

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE UPDATE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PACIFIC BLUEFIN AND BIGEYE TUNA MANAGEMENT

On April 18, 2016 the International Scientific Committee (ISC) of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) released a draft Executive Summary for the 2016 Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) Stock Assessment. The revised assessment adjusted the 2014 spawning stock biomass (SSB) of PBF from 4.2 percent in the original 2014 assessment down to approximately 2.6 percent of unfished biomass. This downward revision is attributed to improvements made in the 2016 model, not further decline in the population. The model projection from the updated assessment shows that both total biomass and SSB of PBF have increased slightly or held steady since 2010. In addition, the stock assessment also does not account for new, more restrictive, conservation measures put in place after 2014, particularly the ones implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) in 2015-2016, which adhere to catch reduction targets in line with the October/November 2014 IATTC resolution. The IATTC is currently reviewing the draft assessment results, and the ISC will finalize its assessment and review it at the Plenary Meeting scheduled for July 2016.

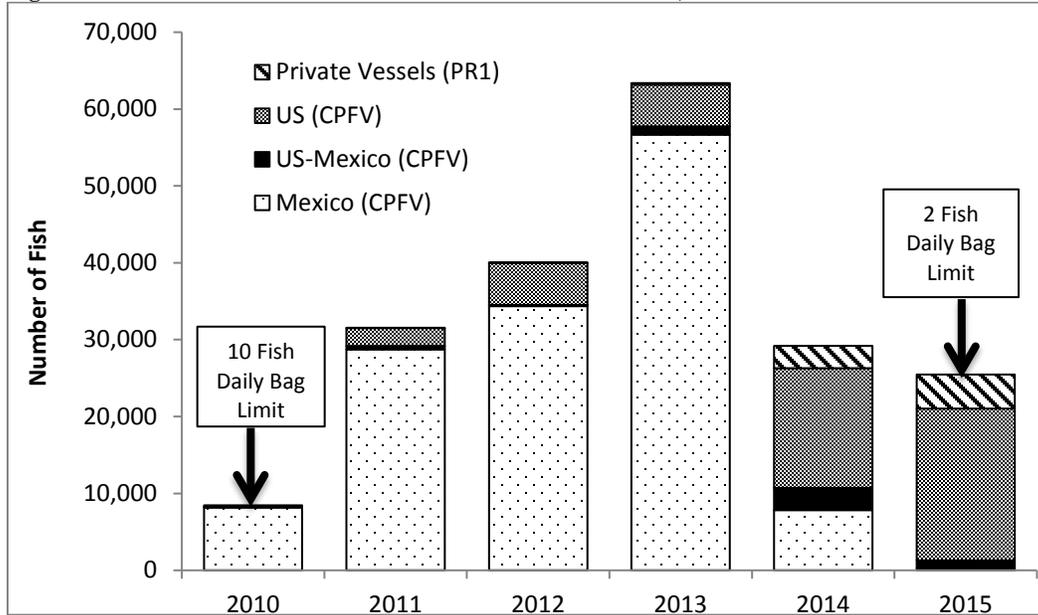
In response to this new stock status information, CDFW recommends that NMFS and the Council support status quo domestic management for PBF in the upcoming international negotiations and management processes.

Current Management

Management measures implemented for the 2015 and 2016 seasons have resulted in significant restrictions to U.S. West Coast fishing opportunities for PBF. These include a reduction in catch and effort through a recreational bag limit change, reduction to commercial catch limits and the addition of commercial trip limits. The measures are designed to address stock-wide overfishing in accordance with IATTC resolutions for catch reductions throughout the Eastern Pacific Ocean. As mentioned, the result from the updated stock assessment does not reflect the benefits of these measures as the data from recent years will not be incorporated until 2018.

- The recreational bag limit decrease from 10 to 2 fish is expected to result in an estimated 30 percent catch reduction of PBF from U.S. West Coast recreational anglers. This is consistent with IATTC Resolution C-14-06 ([Agenda Item D.2, Attachment 2](#)) and the ISC recommendation for a 25-40 percent reduction in catch. Despite the unusual and persistent local abundance of PBF off Baja, Mexico and southern California the last two years, where fish have been highly available to private boaters as well as for commercial passenger fishing vessels (CPFVs), annual recreational landings are no longer increasing as they were between 2010 and 2013 (Figure 1). This may be attributed to the bag limit reductions and temporary prohibitions on sport take in Mexican waters, as well as angler education and industry cooperation.

