

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON COUNCIL
RECOMMENDATIONS ON INTERNATIONAL HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES
MANAGEMENT

Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) discussed recommendations that the Council could make to the U.S. delegation to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Numerous issues and proposals will be discussed at the WCPFC meeting; however, the HMSMT is only providing recommendations on issues that seemed most relevant to the Council.

Bigeye Tuna

In view of the ongoing concern over the stock of bigeye tuna in the Pacific Ocean, the HMSMT recommends that the Council supports strengthening measures above those imposed through the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) bigeye tuna conservation measure (CMM 2008/01). Specifically, the HMSMT recommends supporting a seasonal purse seine closure of the WCPFC Convention Area similar to what currently exists in the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) Convention Area to reduce fishing mortality on bigeye tuna. This recommendation is based upon the presumption that such a closure will be easier to enforce than the current WCPFC seasonal closure of purse seine fishing with fish aggregating devices (FADs). Adoption of a seasonal Convention-wide closure would also promote consistency across Regional Fishery Management Organizations.

The HMSMT further recommends that the bigeye tuna longline catch quotas be maintained at the levels specified in conservation and Conservation and Management Measures 2008/01.

In regards to catch retention, the HMSMT recommends supporting a conservation measure requiring full retention of all tuna caught with purse seine gear, including juvenile bigeye, yellowfin, and skipjack tuna, to discourage the practice of high grading.

Setting on Cetaceans and Whale Sharks

There were several proposals submitted to WCPFC7 regarding the take of cetaceans and whale sharks in the purse seine fisheries. It is expected that proposals will again be put forward at WCPFC8 to prohibit intentional setting on cetaceans and/or whale sharks, require logbook and observer reporting of observed interactions with cetaceans and whale sharks, and establish best handling practices to ensure release of live, unharmed cetaceans and/or whale sharks to the extent practicable. The HMSMT recommends that the Council support these proposals to minimize cetacean and whale shark mortality in the WCPFC Convention Area.

Prohibition on Oceanic Whitetip Shark Retention

At the 2011 IATTC annual meeting, a resolution prohibiting retention of oceanic whitetip sharks was adopted (C-11-10). Oceanic whitetip sharks are a pan-Pacific shark species which has experienced significant declines. If a similar proposal is discussed at WCPFC8, the HMSMT recommends that the Council support such a measure to protect this vulnerable species across its range.

Other Relevant Issues

The HMSMT recommends that the Council generally support proposals presented at WCPFC8 that would increase compliance with WCPFC conservation and management measures and provide the WCPFC with a process and mechanisms to censure or sanction members of the WCPFC that are not in compliance. Such proposals may address vessel chartering arrangements, improved catch documentation, port state measures, Exclusive Economic Zone entry and exit notification schemes, or other issues.

The WCPFC Chairman's proposed way forward on conservation and management of skipjack, bigeye and yellowfin tunas (Agenda Item I.1.a, Supplemental Attachment 5) indicates that the development and adoption of appropriate target and limit reference points for management of tropical tunas by 2014 is a high priority. The HMSMT recommends that the Council support efforts to develop and adopt appropriate reference points for all managed stocks in the WCPFC Convention Area by 2014.

The HMSMT also recommends that the Council continue to support the International Scientific Committee of Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC)'s multi-species biological sampling program to improve stock assessments.

U.S. – Canada Albacore Tuna Treaty

The HMSMT also discussed the U.S. - Canada Albacore Treaty and provides the following considerations and recommendations to the Council to advise the U.S. delegation to the upcoming treaty re-negotiation meetings.

The U.S. – Canada Albacore Treaty was entered into between the United States and Canada in 1981. The treaty establishes the terms for Canadian fisherman to fish for North Pacific albacore in U.S. waters and reciprocal privileges for U.S. fishermen in Canadian waters. On December 31, 2011, reciprocal fishing privileges under the current treaty will expire and four options may be considered for 2012 or beyond:

- a) The United States and Canada do not reach agreement on reciprocal fishing privileges for 2012 and beyond, and the U.S. or Canada sends a notice of termination of the treaty by December 31 to terminate the treaty by 2013;
- b) The United States and Canada do not reach agreement and there would be no reciprocal fishing privileges for 2012 but the treaty would remain and negotiations on reciprocal fishing privileges could continue for subsequent years;
- c) The United States and Canada reach agreement on reciprocal fishing privileges, but either the United States or Canada gives notice by December 31 to terminate the treaty by 2013; or
- d) The United States and Canada reach agreement on reciprocal fishing privileges, and neither country gives notice to terminate the treaty.

Based on available information, it does not appear that the treaty is negatively affecting the sustainability of the North Pacific albacore stock. The HMSMT has inadequate information to evaluate the treaty's ramifications to the U.S. fisheries and coastal communities if reciprocal fishing privileges ended in 2011. The HMSMT notes that it could include consideration of the

treaty in its assignment regarding albacore management strategies. If the Council wishes, the HMSMT could gather further information on the ramifications of terminating or otherwise modifying the treaty.

PFMC
11/07/11