

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT  
ON THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT FOR LIMITED ENTRY  
IN THE HIGH SEAS PELAGIC LONGLINE FISHERY

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) discussed recent events related to highly migratory species (HMS) fisheries and HMSMT work-to-date. Based on Council direction to initiate development of a limited entry program, the HMSMT has developed a data framework to describe participation in the high seas longline fishery. The database will inform decisionmaking for selecting qualifying window periods and landings. One goal of the limited entry program is to reduce fishing effort to a level that minimizes protected resource impacts, notably "take" of Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed sea turtles.

Per National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) guidance to the Council, the HMSMT also discussed results from research in the Atlantic longline fishery and an amendment to the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (WPFMC) pelagics FMP. This recent information indicates that a cap on overall fleet effort and gear/bait requirements may also provide a means to reduce impacts on ESA-listed sea turtles. In materials provided to the Council, NMFS expresses strong support for this new information. The HMSMT recommends expanding the scope of the FMP amendment to include effort cap alternatives (for example, number of hooks per year; number of sets per year). However, this alternative approach could delay development of a limited entry program.

If the Council wants expeditious development of a limited entry program, the HMSMT recommends a two-phase approach. The first phase would involve developing limited entry solely based on qualifying window periods and landings. This would result in a suite of alternative fleet profiles for a limited entry high seas longline fishery. The second phase would use these fleet profiles to project alternative sea turtle impact levels to inform decisionmaking about the most appropriate limited entry fleet composition. Under the two-phase approach, the HMSMT would request Council action at the June 2004 meeting to determine alternative qualifying window periods and landing amounts.

Conversely, the Council could choose to address limited entry and overall fleet effort caps concurrently. At the September 2004 Council meeting, the HMSMT could provide information about a suite of alternative fleetwide effort caps and gear/bait restrictions. These alternatives could be similar to those recently implemented for the WPFMC longline fishery. Under this approach, the HMSMT would develop alternative fleetwide effort caps that result in sea turtle takes below the HMS FMP biological opinion jeopardy threshold. These could include projected alternative sea turtle takes under various sets per vessel or hooks per vessel scenarios, and comprehensive consideration of turtle takes in HMS FMP managed fisheries.

In sum, if the Council thinks limited entry is urgently needed, the HMSMT requests a decision on qualifying criteria at the June 2004 meeting. If the Council prefers combining limited entry with effort caps and gear/bait requirements, the HMSMT would continue to work on the FMP amendment, but not report to the Council until the September 2004 meeting.

The HMSMT recommends the latter approach, reporting to the Council at the September 2004 meeting.