

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON REGULATORY OPTIONS FOR FILLETING OF
TUNA AT-SEA IN CALIFORNIA MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES

Background

As part of the current biennial management cycle, the Council is considering management measures to reduce recreational take of Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) by reducing bag and possession limits. At the June 2014 meeting, the Council directed the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) to develop a suite of potential management measures. In September 2014, the Council chose a preliminary preferred alternative to reduce the daily bag limit from 10 to two PBF.

Reducing the bag limit for PBF from the existing limit of 10 fish requires the ability to identify BFT from other species of tunas if processed at sea. The California Fish and Game Code mandates that all fish possessed aboard a vessel or landed from a vessel to be identifiable to species, unless otherwise specified in regulation (FGC 5509). Current regulations allow all tuna species to be filleted with only a one inch patch of skin remaining on the fillet (ref T-14 CCR 27.65(b)(11)). The existing requirement will not be adequate with changes to bag and possession limits, as it is critical that law enforcement, as well as biologists conducting fishery surveys, be able to differentiate species of tuna fillets and quantify the number of fish aboard a vessel at sea or returning to the dock.

Meeting Summaries

The Council's preliminary preferred alternative for at-sea processing of tunas is the authorization of filleting at-sea in a manner that allows for both the species and quantity of tuna to be determined. After the recommendation that both industry and law enforcement to work together to develop such a process, two workshops were held in San Diego, CA. Parties present included biologists from NOAA Fisheries (NMFS), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), the Sportfishing Association of California (SAC), members of the Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV) fleet, and law enforcement officers from both CDFW and NMFS. Prior to the meeting, SAC worked with its membership to develop alternative methods of filleting tunas while still allowing for identification to the species level.

At the first meeting, NOAA and CDFW law enforcement staff expressed a need for procedures that would allow for identification to species regardless of the condition of the fish/fillets. Following this meeting, SAC representatives worked with Kurt Schaefer of the IATTC on refinements that would be independent of the condition of the fish, include retention of parts of the fish to insure identification of species.

At the second meeting, several different fillet configurations/techniques were evaluated. At the end of the workshop, law enforcement and industry came to an agreement on a feasible fillet process that was workable by fishermen and still allowed for the differentiation between species.

Results

The agreed upon method for the processing at-sea of tuna requires each fish to be in its own bag, with the four loin fillets, the belly fillet including the urogenital vent, and the collar with both pectoral fins attached. The skin must be left intact and attached on all six pieces.



Figure 1. The six pieces resulting from the fillet process. (From Left to right) the four loin fillets, the collar with pectoral fins attached, and the belly fillet with pelvic fins and urogenital vent (on far right of fillet). Skin attached to all six pieces. Photo credit: CDFW

SAC has plans to produce a training guide as well as information cards and other resources to assist in the training of recreational anglers. During the second meeting, a video documenting the new fillet process was made for future demonstration use.

Recommendation

CDFW supports a Council recommendation to NMFS that it implement federal regulations requiring that for tuna that are filleted at sea in waters south of Point Conception, each fish be in its own bag, with the four loin fillets, the belly fillet including the urogenital vent, and the collar with both pectoral fins attached; and the skin left intact and attached to all six pieces.

Acknowledgements

CDFW would like to acknowledge the contributions of SAC, NMFS and IATTC biological and enforcement staff for this timely and important exercise, recognizing the need for enforceable regulations to achieve the goal of reducing U.S. recreational harvest levels on overfished PBF.

Sources

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Gibbs and Collette, 1967. USFWS Fish Bull, no. 66, pg: 65-130.
Roedel, 1948. CDFG Fish Bull, no. 68.
Schaefer, 1999. IATTC Bull, Vol 21, no. 7.