

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
DRAFT HMS FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) met March 13 to discuss the December 2001 draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and has the following comments.

Small-Mesh Gillnet Fishery

One unresolved issue is the treatment of the small-mesh drift gillnet fishery for albacore and bluefin. The Highly Migratory Species Plan Development Team (HMSPDT) is in the process of analyzing information on this fishery. The HMSAS reserves comment on this issue until the new information is presented.

Drift Gillnet Fishery Measures

Drift gillnet fishery representatives believe the federal regulations should include all of the existing state drift gillnet measures, including the California limited entry program. While there was no consensus on this point, HMSAS members agreed this issue needs further review by the Council and NMFS, since there may be some duplication of regulations at the state level.

The HMSAS voted (9 yes, 1 no) to recommend deletion of the proposed closure of the drift gillnet fishery north of 45° N Latitude, and inclusion of a closure east of 125° W Longitude off Oregon and Washington.

Longline Fishery Measures

The HMSAS voted (5 yes, 4 no, 1 abstain) to recommend longline alternative 3: authorize a limited entry pelagic longline fishery for tunas and swordfish with effort and area restrictions to evaluate longlines as an alternative to drift gillnets to reduce bycatch (industry proposal).

Purse Seine Fishery Measures

There is consensus there is insufficient justification in the FMP for prohibiting purse seine fishing north of 44° N Latitude. The HMSAS recommends the Council develop an alternative which closes the area east of a certain longitude north of 44°.

Sale of Striped Marlin

Some members felt that, while the FMP states that no initial allocations are proposed, the preferred alternative of prohibiting the sale of striped marlin in effect allocates this species to the sport fishery.

Some members representing the sport fishery suggest the language on page 8-25 needs to be revised to make it clear that sale of all striped marlin caught in waters under the jurisdiction of the Council is prohibited.

Permits

The HMSAS is concerned with the requirement for gear endorsements on HMS permits. If some evidence of minimal participation in a fishery is required to get an endorsement, this could be considered a limited entry program. It may be desirable to find a way of achieving the objective of the endorsement without creating a limited entry program. The HMSAS recommends the Council explore with NMFS the possible impacts of an endorsement.

Hook-and-line fishery representatives proposed that the FMP address permit requirements for Canadian troll vessels fishing in U.S. waters.

Sale of Prohibited Species

Several members expressed support for a complete prohibition on the sale of prohibited shark species. The FMP allows the sale to recognized scientific institutions. There was no consensus on this point.

Bluefin Net Pens

A description of the net pen operation for bluefin tuna needs to be included in chapter 2.

Charter Survey

There was consensus to recommend the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission look at the economic information for the Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel fleet throughout the entire coast. The current data in the FMP is limited to southern California.

Management Cycle

Some members expressed concern about making decisions at the September Council meeting, during the middle of the albacore season.

Process After March Meeting

The agency comments on the FMP suggest that substantial revisions to the EIS/FMP are necessary before final Council action can be taken. The HMSAS does not have a consensus recommendation on the time required to complete these revisions, but does want the job done completely and correctly so the final FMP will be approvable. The HMSAS recommends NMFS commit additional resources as necessary to ensure the revisions can be completed.

We also recommend the process continue to be very transparent with opportunities for HMSAS and public comment. The HMSAS would like to meet in advance of the Council meeting when final action is taken, not during the Council meeting week, to give us more time to develop recommendations to the Council.

With regard to the next draft, the HMSAS recommends the Council and HMSPDT consider preparation of a supplement, instead of a new complete version of the FMP. The supplement would contain only the revisions prepared in response to Council direction at this meeting. This document should reduce costs and facilitate understanding of the changes.

PFMC
03/14/02