

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON
HIGH SEAS SHALLOW-SET LONGLINE (SSLL) AMENDMENT

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) discussed the management framework for a high seas shallow-set longline fishery with members of the Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS). The HMSMT Report (Agenda Item C.3.b) proposes a number of alternatives, including a status quo option along with various possible configurations of a west coast based high seas shallow set longline fishery. The HMSMT then solicited comments from industry representatives who were present at the meeting regarding their opinions on what fishing areas, effort level, and fleet size would be appropriate.

The HMSAS suggested a small initial fleet size of 12 permitted vessels based on the likely level of effort which would not create potential jeopardy to protected loggerhead and leatherback turtle stocks, while allowing for an economically viable level of effort for participants. The HMSMT recommends considering whether it would be possible to develop an adaptive management policy which provides for periodic review of success in meeting protected species conservation requirements. This review could include an assessment of impacts on target, nontarget, and protected species along with any cumulative impacts. If conservation goals were attained, the policy would allow for an increase in the number of permits without requiring a new fishery management plan amendment or a reinitiation of the Section 7 consultation process.

The HMSMT notes that the current level of observer funding would limit observer availability and may constrain effort below the level that might otherwise be possible for a given number of permits. Similarly, if sea turtle take caps were established to limit the allowable takes of loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles subject to 100 percent observer coverage requirements, effort would potentially be constrained below the level otherwise anticipated. The HMSMT suggests that a balance between the number of permits and allowable effort is necessary to ensure a reasonable chance for participants to achieve an economically viable level of effort.

Given that the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council has initiated a process to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, the HMSMT believes there may be an advantage to immediately beginning the public review process rather than waiting for a more refined list of alternatives later. Therefore, the HMSMT suggests the Council consider whether to initiate the public review process based on the current range of alternatives, or to develop a more detailed proposal for future consideration at the September Council meeting.

Council Action:

- 1. Consider whether to begin the public review process immediately or postpone until a later Council meeting (for example, September 2008).**
- 2. If the Council wishes to immediately initiate the public review process, adopt a range of alternatives for public review.**
- 3. Provide guidance on the timeline for public comment.**