

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON  
FUTURE COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA AND WORKLOAD PLANNING

Issue of Albacore and Salmon/Halibut on a Single Trip

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) was briefed by Mr. Dayna Matthews, NMFS OLE, on interpretation of the current HMS regulations for retention of salmon and halibut on trips where albacore are caught. Salmon and albacore are designated as prohibited species in the HMS Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The FMP states that "...prohibited species must be released immediately if caught, unless other provisions for their disposition are established..." For salmon and halibut the FMP "prohibits retention of Pacific halibut and salmon (*except when caught with authorized gears during authorized seasons*) and adopts a framework authorization for changes in prohibited species designations" (emphasis added). However this exemption was not carried over into the HMS FMP regulations. 50 CFR 660.705 (Prohibitions) states that "it is unlawful for any person to do any of the following ... when fishing for HMS, fail to return a prohibited species to the sea immediately with a minimum of injury" but does not include the exemption described in the FMP for salmon and halibut. HMS regulations apply to both commercial and recreational fisheries

The HMSAS observes that it has been common practice for albacore trollers to switch from their target species to salmon and/or halibut. Recreational charter vessels and guides may also advertise trips targeting both albacore and salmon on the same trip. These are longstanding practices that would be disrupted if NMFS enforces the regulations as written.

Mr. Matthews indicated that NMFS said regulations are going to be interpreted as written and absent any change will be enforced in 2015. A regulatory amendment is required to change the regulations in this regard. This would take a Council two-meeting process. The HMSAS requests that the Council put this issue on their March and April agendas so that the regulatory change can be implemented as soon as possible in 2015.

Webinar Request Prior to HMSAS Meetings

The HMSAS are primarily industry representatives and have jobs other than dealing with Pacific Council issues on a daily basis. Many of us find it difficult to actually have time prior to the Council meetings to read the briefing materials that come to our homes and businesses. For those that participated in the HMSAS/HMSMT webinar prior to the June meeting, found the webinar very helpful in preparing our members for the HMSAS meeting issues that were before the Council. The HMSAS request that the Council Staff try their best to have a webinar on the current HMSAS issues 7 to 10 days prior to the Council meetings when HMSAS issues are on the Council agenda.