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Sharing the catch or catching the shares: Catch shares for the western Pacific region?



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ABSTRACT

The applicability of catch shares programs is evaluated for the various fisheries of the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council region in each of the archipelagoes. Implementation of Catch Shares programs in the region is problematic, but would require better data to be done fairly and equitably. Catch shares are currently under initial consideration for the Hawaii and American Samoa longline fisheries and the Hawaii Deep 7 bottomfish fishery. It is argued that current conditions in all the other small boat fisheries in the region make them inappropriate for catch shares management. Overfishing and the “race for fish” are not yet an issue for these fisheries and some are underdeveloped. Catch share programs can cause significant negative social consequences for Western Pacific communities because data on fishermen’s participation, catch histories, and motivations to fish for cultural needs is not adequate for any initial allocation scheme to be developed equitably. The prevailing Western Pacific cultural value of sharing the fish by gifting portions, sharing the catch widely and sharing fishing opportunities widely is in clear conflict with the individualized commercial profit motive philosophy of fisheries that are appropriate for catch shares. The small boat fisheries lack adequate monitoring and enforcement, and do not have a total allowable catch or quota. Nor do they usually have a demonstrated need for one. Preliminary community outreach by Council staff and community discussion of catch shares shows a general lack of information yet a potential for strong resistance to the imposition of catch shares.

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1. Introduction

The Honolulu Catch Shares Workshop was held in response to the NOAA initiative to support the development of “Catch Shares” programs wherever they are considered to be an appropriate management tool [1]. The workshop brought together fisheries economists with experience with catch share programs and others with in depth understanding of the nature of the fisheries managed by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WPRFMC) (hereafter the Council) and the respective state, territorial, and international agencies of the region. Discussion was lively and the workshop ended on a comment offered by a Council Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) member: “Educate us but do not proselytize us”.

This discussion paper considers the appropriateness of catch shares programs for the small boat fisheries in the Western Pacific region, briefly sketches the various small boat fisheries, and notes which fisheries may be appropriate for further discussion of catch shares, and which fisheries seem to be clearly inappropriate for catch share programs. It draws from a fisheries anthropology

perspective rather than a fisheries economics perspective. It also draws from the author’s long-term experience in the region developed through service on the Western Pacific Council’s SSC and through informal interviewing and participant observation in the fisheries. It highlights the importance of equitable allocation, open participation, and the sharing of fish. It notes the cultural need for freely given fish for cultural and ceremonial occasions in ways that contribute to social solidarity and cultural continuity in the fishing communities of the Western Pacific region. It argues that “Sharing the Catch” in culturally appropriate ways is central to the lifestyles of fishing communities in the Western Pacific and that “Catching the Shares” could change them significantly.

1.1. Data adequacy

The fisheries in the Western Pacific are generally different than U.S. mainland areas where catch shares have been utilized. Western Pacific “fishing communities” encompass entire islands and archipelagoes [2] and most of our fishermen believe in a widespread sharing of fish and fishing opportunities rather than in a narrow sharing of fishing privileges allocated to a few fishermen. Most are concerned about providing continuing opportunities for new entry for their children and grandchildren, extended family

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members and others. [3]. Many are part-timers who fish to give and to share as much as they fish for a profit motive.

There is a blend of commercial, recreational and subsistence motivations. There is not usually a “race for fish”, and effort is often triggered by cultural and ceremonial needs. Post-landing catch distribution or “Fish Flow” through networks and sometimes through “customary exchange” sustains the health, food security and cultural strength and continuity of local communities [4]. The significance of fishing, and being able to continue fishing to meet cultural needs and subsistence by many of the small boat fishermen in the region cannot be overstated, and for some it is actively considered an indigenous right.

1.2. Existing management

Only three of our current fisheries operate under a total allowable catch (TAC) or quota, which is prerequisite to the development of any catch share program. They are the three fisheries selected by NOAA for initial consideration for catch shares development. Two, the Hawaii and American Samoa pelagic longline fleets operate under limited entry and aggregate catch limits or quotas imposed by international agreement for two of the target species, bigeye tuna (BET), and yellowfin tuna (YFT). These two fisheries may appear closer to the image of industrial scale fisheries than other important fisheries in the Western Pacific region. However even these fisheries include some relatively small vessels and family- and extended family-based owner operators. The impact of these fleets on the overall stock condition of BET and YFT and other Pelagic Fisheries Ecosystem Plan (FEP) Management Unit species is small compared to international effort (estimated at less than 4–5%) [5], and to U. S. purse seine effort, which is managed not by the Council but under the South Pacific Tuna Treaty and now through the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) in the Western Pacific and by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) in the Eastern Pacific.

