

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON BLUEFIN TUNA
MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2015-2016 FISHERIES

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) presented a list of concerns on this issue at the September 2014 Council meeting. The latest information presented by the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) confirms these concerns. The U.S. recreational catch of bluefin tuna has very little impact on the stock and any reduction of effort or bag limit would have very little effect on the proposed rebuilding plan. For example, in Table 2, page 3 of the HMSMT report, the difference in the estimated reductions in total population impacts between a bag limit of 2 and 3 is only one-tenth of one percent. The recreational fishery potentially faces a much larger cut.

This information in conjunction with the potential economic impact and the uncertainty concerning the Mexican response is very concerning. The potential early closure of the 2015 recreational fishing in Mexico in conjunction with commercial closure is a very real possibility. In 2014 the recreational fishery was closed within days of the commercial closure. With the reduced quota for Mexico's commercial fleet in 2015, the event could happen very early in the season. Additionally, Mexico limited bluefin tuna fishing for all of 2014 by closing areas around the tuna pens between Ensenada and the international border. These tuna pens, since being placed there, have increased recreational success on bluefin tuna by operating in the fashion of a Fish Aggregating Device (FAD). The new Mexican regulations requiring recreational fishermen to stay out of the area will continue to reduce U.S. catches.

For these reasons, the HMSAS recommends the Council to be very careful in their ruling on recreational bag limits for bluefin tuna to avoid excess and unnecessary economic harm to the fleet of commercial passenger vessels.

PFMC
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