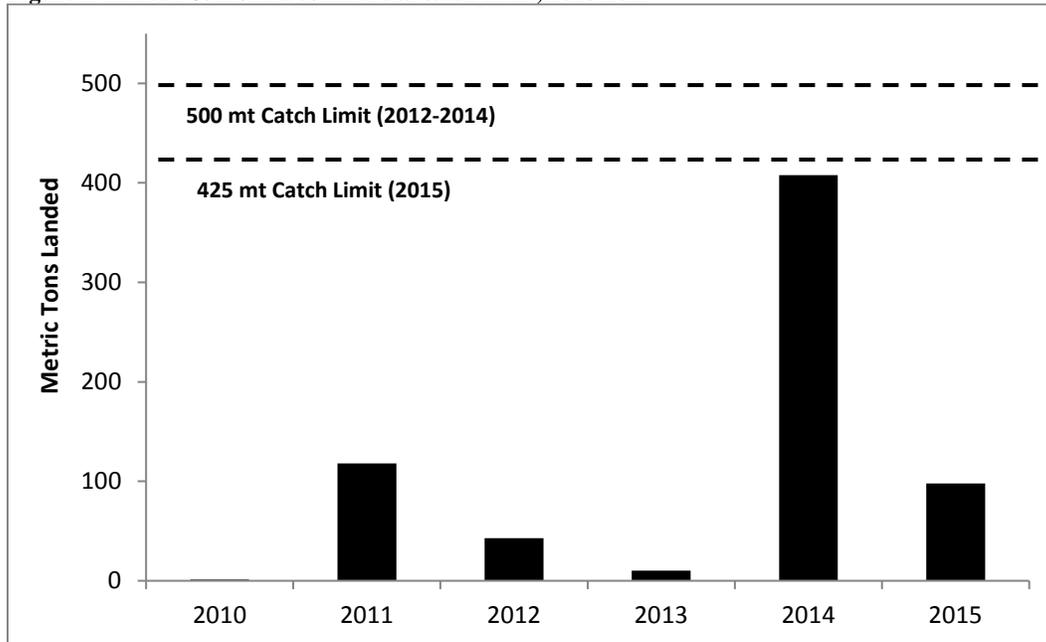
Figure 1. Annual California recreational catch in numbers of fish, 2010- 2015



Source: CPFV Logbook data from CDFW Marine Log System (MLS) extracted on 06/15/16; and California Recreational Fishery Survey (CRFS) primary launch ramp (PR1) data from CDFW's CRFS data portal extracted on 03/18/16. PR1 data includes fish caught in U.S. and Mexico waters.

- Prior to 2012, there was no U.S. commercial catch limit established for PBF. An annual catch limit of 500 mt was established in 2012 for every IATTC member nation (other than Mexico), including the U.S. The annual limit was further reduced in 2014, and then again for a combined 2015-2016 two-year limit of 600 mt with a maximum 425 mt per year (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Annual California commercial catch in mt, 2010-2015



Source: CDFW Commercial Fisheries Information System (CFIS) extracted 05/20/16.

Additional Recommendations

CDFW supports a change to the biennial commercial provisions in Number 2 of Resolution C-14-06 ([Agenda Item D.2, Attachment 2](#)) as shown in the current U.S. proposal ([Agenda Item D.2 Supplemental Attachment 3](#)). The provision would maintain the current 600 mt two-year catch limit but eliminates additional restrictions for individual years. Presuming there will again be a biennial limit in the next resolution, CDFW recommends that the terms of how that biennial limit is taken in the two-year period should be left exclusively to domestic regulations and not be included in terms of the resolution itself.

