

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT

Dr. R. Michael Laurs and Dr. Joseph Powers discussed their draft report “North Pacific Albacore ‘White Paper’” (Agenda Item F.1.a, Attachment 1) with the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Albacore are a Highly Migratory Species under joint international management by the Inter American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). The last assessment for this stock was conducted in 2006. A new stock assessment is planned for 2011. For the next assessment, the modeling platform will change from a Virtual Population Analysis model to Stock Synthesis 3 (SS3).

The SSC offers the following comments on the albacore “White Paper”:

- There are several instances in the paper which reference a concern expressed in the 2006 stock assessment that if current fishing effort levels were not capped, the stock may become overfished by about 2015. The SSC notes the reference to “overfished” used in this case is not the same definition of overfished established by the WCPFC Northern Committee (NC), i.e. when biomass falls below an established biomass threshold (average of lowest 10 years of SSB). Using the NC definition, the 2006 assessment did not indicate that the stock would be overfished in 2015.
- Section 6.2 of the report “Trends in U.S. Albacore Fishing Effort” and Table 6 should be interpreted with caution. At the April 2007 PFMC meeting, the SSC previously reviewed similar effort data and identified problems with this type of analysis (Agenda Item J.3.c, Supplemental SSC Report, April 2007 PFMC meeting). At that time, the SSC suggested a more appropriate analysis that partitioned the fishery mortality for U.S. fisheries (U.S. partial F) out of the overall international fishery mortality. This would allow a better assessment of whether U.S. fishing effort has been stable or increasing. This analysis has been conducted by the Albacore Working Group of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) and should be provided or referenced in the draft report.

Finally, the SSC notes that the new assessment planned for 2011 using SS3 may bring better definition to the issues discussed above.