

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) REPORT ON SCOPING FOR SHALLOW-SET LONGLINE (SSL) OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE (EEZ)

NMFS has compiled information about U.S. longline fishing for highly migratory species in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO), to help inform Council consideration of shallow set longline (SSL) scoping. Note, the following information refers to deep- and shallow-set longline as they are not consistently distinguished in the various sources we reference below.

Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)

Under IATTC Resolutions C-18-06 and C-11-05, all vessels fishing for tuna in the EPO must be on the [IATTC Regional Vessel Register \(RVR\)](#). There are currently 159 U.S. longline vessels listed on the RVR. Longline vessels greater than 20 meters (m) in length overall (LOA) must maintain a minimum of 5 percent observer coverage and report observer data each year. The only catch limit U.S. longline vessels are subject to under the IATTC is 750 metric tons (mt) of bigeye tuna per year for vessels larger than 24 m LOA. Many U.S. longline vessels in the EPO also fish in the western Pacific Ocean under the jurisdiction of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

The IATTC and the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) conduct stock assessments for target and non-target species caught by longline vessels in the EPO. Specifically, the ISC conducts the stock assessments for swordfish in the Western and Central North Pacific Ocean. Swordfish is the primary target for SSL vessels. The [most recent assessment](#), completed in 2018 with data through 2016, indicates the stock is likely not overfished and not experiencing overfishing.¹

Federal Permits and Regulations

In addition to the IATTC measures, U.S. longline vessels in the EPO are subject to additional federal regulations implementing the following permits: (1) Hawaii Longline (HILL) Limited Entry Permit under the Fishery Ecosystem Plan for Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific^{2,3} (managed by WCPFC/NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office), (2) Pacific Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Permit under the West Coast HMS Fishery Management Plan^{4,5} (managed by the Council/NMFS West Coast Region), and (3) the High Seas Fishing Permit under the High Seas Fishing Compliance Act⁶ (managed by NMFS International Affairs and Seafood Inspection). Note that the High Seas Permit is required to fish in international waters (i.e., beyond any

¹ The assessment states: “Compared to MSY-based reference points, the spawning stock biomass in 2016 was 87% above SSBMSY and the current fishing mortality (average for ages 1 to 10 during 2013-2015) was 45% below FMSY.”

² Federal regulations found at [Western Pacific Pelagic Fisheries – 50 CFR 665, Subpart F](#)

³ Compliance guide: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/hawaii-pelagic-longline-regulation-summary>

⁴ Federal regulations found at [Pacific Highly Migratory Species Fisheries – 50 CFR 660, Subpart K and Eastern Pacific Tuna Fisheries – 50 CFR 300, Subpart C](#)

⁵ Compliance guide:

https://archive.fisheries.noaa.gov/wcr/publications/fishery_management/hms_program/hms_complianceguide_010917.pdf

⁶ Federal regulations found at 50 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 300, [Subpart A](#) and [Subpart R](#)

country's EEZ) but it alone does not allow fishing—a vessel captain needs authorization to fish under another permit, in this case a HILL or Pacific HMS permit.

Hawaii Fleet

The HILL permitting regime provides for a total of 164 HILL permits. As of November 1, 2019, 148 permits are being actively fished, and 16 permits are not currently being fished or are not assigned to a vessel. Vessels with a HILL permit may fish longline in either the SSL or deep set longline (DSL) configuration. Most vessels fish DSL, with only about 30 fishing SSL. Longline fishing is prohibited within 50 nautical miles of mainland Hawaii, and most fishing takes place on the high seas. Fish caught by these vessels are landed in Hawaii and the West Coast. In Hawaii, they are landed fresh at the Honolulu fish auction, where fish are sold individually. This system contributes to a robust database of fish lengths, weights, and selling prices, and also helps accurately monitor any applicable catch limits. HILL vessels need a Pacific HMS permit to land to the West Coast. These vessels commonly land swordfish in San Francisco, and both tuna and swordfish in Southern California.

