



Sportfishing, Inc.
1403 Scott St.,
San Diego, CA 92106

Agenda Item G.4.c
Public Comment
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Members of the Council

My name is Markus Medak and I own a CPFV vessel based in San Diego, California. I have worked in this industry as a crewmember since 1988 and as an owner for the last 11 years. I am extremely concerned about any potential management changes regarding Pacific Bluefin Tuna because my business is critically dependent on access to tuna. The Southern California Bight is a unique region oceanographically and we find that the abundance of our three primary tuna species, bluefin, yellowfin and albacore tuna varies dramatically in response to oceanographic conditions. During years of high albacore and/or yellowfin tuna abundance we find that these are our primary target species because they tend to be more catchable on a more consistent basis than the notoriously fickle bluefin tuna.

I have read the latest stock assessment of Pacific bluefin tuna and am well aware of the cause for concern. As a fisherman and conservationist it is clearly not in my interest to recommend fishing at an unsustainable pace, but I am gravely concerned about the possibility of unnecessarily strict regulations being drafted in order to show the rest of the world that we are "doing all we can" in order to conserve bluefin tuna. The CPFV fleet currently harvests less than 1% to a maximum of 5% annually of the North Pacific bluefin catch. This is not an insignificant amount, but even a complete ban on American bluefin tuna fishing will not achieve the goal of recovering the species. Any successful management will require a multinational effort among all nations that participate in this fishery. Over the last 5 years, I have seen first hand how the implementation of a quota system by the IATTC and Mexico has dramatically changed an unsustainable industrial fishery into a well regulated fishery with reasonable quotas that allow for very significant escapement while still supporting a large, economically important industry in Northern Baja California. We would do well to follow their lead and ensure that any management regime not only ensures the health of the stock, but also allows our fishing fleet to stay in business.

I recently attended the HMS working group meeting in La Jolla and after listening to a presentation by California Fish and Wildlife on the recreational bluefin tuna fishery in California, I was very concerned about the validity of some of the data used as well as some of the conclusions that were drawn from the data as presented.

First of all, inadequate sampling was done in order to generate a valid estimate of mean fish weight. Although the table shown depicted a sample size in the hundreds, the California Fish and Wildlife biologist informed us that these were actually phone calls and that some years only one or two fish were actually sampled. I know of no statistics where a sample size of $n=1$ or $n=2$ is considered significant.

Secondly, the mean weight of bluefin tuna was shown to be 0.9 kg in one year, however according to Dan Fuller, associate scientist at IATTC) there are no records of bluefin tuna of this size in the EPO. I

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suspect that this error is due to misidentification and small sample size which makes this data meaningless when considering management decisions.

Thirdly, an analysis of bag limits ranging from 0 to 10 was completed using data from catch in U.S. waters. This analysis showed that no real reduction in take is realized until the bag limit is reduced to 1 or 2. This may be correct in U.S. water, but we must consider that the majority of bluefin landed by U.S. CPFV vessels are captured in Mexico and landed in the United States. We very rarely see "limit style" fishing in California, but it is a fairly common occurrence in Mexico. Since we rarely reach our limits in California, but do fairly commonly in Mexico, a bag limit change in Mexico would have a much more profound impact.

Fourthly, graphs of bluefin tuna landing data were shown from the last 10 years, and because there were very low landings during the mid 2000's with a sharp spike in landings over the last three years, there was the erroneous assumption drawn that our fleet was contributing to an ever larger portion of the catch. However, if we examine a longer data set, we can see that from the 1990's until the early 2000's, CPFV catches ranged from approximately 200 m.t. to 650 m.t. and the landings during the mid 2000's were unusually low due in large part to very heavy commercial fishing pressure. When considering a baseline catch, we must look at twenty years of landing data, not just ten.

In conclusion, I applaud the fact that bluefin tuna conservation is being taken seriously in the North Pacific and I am fully supportive of reasonable management changes. In conversations with my colleagues and customers, I have found that a daily bag limit of three fish is widely accepted as a reasonable compromise between the perceived conservation value and the desire for angling opportunities. Many of my customers have informed me that at bag limits of less than three, they would start to question whether or not this type of trip is a worthwhile investment of time and money. I strongly support a 3 fish limit in California and I also support a 3 fish daily possession limit on bluefin tuna caught in Mexican waters, because without addressing Mexican catches, we are not addressing the real issue.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



Markus Medak

Owner/operator F/V New Lo-An