

WESTERN AND CENTRAL PACIFIC FISHERIES COMMISSION NORTHERN COMMITTEE MEETING OUTCOMES

The 11th Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee (NC) met August 31-September 2, in Sapporo, Japan. The U.S. Delegation included Ms. Dorothy Lowman, Council Chair and WCPFC Commissioner; Mr. Barry Thom, Deputy Regional Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service West Coast Region; and Dr. Kit Dahl, Council Staff.

North Pacific Albacore

The U.S. submitted a proposal enumerating biological reference points and harvest control rules to be considered in the management strategy evaluation (MSE) to be conducted by the Albacore Working Group of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) (Agenda Item G.1, Attachment 2, September 2015). NC members were not prepared to adopt the proposal. In particular, Canada emphasized the need to identify operational objectives, which it saw as lacking in the U.S. proposal.

As stated in the draft meeting summary, “After substantial discussion the NC agreed to advance the work on MSE based on the document provided by the ISC (NC11-WP01 [Agenda Item G.1, Attachment 1, September 2015]), particularly the expected input from managers as contained as Table 1, taking also into account the US proposal (NC11-DP01). In addition, J. Holmes agreed to prepare an explanatory note to help managers to prepare answers and this will be distributed to members through the Secretariat. The members are then requested to submit answers to the questions to the Secretariat by November 19. ISC will then organize the answers for redistribution to members. In the margin of the Commission meeting in Bali, NC members will review the document provided by the ISC with the aim of producing the initial consensus input to the ALB MSE Workshop scheduled in April 2016.”

Pacific Bluefin Tuna

The U.S. submitted two proposals on Pacific bluefin tuna, a precautionary management framework (Agenda Item G.1, Attachment 3, September 2015) and a rebuilding plan (Agenda Item G.1, Attachment 4, September 2015). The precautionary management framework proposed by the U.S. identifies $15\%SSB_{\text{current}, F=0}$ as a limit reference point and references a stock rebuilding target of $20\%SSB_{\text{current}, F=0}$.¹ The rebuilding plan identifies $20\%SSB_{\text{current}, F=0}$ as an “ultimate rebuilding target” to be achieved by 2030; the current measure (CMM 2014-04) identifies the median SSB estimated for the period 1952 through 2011 as the current rebuilding target, to be reached by 2024. Japan, supported by Chinese Taipei and Korea, did not support the U.S. proposal for $20\%SSB_{\text{current}, F=0}$ as a rebuilding target. These countries opposed the proposed target, because 1) there is a weak relationship between observed SSB and observed

¹ 15% and 20% respectively of estimated current spawning stock biomass if no fishing was occurring.

recruitment over the historical time series (in the last stock assessment the steepness parameter was estimated at 0.99), 2) the last stock assessment showed that Pacific bluefin tuna has been below $20\%SSB_{\text{current, F=0}}$ throughout the historical time series (i.e., since 1952), and 3) estimates of $SSB_{\text{current, F=0}}$ fluctuate substantially over the historical time series. Japan also emphasized the measures it has taken to regulate its domestic fisheries for Pacific bluefin. Fundamentally, Japan prefers empirical reference points (based on historical observation) over dynamic reference points such as those scaled to estimates of biomass in the absence of fishing. While favoring empirical reference points, Japan did propose a strategy to “identify and eventually reach B_{MSY} .”

Japan submitted a proposal (WCPFC-NC11-DP-05) for an “emergency rule” that would be invoked if a recruitment index based on catch of age-0 fish by Japanese troll vessels indicates recruitment failure, which was adopted, although a definition of recruitment failure and the management response remain undefined.

The U.S. rebuilding plan proposal identified 13 candidate harvest scenarios to be evaluated by the ISC in concert with the next stock assessment (scheduled for 2016). This range was narrowed considerably to the following:

- a. The current management regime, considered to be: fishing effort at 2002-2004 level in PBF-directed WCPO fisheries and maximum catch of 4,725 mt/yr of fish $<30\text{kg}$ in WCPO fisheries; maximum catch of 6,591 mt/yr of fish $\geq 30\text{kg}$ in WCPO fisheries; maximum catch of 3,300 mt/yr in EPO commercial fisheries; and catch in EPO sport fisheries as currently managed.
- b. Scenario (a), 10% less in catches in all fisheries.

These scenarios would be evaluated with respect to expected SSB over the course of 10, 15 and 20-year projection periods. However, the ISC Chair confirmed that ISC will conduct any additional scenarios they deem necessary as part of the 2016 stock assessment.

The U.S. submitted the following statement for the meeting record:

The U.S. considers the progress made here to be only the barest minimum needed and believes that we missed an opportunity to have a meaningful discussion about the long term management of Pacific bluefin tuna. NC members have a responsibility to recover PBF, and then manage the stock throughout the Pacific Ocean using the best available science. The United States offered two proposals this week – one to rebuild the stock and one to guide future management – and both were based on the best available science and modern principles of science-based management, including the use of biologically based limits. We recognize that the current interim rebuilding target is based on the historic biomass level and we must explore a more appropriate target based on the best available science. We cannot delay this work and shirk this responsibility. The United States hopes that all NC members will provide feedback on our proposals so that at next year’s meeting proposals to recover and appropriately manage PBF, including biologically-based reference points for the management framework and the long-term rebuilding objectives.

North Pacific Swordfish

The U.S. submitted a proposed precautionary management framework (Agenda Item G.1, Attachment 5, September 2015) that included a fishing mortality based limit reference point, F_{MSY} . Japan countered by proposing a limit reference point of 40% of B_{MSY} . Since one of the main objectives of the U.S. proposal was to introduce a dynamic F-based limit reference point, the U.S. did not support Japan's proposed change and the precautionary management framework was not adopted.