

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT (EFP) FOR LONGLINE FISHING IN THE WEST COAST
EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the Draft EA regarding issuance of an EFP to fish with longline gear in the West Coast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The SSC notes that the proposed EFP pertains to operation of a single vessel which would be fishing with longline gear in an area without corresponding drift gillnet fishing for comparison of finfish and prohibited species bycatch between the two gear types. Few constraints are imposed to limit where the vessel will operate, and no experimental design is proposed to test the hypothesis that longline gear would offer an improvement in bycatch rates over drift gillnet fishing gear. Average bycatch values are inadequate to evaluate bycatch impacts. Bycatch events are typically rare and spatially correlated. As such, the problem is one of estimating the statistical probability of a rare event (i.e. a longline set with large bycatch). Data collected from a single vessel operating under an EFP would not be adequate for this purpose.

The SSC did not find adequate information in the Environmental Assessment to evaluate the biological risks of the proposed EFP. For example, the values presented in Table 4 (page 80) are projected bycatch rates based on average bycatch information from Hawaii. Bycatch rates for Hawaii cannot be assumed to be representative of the area to be evaluated under the EFP. The most feasible way to constrain the biological risks of fishing with longline gear in the West Coast EEZ would be to operate a fishery with full observer coverage and to impose hard bycatch caps.

PFMC
04/04/07