

HMSAS REPORT ON NORTH PACIFIC ALBACORE TUNA PRECAUTIONARY MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) is very concerned with the title for this Council action “Adopt Elements of a Precautionary Management Framework for North Pacific Albacore Tuna”. The HMSAS understood that the Council directed the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) to analyze factors that would affect the U.S. fleet in the international negotiating arena such as biological reference points (BRPs) and harvest control rules (HCRs). The analyses would be forwarded with the pros and cons to the U.S. Delegation with the idea that the U.S. Delegation would negotiate at the NC and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) to obtain the international management measures most favorable to the U.S. fleet. We view the Council action as forwarding the results of the HMSMT analyses to the U.S. delegation for the purpose of negotiating with the foreign governments. As indicated in several areas of their report, the best situation for the U.S. fleet is contingent on how the international agreement is finalized such as management measures based on an annual catch limit (ACL), some type of effort base, or some other type of biomass measurement. The HMSMT statement on page 4 suggests “At this point, the Council may wish to simply recommend that biomass reference points be taken into account as part of the North Pacific albacore precautionary management framework.” There does not appear to be enough scientific agreement or information of foreign fleet catches to do any more than encourage the international scientists to get agreement on limit and target reference points for the following reasons:

It is apparent that not all countries are providing catch / effort data on their national harvest of North Pacific albacore. For example, there is almost no catch data from China. Japan reports catch and number of vessels for a portion of their fleet, but does not include their very large artisanal fishery. This information is critical in establishing the basis for management.

The Japanese fleet has the ability to move from a skipjack target harvest to an albacore target harvest depending on market and availability. There has been no information on how that could be handled in any future management measures.

The two RFMOs do not appear to be coordinated in their approach to determining BRPs.

As noted in the HMSMT paper, effort control is one of the potential means of basing management measures. This idea of effort control might come from fisheries such as yellowfin tuna where effort and gear are relatively homogenous and there is some relationship between catch and effort. Albacore is more complex with different gear and some fisheries have significant albacore bycatch. More research is essential on the harvest effects of juvenile (age 3-4 as occurs in the U.S. surface fleet) vs. the harvest effects of the adults (ages 5 and up occurring in the longline fleet). In the salmon world, this concept is called adult equivalence. The science is very complex. A scientist who sits on the Albacore Working Group of the International

Scientific Committee (ISC) believes the research will show that the surface fishery will have a marginally lower impact on spawning stocks than the longline fishery.

The scientist from the Albacore Working Group thinks that the Japanese will position a finding that a limit reference point similar to the current 10 low abundance years is perfectly adequate and useful for management. If this is the result of the international process, it would change the dynamics of current thinking that MSY is the basis for a biological target reference point.

In conclusion, the HMSAS advises that the Council recommend that the U.S. Delegation use the report of the HMSMT to work on getting international agreement on target and limit biological reference points and pursue the harvest control rules after international biological reference points are determined.

PFMC
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