Observer coverage requirements

The Pacific Islands Region Observer Program is responsible for deploying observers on board longline vessels that possess a HILL permit, including trips that originate from West Coast ports. NMFS-funded observers cover 100 percent of SSL trips, and 20 percent of DSL trips fishing under a HILL permit.

Protected species limits

The current Biological Opinion for the Hawaii SSL fishery from June 26, 2019, requires NMFS to set an annual interaction limit for the fishery of 16 leatherback sea turtles. If the fishery reaches this limit then NMFS shall close the Hawaii SSL fishery for the remainder of the calendar year. The Biological Opinion also requires NMFS to set a trip limit not to exceed 2 leatherback sea turtles or 5 loggerhead sea turtles per vessel trip. Any vessel that reaches the established trip limit must immediately stop fishing and return to port. These vessels will not engage in SSL fishing for 5 days while NMFS evaluates vessel and turtle interactions to identify any problems and determine if guidance can be provided to the vessel to reduce the interactions. Vessels that reach the per trip limit for either leatherback or loggerhead sea turtles twice in a calendar year shall be prohibited from SSL fishing for the remainder of the calendar year. Any vessel that reaches a trip limit for either species twice in one calendar year shall have an annual vessel limit of 2 leatherbacks or 5 loggerheads for the following year.

The False Killer Whale Take Reduction Plan for the Pacific Islands region contains research recommendations, regulations for the Hawaii-based longline fisheries, and best management practices. NMFS published a final rule to implement the False Killer Whale Take Reduction Plan on November 29, 2012. These regulations implement a temporary closure of the Southern Exclusion Zone⁷ to DSL fishing if a specified threshold level (or “trigger”) of observed false killer whale mortalities or serious injuries occurs inside the U.S. EEZ around Hawaii within a single calendar year.

⁷ The Southern Exclusion Zone is the portion of the U.S. EEZ around Hawaii bounded by 165° 00' W. longitude on the west, 154° 30' W. longitude on the east, the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and the Main Hawaiian Islands Longline Fishing Prohibited Area on the north, and the EEZ boundary on the south.

West Coast Fleet

Four vessels are currently fishing DSLL outside the U.S. EEZ under the Pacific HMS permit without also possessing a HILL permit. The HMS FMP does not limit the number of vessels that may fish DSLL. NMFS' current Biological Opinion for vessels fishing only under a Pacific HMS permit analyzes the effects of setting 800,000 hooks per year (roughly 6 vessels at 14 sets per trip, 5 trips per season, and setting 1,900 hooks per set). These vessels predominantly land their catch to San Diego, and cannot land to Hawaii without a HILL permit.

Observer coverage requirements

The West Coast Region Observer Program is responsible for deploying observers on board west coast DSLL vessels that fish under the Pacific HMS permit, and do not possess a Hawaii Longline Limited Entry Permit. The current Biological Opinion requires 20 percent observer coverage in this fleet.

