

June 2013

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

Southwest Region

501 West Ocean Boulevard, Suite 4200

Long Beach, California 90802-4213

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Mr. Dan Wolford
 Pacific Fishery Management Council
 7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101
 Portland, Oregon 97220

Dear Chairman Wolford:

This letter is to inform you that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has determined that Pacific bluefin tuna (*Thunnus orientalis*) continues to be subject to overfishing and is now overfished. Pacific bluefin is a management unit species in the Council's Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for U.S. West Coast Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species (HMS) and the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council's (WPFMC) Fishery Ecosystem Plan for Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region (FEP). NMFS is also informing the WPFMC about the change in status.

In December 2012, the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) completed their assessment of the status of Pacific bluefin using data through 2011 and concluded that the stock is still experiencing overfishing and is now overfished. The ISC assessment estimated the current spawning stock biomass of 22,606 metric tons (mt) to be about 3.6 percent of the unfished SSB. Unfished SSB was estimated at 633,468 mt. Current SSB is far below that associated with maximum sustainable yield (124,498 mt) and is near historic low levels. The Southwest Fisheries Science Center affirmed that the stock assessment was the best available science.

Although the criteria for making status determinations are identified in the HMS FMP, specific values for maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT) and the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) reference points have not been identified for Pacific bluefin tuna. Therefore, the assessment cannot directly evaluate the stock's status based on the FMP criteria.

Pacific bluefin tuna is considered to be a single North Pacific-wide stock. Its conservation and management are the responsibility of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). The United States is a member of both regional fishery management organizations. Although both organizations have internationally agreed upon management measures in place for Pacific bluefin tuna that expire at the end of 2013, these measures may be insufficient to end overfishing. Consequently, NMFS has determined that Section 304(i) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) applies because: (i) the overfished and overfishing condition of Pacific bluefin is due to excessive international fishing pressure and (ii) the IATTC and WCPFC have inadequate measures in place to correct the problem.



Under MSA Section 304(i)(2), the Council is required to develop domestic regulations to address the relative impact of the domestic fishing fleet on Pacific bluefin tuna. Section 304(i)(2) also requires the Council to develop recommendations to the Secretary of State and to Congress for international actions to end overfishing and rebuild Pacific bluefin tuna. The Council should develop recommendations in consultation with the Secretary that take into consideration relevant provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act as well as National Standard 1 Guidelines that address international overfishing.¹ NMFS encourages the Council to work cooperatively with the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council to develop management recommendations for this purpose.

My staff is ready to work with the Council on these efforts. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Mark Helvey, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



for Rodney R. McInnis
Regional Administrator

¹ 50 CFR 600.310(k)(2)