

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON CONSIDERATION OF BLUEFIN TUNA OVERFISHING STATUS

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) considered information on the status of Pacific bluefin tuna, and then discussed current and potential future management measures the Council could take to address Pacific bluefin tuna overfishing. The Council is specifically required to develop recommendations for domestic regulations to address the relative impact of United States vessels on the stock (Magnuson-Stevens Act [MSA] Section 304(i)(2)(A)) and to submit recommendations to the Secretary of State and Congress for international actions to end overfishing and rebuild the stock (MSA Section 304(i)(2)(B)). As outlined in the Situation Summary, the Council must make any such recommendations by April 7, 2012.

Domestic Fisheries

The HMSMT suggests recommending no additional domestic management measures to those already in effect for Pacific bluefin tuna. The HMSMT considers the current measures in the HMS fishery management plan, including recreational bag limits and logbook reporting requirements, to adequately address the very low impact of U.S. fisheries on the stock of Pacific bluefin tuna. Based on the most recent catch tables of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC), Japan, Mexico, Chinese Taipei and Korea have caught an average of 99 percent of the northern bluefin tuna landings in the Pacific Ocean from 2005-2009. For the past five years (i.e., 2005-2009), U.S. domestic fisheries have accounted for a very small portion (less than 1 percent on average) of the total Pacific northern bluefin tuna catch. Thus, the HMSMT recommends that overfishing be addressed at the international level rather than through unilateral domestic measures that are unlikely to result in any significant conservation benefits to Pacific bluefin tuna. Any proposed measures should consider the annual variability in U.S. catch and effort of bluefin in the eastern Pacific Ocean, to enable the U.S. fleet to target bluefin in years when they are available off the U.S. West Coast.

International Fisheries

The HMSMT recommends that the Council strongly support the adoption of Pacific bluefin tuna measures in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) in 2012. The HMSMT considers reduction of the fishing mortality of juvenile age classes a key step to end overfishing. International measures should reflect the relative impact of fisheries on the stock by age.

Currently, the WCPFC has a Pacific bluefin tuna conservation and management measure in place (i.e., Conservation and Management Measure [CMM] 2010-04) to limit fishing effort in 2011-2012 to the 2002-2004 levels and to limit the catch of juveniles (age 0-3) to below the 2002-2004 levels. The measure currently includes an exemption for artisanal fisheries and Korea. As this measure expires at the end of 2012, the HMSMT recommends the Council strongly support adoption of a replacement measure at the 2012 WCPFC meeting, including removing the

exemptions for artisanal fisheries and Korea if they are not well-justified. The HMSMT could provide more detailed recommendations on potential management measures at upcoming 2012 Council meetings, after the next bluefin stock assessment is complete and WCPFC proposed management measures are available to review. The ISC is scheduled to conduct the stock assessment in May 2012, and the ISC plenary will review the stock assessment and provide conservation advice in July 2012.

The HMSMT also encourages the Council to support adoption of IATTC conservation and management measures to reduce fishing mortality on juvenile age classes of Pacific bluefin tuna in the eastern Pacific Ocean. The IATTC considered a bluefin measure in 2011 that was proposed by various members of the IATTC, including the United States, which ultimately was not adopted. The measure would have limited 2012-2013 commercial catch of bluefin tuna in the eastern Pacific Ocean to 1994-2007 levels and would have prohibited the sale of recreational bluefin tuna catch. The HMSMT recommends the Council support similar measures in 2012. The HMSMT could provide detailed recommendations on potential management measures at upcoming 2012 Council meetings, after the next bluefin stock assessment is complete and IATTC proposed management measures are available to review.

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