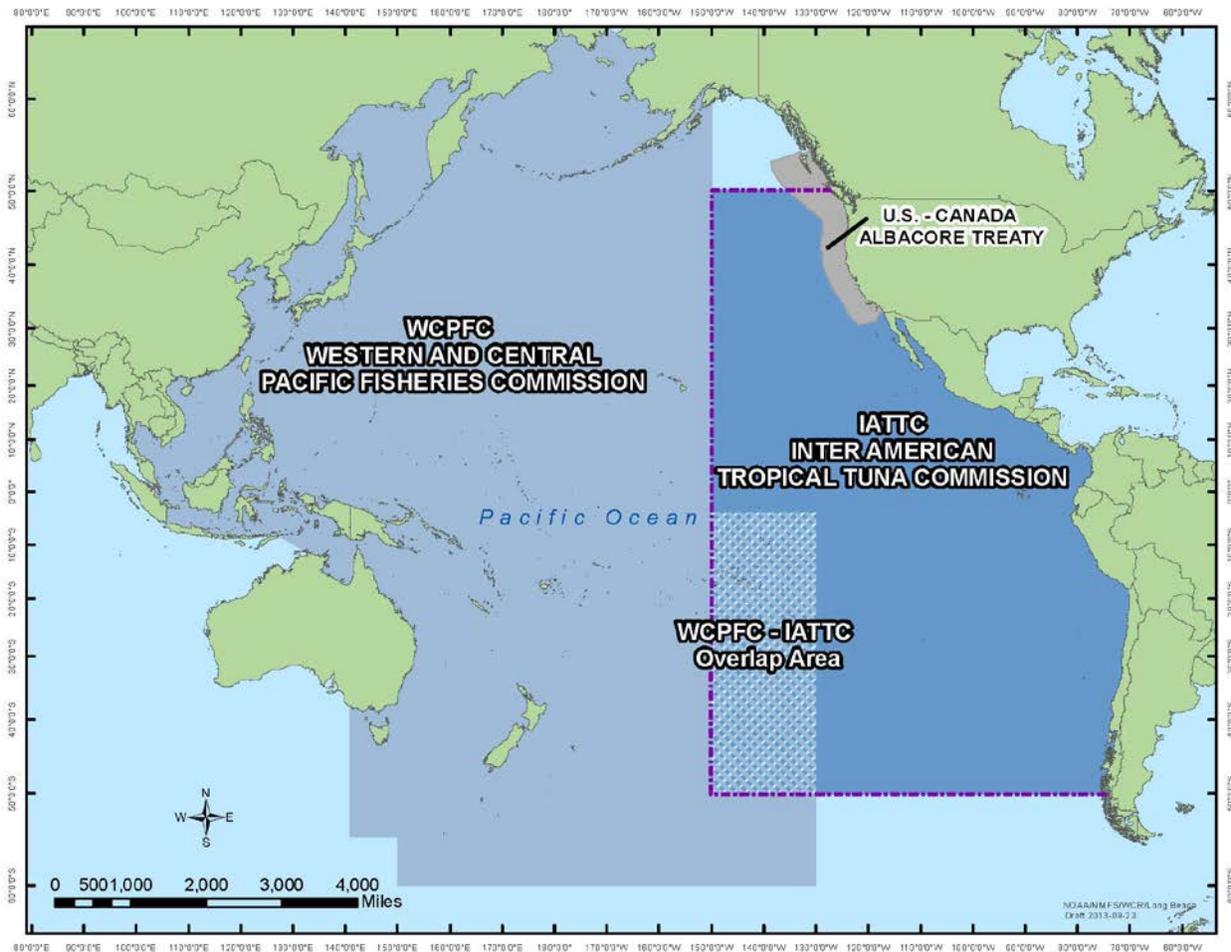
Protected species limits

There are no protected species limits for DSLL vessels operating solely under a Pacific HMS permit that would automatically close the fishery if reached. The current Incidental Take Statement for this fishery authorizes the take of up to one green sea turtle, four leatherback sea turtles, six olive ridley sea turtles, and one loggerhead sea turtle over a ten-year period.

