent Measures (RPMs) to minimize fishery impacts to the species. One RPM requires releasing ESA-listed species in a way that minimizes injury and increases post-release survivorship. The second measure ensures the fisheries have monitoring and reporting programs in place to collect data on the interactions. NMFS issued the final BiOps for the American Samoa and Hawai'i deep-set longline fisheries on May 15 and May 18, 2023, respectively. The Council began working with the NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office on the implementation process for the RPMs and expects to hear an update at the June Council meeting in American Samoa. 🐟