

## COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENTS RELEVANT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WEST COAST SWORDFISH MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING PLAN

During Agenda Item G.2, the Council expressed some questions about content and status of the draft Swordfish Fishery Management Monitoring Plan shown as reference material (Agenda Item G.2, Attachment 1). Council staff committed to providing the context of the origin of this draft document under agenda item C.6, to better understand its status and so that consideration could be made for a future floor session agenda item to discuss the draft plan in more detail.

At the direction of the Council, the draft plan is essentially a collation of the most recent policy decisions made on the drift gillnets fishery and alternative gear types, and associated issues about considerations to develop an improved swordfish fishery.

Following are excerpts from Council Meeting Decision Summary Documents from recent meetings that show the policy actions taken by the Council and the instructions to the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) and Council staff about inclusions to the plan. The titles of each section are the title of the Agenda Item at that particular Council meeting.

### **I. March 2014 (Drift Gillnet Monitoring, Management and Alternative Gear Report)**

The Council took several actions toward a goal of developing a comprehensive plan to transition the current drift gillnet fishery to a fishery utilizing a suite of more environmentally and economically sustainable gear types that can effectively target the healthy West Coast swordfish stock operating under Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) authority. The Council actions are:

1. Sending a letter to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) requesting reinstatement of the emergency rule that lapsed on January 31 and implementation of the Pacific Offshore Cetacean Take Reduction Team recommendations so there is no gap in application while NMFS implements permanent regulations on this matter.
2. Requesting NMFS provide a report at the June Council meeting on issues and possible solutions to more comprehensively placing a transitioning swordfish fishery under MSA authority, including Federal permit options that would replace the current California State permit regime.
3. Tasking Council staff with noticing the public that the Council would consider preliminary experimental fishing permit (EFP) approval on fishery transition proposals at the June 2014 Council meeting, and encouraging EFP submission. Further, the Council directed the HMSMT to prepare research protocols to guide the evaluation of EFPs to test alternative gear types.
4. Tasking Council staff, the Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS), and the HMSMT with initial development of a fishery transition plan and possible

regulations under a typical MSA process, with the transition period being of sufficient duration to maintain a reasonable commercial flow of swordfish to domestic markets during the transition. The initial compilation of ideas was scheduled for the June 2014 Council meeting, with typical MSA process management tools to use such things as, seasons, areas, allowable gear alternatives, and integration of EFP results.

## **II. June 2014 (Drift Gillnet Fishery Transition Issues)**

The Council enumerated a set of policy objectives for managing the West Coast swordfish fishery under full MSA authority for 2014 and beyond:

1. Reduce bycatch in the California drift gillnet (DGN) fishery through the use of hard caps for high priority protected species (marine mammals and sea turtles) and measures to reduce discard of other species. If hard caps are reached or exceeded during a fishing season, the fishery would be closed for the remainder of the season. Hard caps are to be evaluated for the following species: fin, humpback, and sperm whales; and leatherback, loggerhead, olive ridley, and green turtles.
2. Establish a control date of June 23, 2014, for purposes of possibly considering a future federal DGN limited entry program under MSA authority.
3. Increase observer coverage rates above 2013 levels for the DGN fishery to facilitate implementation of bycatch reduction measures such as hard caps. The beginning of the 2016/2017 DGN fishing season is identified as a target for implementing full monitoring and accountability through onboard observers and/or electronic monitoring systems.
4. Support collaboration between fishing communities, agencies, scientists, and nongovernmental organizations to develop alternative fishing gears, conduct research to further minimize bycatch in the DGN fishery, maintain a viable domestic West Coast highly migratory species fishery, and reduce capacity in the DGN fishery through buyouts or other incentives.
5. Explore regulatory amendments that would remove exemptions for unobservable vessels in the DGN fishery.
6. Routinely review DGN fishery performance to evaluate its ability to operate within hard cap levels and successfully minimize bycatch of other discard species according to bycatch performance standards to be adopted by the Council.
7. Evaluate future access to Pacific Leatherback Conservation Area (PLCA) in light of full accountability and acceptable bycatch cap levels.

## **III. November 2014 (Drift Gillnet Fishery Hard Caps and Other Adopted Priorities for 2015-2016 Fisheries)**

...The Council discussed a policy goal to end the DGN fishery and transition it to a swordfish target fishery that excludes DGN gear time at some point in the future, but did not adopt this as a policy goal. The discussion instead expressed a policy intent to pursue strong management

measures designed to improve the target performance of the DGN fishery, while at the same time encouraging alternative gears that can provide for a viable commercial fishery with significantly better bycatch performance than the past DGN fishery...

...[The Council] Directed the HMSMT and staff to prepare a draft purpose and need statement for a Drift Gillnet Management and Monitoring Plan, including its goal and objectives, for the Council's consideration in March 2015. As part of this effort the Council staff should strive to complete a Fishery Monitoring Plan by June 2015, working with the HMSMT and other appropriate Council advisory bodies. The objective is to increase monitoring in the drift gillnet fishery, either through human observers or electronic technologies, to 100 percent....

#### **IV. March 2015 (Drift Gillnet Management and Monitoring Plan Including Final Action on Hard Caps)**

...The Council ... expanded the scope of the management and monitoring plan to be the "Swordfish Management and Monitoring Plan (SMMP)." The Council also made revisions to the description of the proposed action and the purpose and need statement for the SMMP. The Council affirmed its commitment to continue progress on finfish performance standards and revisit potential measures at a future date...

#### **V. June 2015 (Swordfish Management and Monitoring Plan Hardcaps)**

...The Council ... directed the HMSMT to further develop the Swordfish Fishery Management and Monitoring Plan and to continue investigating optimal levels of observer coverage to detect rare event bycatch while considering the costs of observer coverage. The Council also expressed interest in obtaining more detail on alternatives that include performance standards for finfish bycatch...

PFMC  
09/16/15