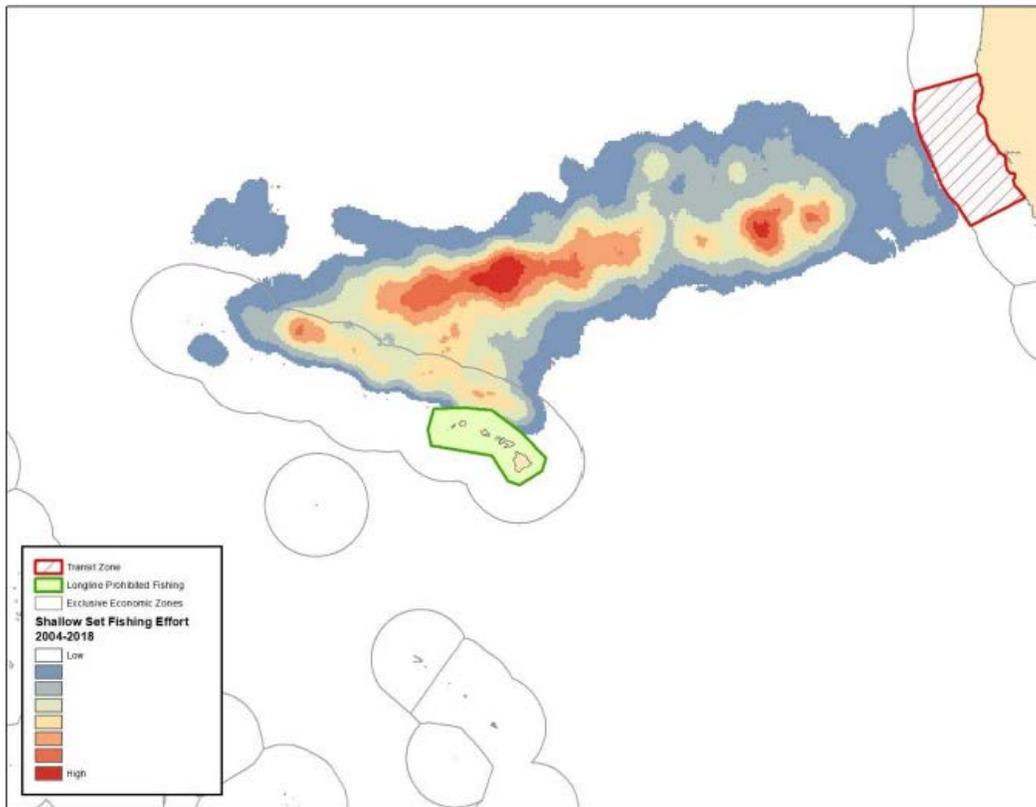
Emergent Considerations

1. Vessels fishing under the HILL permit basing operations out of the West Coast. This shift has had implications on the agency including (1) changing origins and destinations for data, (2) issues getting observers from Hawaii to and from the West Coast to work on Hawaii-permitted vessels, and (3) some enforcement complexity (e.g., vessel operator confusion whether to provide pre-trip notification to PIRO or the WCR).
2. In recent years, Hawaii longline vessels have accounted for the majority of domestic swordfish supply to California. In 2018, Hawaii longline vessels landed 120.3 mt of swordfish in southern California ports, while the large-mesh drift gillnet fishery landed 78.5 mt.
3. A processor from Hawaii relocated their buyer/processor operations (including their own vessels) to the West Coast.
4. 2019 is the first year during which at least three vessels have fished longline exclusively under the Pacific HMS permit (i.e., they do not also have a HILL permit).
5. NMFS' 2004 disapproval of the SSSL portion of the FMP was due to a Biological Opinion that the SSSL fishery would result in jeopardy to sea turtle species. Since implementation, gear modifications have proven effective at decreasing sea turtle bycatch in longline fisheries. Over the last 15 years, longline gear modifications (i.e., large circle hooks and whole finfish bait) to mitigate bycatch impacts on non-target species have been implemented in U.S. longline fisheries. Now, the United States is pursuing implementation of the same gear modifications in the WCPFC and IATTC, which recently adopted stronger sea turtle measures for longline vessels (WCPFC [2018-04](#) and IATTC [C-19-04](#)).

Maps



This map shows the Pacific tuna RFMO boundaries, as well as the 150°W longitude line that separates the EPO from the WCPO. (Source: [Southwest Fisheries Science Center Website](#) - November 1, 2019).



This map shows Hawaii shallow-set longline effort from 2004 (after re-opening with gear modifications) to 2018. (Source: 2019 Biological Opinion for the [Continued Authorization of the Hawaii Pelagic Shallow-Set Longline Fishery](#))