

SWORDFISH FISHERY MANAGEMENT POLICY CONNECTIONS

At the September 2015 Council meeting, the agenda item titled “Swordfish Management and Monitoring Plan Hardcaps” scheduled for final action on the hardcaps matter, was not able to complete discussion of the draft management and monitoring plan content ([Agenda Item G.2, Attachment 1, September 2015](#)) due to time constraints. During the future meeting agenda and workload planning agenda item, the Council reviewed a short staff paper collating prior Council policy decisions and direction for the content of the draft management and monitoring plan (see [Agenda Item C.6, Supplemental Attachment 4, September 2015](#)). However, questions remained about how the various aspects of a healthy, productive swordfish fishery worked together within a cohesive overall strategy. Thus, this agenda item was scheduled with a goal of further understanding the various connections. Because of overall meeting agenda constraints at this meeting, this agenda item was expressly designed to not be extensive in time and scope, with a limited focus on understanding of the state of policy development at the time of the September Council meeting without the expectation of contentious voting on individual policy confirmations or adjustments. This agenda item was scheduled for up to three hours of Council floor time.

Based on motions and Council discussion over the course of 2014 and 2015, the overarching strategy for this fishery could be described¹ as striving to achieve a productive, well-monitored fishery of reasonably high volume that is economically viable to participants, targeting swordfish but including other healthy Highly Migratory Species (HMS) commercial species, with non-target bycatch less than that which occurred in the historic drift gillnet (DGN) fishery. Relying only on harpoon and yet-to-be-allowed buoy gear fisheries has not been viewed as being of sufficient commercial volume, and the Council voted to not schedule transitioning an end to the use of drift gillnet gear. The reason achieving a commercially viable level of production is important relates to issues of local demand for swordfish otherwise being satisfied by foreign-caught fish that carry a higher level of bycatch than the historic DGN fishery level, including specifically sea turtles and marine mammals, thereby causing more ecological damage on a global level among other negative concerns associated with foreign swordfish fisheries. The overarching strategy could be achieved by significant improvements in the DGN fishery and the use of alternative gear types, which should be tested by exempted fishing permits (EFPs) prior to full fleet allowance. Elevated performance in the use of DGN gear could be improved by the use of hard caps that incentivizes fisherman behavior, and by use of a more sophisticated time-area season structure that allows fishing only when ocean conditions coincide with high abundance of the target species and low incidence of non-target bycatch, a concept used successfully in various marine and freshwater salmon gillnet fisheries. This latter concept is the subject of a proposed EFP test that could result in a full fleet fishery of shorter duration in smaller open areas, but with a higher swordfish catch and lower bycatch than the existing fishery. The Council is also interested in testing various configurations of pelagic longline gear as another alternative to the

¹ There has been a wide spectrum of perspectives expressed by Council members on aspects of purpose, goals, objectives, and implementation management of an optimal West Coast swordfish fishery, and there have been votes on various policy elements that have not been unanimous votes; this truncated description does not attempt to capture a complete topic listing or the interpretative nuances of these discussions.

existing DGN fishery, both within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and on the high seas in a manner similar to the successful fishery for Hawaii-based vessels managed by the Western Pacific Council. The Council is interested in managing the overall fishery with all gear types licensed within a Federal permit under Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) authority and the HMS Fishery Management Plan (FMP), consistent with management of other West Coast commercial fisheries; the Council set a control date of June 24, 2014 to start this process as it relates to the transfer of State DGN permits.

Currently, separate consideration of elements of the above overall strategy are scheduled to come forward during 2016, such as two agenda items tentatively scheduled for the March 2016 Council meeting: scoping for an FMP amendment dealing with pelagic longline fishing outside the EEZ and progressing on an HMS Federal permit under MSA authority (see the Year-at-Glance summary of future Council meeting agenda items, Agenda Item F.6, Attachment 1, November 2015).

At the September Council meeting, a variety of questions were posed relative to the connections between the various policy directions and overall strategy for the swordfish fishery. Some of these questions, together with limited response information, are provided in Agenda Item G.2, Supplemental Attachment 1.

There is a National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) report (Agenda Item G.2.a, NMFS Report) with information to contribute to the purpose of this agenda item. The report extracts results from two workshops sponsored by NMFS relevant to the Council's discussion of policy connections.

Council Action:

Discuss how the various possibilities for a commercially viable West Coast swordfish fishery can be best coordinated and brought forward in 2016 for policy development and/or implementation, including any further guidance on when consideration of a draft management and monitoring plan is best scheduled.

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item G.2, Supplemental Attachment 1. West Coast Swordfish Fishery Policy Questions.
2. Agenda Item G.2.a, NMFS Report 1: Reference Information From NMFS-Sponsored Swordfish Workshops.
3. Agenda Item G.2.b, Public Comment.

Agenda Order:

Swordfish Fishery Management Policy Connections

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- a. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies and Management Entities
- b. Public Comment
- c. Council Discussion

PFMC
10/22/15