The third fishery proposed by NMFS for discussion of possible catch shares is the Main Hawaiian Islands Bottomfish fishery which operates under a commercial quota and a recreational bag limit for the “deep 7” species¹ (1), as well as a system of state bottomfish restricted fishing areas (BRFA) where fishing for “deep 7” bottomfish is prohibited. This fishery is currently co-managed by the Council and the State of Hawaii because the primary grounds overlap state and federal waters. Effective and sustainable bottomfish Limited Entry programs existed for two zones in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands until 2010, when that fishery was closed as the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument was developed. Even for these three fisheries, adoption of a catch shares management regime that is fair and equitable is problematic. [6–9].

Development of catch shares programs for most of the other small boat fisheries in the U.S. Pacific Islands region is unnecessary, impractical, culturally inappropriate, and likely to be resisted by fishermen. There is not enough data to establish catch shares in an equitable fashion that meets the intent of National Standard 4 “that such allocation shall be fair and equitable...and that no particular individual, entity or corporation acquires an excessive share” [10]. These fisheries do not operate under quotas and there is limited to quite inadequate data on effort, participation and catch histories. They have generally remained open access, and some are clearly underdeveloped. The small boat fisheries are generally not approaching MSY for most of their target species.

Annual catch limits are in the process of development for the other small boat fisheries, but it is generally anticipated that the limits will be significantly higher than current catches [11].

The development of catch shares programs for any of the small boat fisheries would require establishment of limited entry and quota systems for multiple targeted species, much better fishery history data, and a clear need for catch controls such as a race for fish as fishermen approach MSY for particular species in the fishery.

It should be noted, however, that limited entry has been considered and evaluated for the Hawaii offshore handline/shortline/mixed gear fishery a number of times in the past, and a control date of June 2, 2005 exists for that fishery and for all Hawaii small boat pelagic fisheries should need for a limited entry program or other catch controls develop. It is not clear whether the Conservation and Management Measures (CMM) currently adopted by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission² for BET and YFT or those that may be adopted in the future will directly affect the small boat commercial, recreational, subsistence mixed handline, troll and charter fisheries that operate solely within the U.S. EEZ. These are best understood as “artisanal” fisheries since vessel sizes range from 16–45 ft. and they generally operate within 10–30 miles from shore within the Hawaii EEZ.

The Council made a decision to utilize the international exemption clause and adopt or set Annual Catch Limits (ACL) for pelagic species that reflect quotas that might be imposed by international management on the larger scale commercial fleets. The ability of the SSC and the Council to develop ACLs for important pelagic species is limited by the lack of reliable stock assessment and life history data for many of them. This decision means that stock assessments developed by the Oceanic Fisheries Program (OFP) of the Secretariat for the Pacific Community for the WCPFC could be applied to set both ACLs and Accountability Measures (AM) for the larger scale fisheries. How the overall ACLs might affect or be applied or allocated between the somewhat larger scale longline fleets and the smaller in catch but potentially much larger in number of participants in the small boat fleets is a significant challenge.

As they develop ACLs for other species such as bottomfish and coral reef species the SSC and Council are also faced with significant challenges. Commercial catch records, life history and habitat data exist for some but not most species, and catch and effort data for recreational and subsistence fishermen is inadequate. The Council has determined that recreational data on effort and catch used in statistical estimations from the current Hawaii Marine Recreational fisheries Statistical Survey is not adequate for management, especially for potential allocation decisions. Revisions to the Marine Recreational Information Program MRIP are ongoing but they will only be in effect for Hawaii, not for the rest of the region and will take some time to implement and evaluate.

The WPRFMC was the first council to develop an ecosystem-based Fishery Management Plan and that plan for coral reef species was faced with the complex issue of managing a fishery with very large numbers of species and species groups and limited information about most of them. The Council now operates with place-based archipelagic Fisheries Ecosystem Plans (FEP) for all non-pelagics in each archipelago in the Council's jurisdiction. An important feature of the archipelagic FEPs is an emphasis on community-based management and an integration of traditional and local ecological knowledge into the management process. The Council has a single Pelagics FEP for all five parts of its jurisdiction.

¹ The Deep 7 include: ehu (*Etelis carbunculus*), gindai (*Pristipomoides zonatus*), kalekale (*Pristipomoides sieboldii*), hapuupuu (*Epinephelus quernus*), onaga (*Etelis corsucans*), opakapaka (*Pristipomoides filamentosus*) and lehi (*Aphareus rutilans*).

² WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) 2008-01 www.wcpfc.int

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