

## HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON FINAL CHANGES TO ROUTINE MANAGEMENT MEASURES

At the September 2006 meeting, the Council approved management measure alternatives for public review for the 2007-08 biennial management cycle. If approved, the regulations implementing these changes would be effective beginning April 1, 2007 through March 31, 2009 (minimum of two years), or until changed. The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) and Council staff drafted analyses on the vessel marking and California recreational bag limit alternatives for albacore and bluefin tuna, which are presented in Attachments 1 and 2. A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was not completed for the proposed drift gillnet turtle closure boundary alternatives in time for this meeting, but the HMSMT has a proposed process and timeline to address this management issue.

### **Routine Management Measure Alternatives**

#### Vessel Marking Requirements

The current HMS regulations require all commercial vessels, including charter vessels and Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels (CPFV), to display their official numbers on the port and starboard sides of the deckhouse or hull, and on an appropriate weather deck (horizontal or flat surface) so as to be visible from enforcement vessels and aircraft. The official numerals must be at least 10 inches in height for vessels 25-65 feet in length, and 18 inches in height for vessels longer than 65 feet. In September, the Council approved for public review the following alternatives to exempt charter vessels from this marking requirement:

1. No Action (status quo) – All commercial vessels, including charter vessels, would have to adhere to the current HMS vessel marking requirements.
2. Provide a specific exemption for commercial passenger and recreational charter fishing vessels to the HMS vessel marking requirements.
3. Do not require commercial passenger and charter vessels to display official number on port and starboard sides of deckhouse or hull, but maintain a requirement to display official number on appropriate weather deck so as to be visible from aircraft.

***HMSMT Discussion:*** The current regulatory language originated from the West Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP); however, the Groundfish FMP specifically excludes commercial passenger and charter vessels. When the FMP regulations were developed for HMS, the intent was to place these vessel marking requirements on commercial HMS vessels, but to exempt CPFVs and charter vessels; Alternative 2 is consistent with this intent.

#### California Recreational Limits for Tuna

In September 2006, the Council approved for public review the following alternatives for recreational limits for albacore and bluefin tuna for California:

#### Albacore

1. No Action (status quo) – There would be no bag limit for albacore.

2. A statewide bag limit of 25 albacore per angler per day may be taken or possessed.
3. An albacore bag limit of 25 fish per angler per day may be taken or possessed north of Pt. Conception; an albacore bag limit of 10 fish per angler per day may be taken or possessed in waters between Pt. Conception and the U.S./Mexico border.
4. An albacore bag limit of 25 fish per angler per day may be taken or possessed north of Pt. Arena; an albacore limit of 10 fish per angler per day between Pt. Arena and Pt. Conception; and an albacore limit of 5 fish per angler per day between Pt. Conception and the US/Mexican border.

**HMSMT Discussion:** From a pan-Pacific perspective, West Coast recreational landings represent about 1% (California is 0.9%) of the total albacore harvest. However, implementing a recreational albacore limit could be viewed as a step in support of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission's albacore resolution C-05-02 and the U.S. commitment to not increase its current effort level on albacore. A daily limit of 10 albacore south of Pt. Conception and 25 albacore north of Pt. Conception accommodates most of the current fishing activity and the northern limit would be consistent with Oregon's marine fish bag limit of 25 fish.

#### Bluefin

1. No Action (status quo) – There would be no bag limit for bluefin tuna.
2. A statewide bag limit of 5-10 bluefin per angler per day; the possession limit would be equal to one daily bag limit.

**HMSMT Discussion:** The HMSMT believes that it is important to ensure that the purposes of the albacore bag limit remain separate from those proposed for bluefin tuna. A recent stock assessment indicates that overfishing is likely occurring on albacore, although a biological reference point for that stock has not yet been agreed upon by the Council and the international management bodies. The proposed albacore bag limit is, in part, in response to that. While it has not been determined that overfishing is occurring for bluefin tuna, recent indices of bluefin stock abundance demonstrate that fishing pressure likely exceeds  $F_{Max}$ . While the HMSMT acknowledges that implementing a bluefin bag limit is viewed as a proactive conservation measure by some, implementing a bag limit of ten bluefin, when catch data indicate that anglers have not retained more than five per day, may not accomplish any conservation and, further, may result in increased targeting on bluefin. However, having the measure in place could potentially limit catch (depending on the bag limit adopted) if bluefin become more available to California anglers.

#### **Proposed Management Measure Process and Timeline for Drift Gillnet Regulations**

In September 2006, the HMSMT proposed that a separate EA document be completed for the proposed drift gillnet measures, as the analysis and process to change them were considerably more complicated and time-consuming than the analyses for the other management measures. An EA was not completed in time for the Council's consideration at this meeting; however, the HMSMT could draft one prior to the Council's June 2007 meeting. Therefore, the HMSMT recommends that the Council delay final action on this item until then. Following the Council's action in June 2006, the National Marine Fisheries Service could draft and file implementing

regulations, which could be effective beginning April 1, 2008 (i.e., the start of the second fishing year in the biennial cycle).

**HMSMT Recommendations:**

1. Adopt Alternatives for:
  - a. Vessel Marking
  - b. California Recreational Bag Limits for Albacore and Bluefin Tuna; and
2. Delay Final Action on the Proposed Drift Gillnet Turtle Closure Boundary Measures until June 2007.

PFMC  
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