

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON
RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE WESTERN AND CENTRAL PACIFIC FISHERIES
COMMISSION (WCPFC)

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) had a discussion regarding possible Council recommendations to the U.S. delegation to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

Regarding North Pacific albacore, the HMSMT notes that the Northern Committee's draft conservation and management measure proposes to ensure that fishing effort in each of the fisheries or fleets does not increase above 2002-2004 average levels. At the April 2007 Pacific Fishery Management Council (Pacific Council) meeting, the HMSMT presented a characterization of North Pacific albacore effort by U.S. Pacific fisheries which used the period of 1996-2005 to characterize recent effort due to relatively stable landings over that period. Given significant seasonal variability in North Pacific albacore effort levels over seasons, the HMSMT is concerned that an average of effort based on a much narrower time window from 2002-2004 and choice of the effort measure may result in an inaccurate characterization of current effort levels for fisheries on North Pacific albacore.

Although commercial and recreational landings of northern bluefin tuna on the west coast are highly variable from year to year, this species continues to be economically important to west coast fishers. With this in mind, the HMSMT reiterates concerns about increased fishing mortality in recruits and juveniles. International Scientific Committee (ISC) and Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) scientific staffs have expressed the opinion that further increases in fishing mortality, particularly of zero-year-old recruits, could potentially result in overfishing. Although the draft conservation measure proposed to the WCPFC by the Northern Committee to the ISC is a good first step, the U.S. should continue to work for a stronger conservation measure that specifically limits fishing mortality on age 0-3 fish with compatible measures applied in both the high seas and Regional Fishery Management Organization members nations' Exclusive Economic Zones. In addition, the Pacific Council might consider recommending to the WCPFC to encourage the IATTC to adopt complementary conservation measures for the Eastern Pacific.

PFMC
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