CDFW also supports continued use of trigger points that would leave a portion of the total catch limit for small volume and incidental landings to avoid any need for complete closure of the commercial fishery during the two-year period. For U.S. West Coast vessels, domestic federal regulations specify that individual fishing vessels are subject to a 25 mt trip limit, which is reduced to 2 mt if total U.S. landings come within 50 mt of the commercial limit. CDFW recommends the Council, with input from its advisory committees and management entities, review these trip limits and trigger points and provide recommendations for the next two-year period. The discussions should happen on a timeline that allows meaningful Council input to NMFS prior to publication of the final rule.

CDFW supports the continued use of trip limit management to slow commercial catches by the purse seine fleet, and to minimize high-volume landings, which will also reduce the risk that the catch limit will be exceeded by only a few large volume purse seine deliveries (Table 1).

Table 1: Annual California commercial catch in mt by gear, 2010-2015

Gear Type	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Hook and Line	0	0	0	2	2	7
Other	0	1	0	0	0	0
Gillnet	1	18	5	7	5	4
Purse Seine	0	99	38	0	401	86

Source: CDFW market receipt data from Commercial Fisheries Information System (CFIS) extracted 05/20/16.

CDFW recommends that the Highly Migratory Species Management Team and Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel evaluate the viability of a federal electronic ticket program, especially the feasibility of including a 24-hour filing requirement for businesses receiving PBF, consistent with requirements for some groundfish fishery sectors. Such a program could allow for improved and expedited catch tracking, especially in small ports and landings made in remote areas.

Balancing Needs and Looking Forward

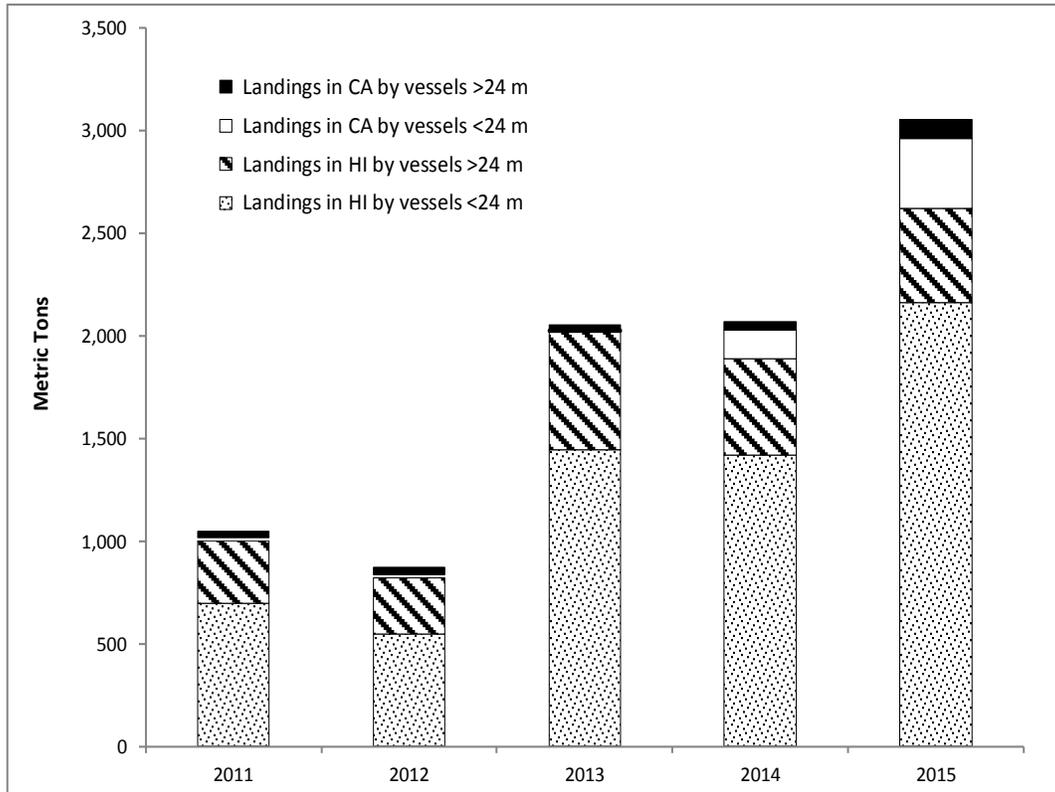
Current U.S. recreational and commercial harvest of PBF makes up a minor portion of total take by treaty member nations. Despite the relatively small impact the U.S. fishery has on the stock as a whole, CDFW remains supportive of domestic catch reduction efforts due to the stock's status. However, CDFW also acknowledges the need to maintain California's fishing opportunities on this important stock, particularly the need to maintain ability to make small-volume or incidental commercial landings throughout the year, and ability to retain PBF among the mix of tuna target species in offshore recreational fisheries.

