

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) has the following comments concerning albacore in regards to the September 1-4, 2014, Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee (NC) meeting.

The HMSAS supports the NC resolution “Precautionary Management Framework for North Pacific Albacore” as a workable framework for the North Pacific albacore that was passed after good scientific input from the International Scientific Committee (ISC) for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean, Albacore Working Group (ALBWG) and NC member nations. It shows that a highly migratory species can be managed on a multilateral basis in a reasonable fashion.

The HMSAS also remains very concerned about the absence of China from the NC meeting as well as the Inter American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) meeting in Lima, Peru. China’s fishing fleet continues to expand, especially in harvesting of highly migratory species. The HMSAS has little confidence that China will accurately report catch and effort now and in the future while continuing expansion of effort into the Western Pacific. China has also entered albacore markets with heavily subsidized fish, affecting prices in a negative way. The HMSAS asks the Council to strongly address concern with expanding Chinese harvest to the U.S. delegations to the IATTC and WCPFC as well as the U.S. Departments of State and Commerce.

One shortcoming we did notice in the NC resolution on North Pacific Albacore is the lack of addressing NP albacore by catch accountability in other North Pacific targeted species.

The HMSAS noted in the NC Management Framework (Agenda Item G.2.a, Supplemental Attachment 4) that target reference points and harvest control rules are still to be determined. In order to determine what is most advantageous for the U.S. fleet, the HMSAS asks the Council to task the HMSMT to study the economic affects on the fleet of different target reference points for North Pacific albacore.

The HMSAS has also reviewed the resolution from the Northern Committee concerning Pacific bluefin tuna (Agenda Item G.2.a, Supplemental Attachment 3) and summarizes its primary points as follows:

For the 2015 harvest:

- The total fishing effort level shall remain below the 2002-2004 annual average level.
- 50% proposed reduction of Pacific bluefin tuna less than 30 kilograms based on the 2002-2004 annual average level.

The HMSAS interprets this in actuality as only a 33% reduction from last year’s catch by the Japanese.

The HMSAS also notes that there is no documentation of, or reduction proposed in, the Japanese recreational fishery. (Currently, RFMOs do not require nations to document their recreational catch.)

With regard to the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) report:

- The HMSMT made their comparisons based on the period of 2007-2013 instead of the years 2002-2004 used in the resolution adopted by the Northern Committee.
- Table 4 on page 9 of Agenda Item G.4.b. HMSMT Report 2 shows that the maximum impact of the recreational fishery is less than 5% overall (ranges from .1% to 4.7%); however, it is unclear how this compares to the rest of the Pacific nations because the report uses 2007-2013 data. Because different years are being used in the analysis it is difficult to determine if the economic consequences are equitable.

The HMSMT should be commended for recognizing that a large reduction in opportunity created by minimal retention limits could be economically devastating to the recreational fleet in Southern California and all the associated jobs and revenue.

The HMSAS commercial and recreational fishermen are observing significant increase in the abundance of bluefin tuna in US and Mexican waters. Based on this fact, the HMSAS requests:

- The Southwest Fisheries Science Center stock assessment staff meet with the Scientific and Statistical Committee and the appropriate IATTC scientific staff to bring clarity to the biomass assessments.

Based on the above information the HMSAS recommends that any change in US retention limits be aligned with Mexican retention limits for recreational bluefin fisheries.

The HMSAS is concerned with the premature closing of the commercial catch of bluefin. The closure could cause unintended waste in the DGN and hook and line fishery. HMSAS requests the Council ask the NMFS regional administrator (Mr. William Stelle) to reopen the commercial fishery and if possible, **establish a one metric ton trip limit until the quota is met.**

In view of the above statements, the countries around the north Pacific will continue to harvest Pacific bluefin tuna and the US portion is very minimal of that harvest. **The HMSAS requests the council advise the NMFS to reject the petition proposing that all US bluefin tuna fisheries be prohibited (Agenda Item G.4.a, Attachment 2).**

The HMSAS requests the Council to remind the US delegation to the extraordinary session of the IATTC in October 2014 to retain the 500 metric ton commercial catch of bluefin tuna in each of 2015 and 2016 per reference to the Proposal IATTC-87 I-2.

PFMC
09/13/14