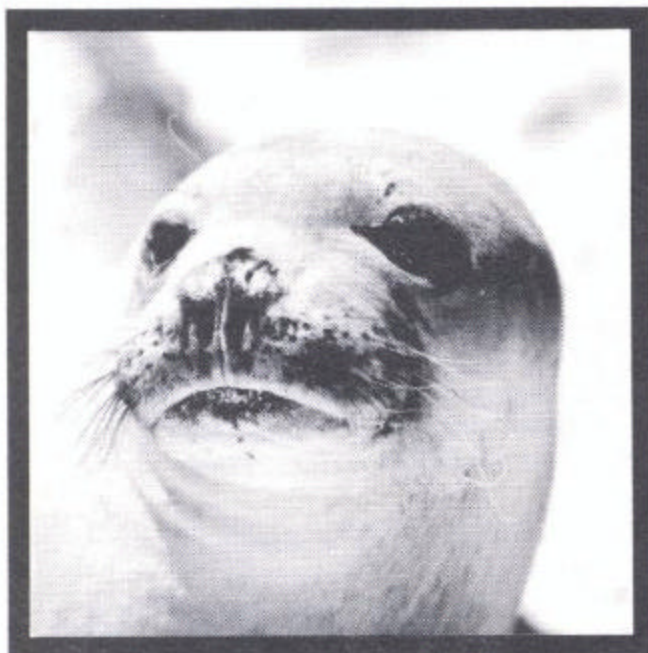


Northwestern
Hawaiian
Islands



Protected
Species
Zone

Closure to Longline Fishing

INTRODUCTION

Longline fishing has been practiced in Hawaii for decades. Historically, a fleet of small wooden-hulled sampans fished for yellowfin and bigeye tuna (ahi) from several ports throughout the islands. The nature of the fishery changed dramatically in the late 1980s when new fishing techniques, developed on the US east coast for broadbill swordfish, were adopted and the size of the fleet grew rapidly, mostly due to an influx of boats from the east coast and Gulf States.

Hawaii's longline fishing fleet now consists of about 150 vessels, 80 of them arriving in Hawaiian waters more recently than January 1990. The mostly steel-hulled vessels range in size from 50 to 100 ft and carry a crew of 3-6. Honolulu is the homeport for most, and many travel 500 to 1800 miles in search of fish. They spend an average of about three weeks at sea per trip, targeting ahi and swordfish. Mahimahi, wahoo (ono), sharks and other pelagic species are also caught.

As fishing pressure increased, so did reports of interactions (injuries and deaths) between longline operations and several protected animal species, some of them endangered and found only in the remote Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Several interactions were documented, prompting the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) to take immediate management action.

MANAGEMENT ACTION

In response to documented injuries to endangered Hawaiian monk seals and several species of sea birds and sea turtles resulting from longline fishing operations in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, the Council asked a special inter-agency task force to recommend actions to prevent further harm to protected species. The task force concluded that physical separation was the best solution, and recommended closing certain areas of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands to longline fishing. At its February 1991 meeting, the Council voted to establish a "Protected Species Zone" an emergency 90-day closure to longlining of areas inhabited by Hawaiian monk seals. These areas include waters within 50 nm of the islands and banks of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, and certain 100-nm wide corridors used by monk seals when migrating between islands (See map). This emergency action became effective in April 1991, for 90 days, and was extended another 90 days. In October 1991, an amendment to the fishery management plan for pelagic species made the Protected Species Zone permanent.

HAWAIIAN MONK SEAL

Hawaiian monk seals are found only in the Hawaiian Archipelago. They are light gray to brown in color, and can grow to 7 ft long and 500 lb. The main breeding populations are found at eight locations in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands from Nihoa Island to Kure Island, although several births have been recorded recently in the Main Hawaiian Islands. Their total population is estimated to be around 1200 individuals.

These seals frequently haul out on beaches near the vegetation line at the high water mark. They feed mostly at night on reef fishes, eels, octopus and lobster, at depths ranging from 30 to 480 ft. They are attracted to the bait or light sticks used in longline fishing operations. Injuries and deaths result when hooked or snagged seals drown, develop infections, or are weakened and fall prey to other predators such as sharks. Other seals are entangled in discarded fishing gear that has washed up on beaches where the seals haul out.

Protected Status

Two federal laws, the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act, as well as State of Hawaii regulations protect Hawaiian monk seals. Violations can lead to civil penalties of up to \$25,000, and criminal conviction carries fines of up to \$100,000 and a maximum of one year in jail, or both (16 USC 1375, 16 USC 1538/ 1540).

SEA BIRDS

Three species of albatross are found in the Northwestern Hawaiian waters. The Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses have resident breeding populations on the larger islands. Endangered Short-tailed Albatrosses nest on two islands south of Japan, and several individuals visit Midway each winter and spring, and are occasionally seen on other Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The historical range of the short-tailed Albatross includes Hawaiian waters. The worldwide population of Short-tailed Albatrosses is only 400 individuals, including 85 breeding pairs.

Albatrosses are large seabirds, which feed primarily on squid. They often follow fishing vessels, a behavior reinforced by the disposal of offal or unused bait. Albatrosses will also seize baited hooks, as longline gear is set, often hooking the birds.

Protected Status

Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which allows fines to \$5000 per violation and up to six months in jail, or both. Short-tailed Albatrosses are also protected under the Endangered Species Act with fines to \$100,000 and one year in jail, or both (16 USC 703/716, 16 USC 1538/1540).

SEA TURTLES

Several species of sea turtles are found near the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The most common species are Pacific Green Sea Turtle, Hawksbill and Leatherback. These air-breathing reptiles travel great distances in search for food items. Researchers report that these turtles are attracted to natural bioluminescence, so they may also be attracted to chemical light sticks used by longline fishermen of the entire Hawaiian Islands population of Pacific Green Sea Turtles, 90% mate and lay eggs at French Frigate Shoals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The rare Leatherback Turtle, world's largest reptile, rarely leaves the water, but its presence is well documented near the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Interactions between Leatherback and Pacific Green Sea Turtles and fishing operations are documented as a problem worldwide. Turtles are snagged on baited hooks and entangled in lines and other gear. On land, basking turtles may be entangled in discarded fishing lines.

Protected Status

All sea turtles are protected under the Endangered Species Act and State of Hawaii regulations. Maximum fines are \$25,000 for civil penalties and \$100,000 and up to one year in jail for criminal convictions, or both (16 USC 1538/1 540).

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Protected Species Zone

not intended for navigation