CDFW and NMFS will continue to coordinate and improve recreational and commercial biological data collection for PBF in cooperation with the fishing industry and NGOs. These efforts have resulted in opportunistic collection of length, weight, and sex information, as well as otoliths, gonads and genetic tissue collection that will help inform essential fishery information in future stock assessments. Recreational at-sea fillet and labeling requirements have helped catch accounting and enforcement of the new bag limit. CDFW supports continuing these coordinated efforts and the current recreational monitoring standards which include semi-annual reporting to IATTC. To date this process has worked effectively to gauge relative catch levels at a few points in time during the season, while requiring only minor agency workload.

BIGEYE TUNA IN THE EASTERN PACIFIC

Under current IATTC management measures the U.S. has an annual catch limit for bigeye tuna (BET) of 500 mt, applicable to longline vessels greater than 24 meters in length in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). There currently is no catch limit for vessels under 24 meters. Catch from the EPO landed in California has been increasing since 2014, especially by vessels less than 24 meters, but still remains a small fraction of the total U.S. landings which primarily occur in Hawaii (Figure 4). BET landings in California increased sevenfold in 2014, and then more than doubled again in 2015. Value of these deliveries into California in 2015 exceeded \$3.1 million, ranking it in the top 10 species by value last year. Of those landings, 77 percent in 2014 and 79 percent in 2015 were from vessels under 24 meters.

Figure 4. California versus Hawaii Landings of Bigeye Tuna



Source: CDFW Commercial Fisheries Information System (CFIS) extracted 06/06/16; NMFS reported landings from State of Hawaii landing receipts 06/14/16.

The catch limit in the Western Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) has been reduced over several years, resulting in some transfer of effort to the EPO when the WCPO fishery closes. This factor, combined with crowded offloads in Hawaii and the establishment of steady buyers in San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco may be attractive, resulting in more vessels landing and/or moving their home ports to California in the last two years (Table 2). Vessels landing BET in California have more than doubled since 2011, especially in the less than 24 meters class.

While the majority of U.S. vessels fishing in the EPO are longer than 24 meters and subject to the annual catch limit, most of the vessels landing in California are less than 24 meters. The tonnage of BET landed by these smaller vessels in the 2015 season was 340 mt.

Table 2. Number of vessels that have landed BET in California by year, 2009-2015

Year	number of vessels >24m	number of vessels <24m	Total number of vessels
2011	3	4	7
2012	3	3	6
2013	2	4	6
2014	5	8	13
2015	6	10	16

Source: CDFW Commercial Fisheries Information System (CFIS) extracted 06/06/16

The U.S. reports landings of BET from all vessel sizes to the IATTC, but it is unclear if all treaty nations are reporting in this manner (pers. comm. Taylor Debevec, NMFS affiliate). Some treaty nations consider their small vessel fleets artisanal fisheries and may not report the associated landings. This was discussed at the Scientific Advisory Subpanel to the U.S. delegation to the IATTC at the May 2016 meeting in La Jolla, CA.

This year, CDFW is coordinating with NMFS to increase real-time tracking and reporting of commercial BET landings throughout the state. This effort will be focused in southern California for all vessel types, in an effort to more efficiently account for CA landings in the annual U.S. catch limit.

Recommendations

CDFW supports NMFS' effort to gain further understanding of international catch reporting practices, and recommends that NMFS and the Council continue to support the publication of the annual national report in accordance with item 14 on IATTC proposal G-1 ([Agenda Item D.2 Supplemental Attachment 3](#)). CDFW further recommends that the Council reach out to the U.S. State Department to advocate for continued active involvement of the Council in the development of future resolutions and catch limits.