

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

Regarding the Council's September motion to add to the range of alternatives an analysis of how to accomplish inseason management as a tool to manage Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF), the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) recommends adding the following considerations:

Timely data collection and estimation procedures:

1. Consider implementing a web-based angler-catch reporting program (see Agenda Item C.4.b, Supplemental HMSMT Report, November 2014).
2. Enhance fish length sampling to improve average weight estimates.
3. Consider enhancing the PBF catch subsampling program for private anglers.

Research Activities to:

4. Adjust catch estimates for logbook non-compliance.
5. Develop expansion factors for the recommended subsampling program (see 3 above).
6. Estimate post-release survivorship, especially to account for potential high-grading.

Management Actions:

7. Consider implementing a variable bag limit. For example, if a catch threshold is reached, inseason action would not necessarily trigger a prohibition on PBF retention, but may result in a lower bag limit.
8. Develop outreach methods to notify anglers of inseason changes.

In addition, the HMSMT would like to draw the Council's attention to the fact that commercial passenger fishing vessel catch rates and catches were reportedly higher in recent years when vessels were fishing in very close proximity to the bluefin net pens in Mexico waters. If recreational fishing is no longer allowed in such close proximity, catches may be significantly reduced from levels observed in recent years.

Further, Mexico could close the recreational fishery on attainment of the commercial catch limit as they did in 2014. Therefore, actual catch reductions may differ from the estimates for various potential bag limits.