

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON FISHERY MANAGEMENT
PLAN AMENDMENT 2: ANNUAL CATCH LIMITS AND ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

Mr. Kit Dahl and Dr. Steve Stohs presented the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) Report on Amendment 2 to the HMS Fishery Management Plan (FMP). This document presents an overview of the topics recommended by the HMSMT for the Council to address. Namely, 1) classification of stocks in the FMP; 2) the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) international exception to annual catch limit (ACLs) requirement for Management Unit Species (MUS); 3) determining the primary FMP for MUS also addressed by the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council's (WPFMC) Pelagics FMP; 4) establishing reference points; and 5) accountability measures. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) discussion focused primarily on Items 1-3.

The HMSMT Report is difficult to follow given the number of species in the FMP and the various ways of classifying species. It would be useful to add a table to the report that delineates all species in the FMP, how they are classified, and the rationale for the respective classification.

The Amendment 2 process provides the Council with an opportunity to reduce the number of species in the HMS FMP – particularly species with little or no recorded catch off the U.S. west coast and for which the WPFMC Pelagics FMP would likely be the primary FMP (e.g. black marlin and sailfish). This would greatly simplify the HMS FMP and allow the HMSMT to focus its limited resources on the species of greater interest to the Council.

The HMSMT recommends designating a primary FMP (PFMC HMS FMP or WPFMC Pelagics FMP) for each of the species in the FMP. This would not only establish clear lines of responsibility between the Councils but would also clarify the scope of the work needed to complete Amendment 2 to the HMS FMP. For example, ACLs would only be needed for the PFMC-primary MUS that do not fall under the international exemption.

The HMSMT has yet to take up the issue of how best to establish acceptable biological catches (ABCs) that reflect uncertainty in the HMS stock assessments. Experience in dealing with this issue for the Groundfish and CPS FMPs indicates that this issue may require considerable time and effort. However, this work would not be necessary should the Council apply the international exception to all species (as apparently the WPFMC will do for its MUS). A Council decision on the international exemption issue at this meeting would be most helpful in determining what needs to be done and in planning the workload. The SSC HMS Subcommittee is willing to work with the HMSMT on this matter.