

## **International Activities**

**U.S. - Canada Albacore Treaty** - NOAA Fisheries implemented final regulations effective June 1, 2004, to ensure that the U.S. could carry out its obligations under the amended U.S.- Canada Albacore Treaty, including the effort reduction program the next 3 years. The regulations require (among other things) that U.S. and Canadian vessel operators call in to a third party contractor prior to crossing the border to fish in the other Party's zone and prior to exiting those waters. The contractor provides a confirmation number to the caller, and the data are immediately posted on a website (access controlled) that U.S. and Canadian fishery officials can check to monitor fishing patterns during the season. If and when a Party finds that its fishery effort limit is being approached, it will notify its fleet and advise that further crossings to fish under the Treaty would be prohibited on a date certain. The crossing reports also will provide a solid basis for checking to ensure that relevant vessels have submitted logbooks covering their fishing. This is the first year of real monitoring of fishing in each others waters, but early reports indicate that the reporting system is working well. The SWR sent letters directly to over 1,000 troll fishing vessel owners earlier this year advising them of the new requirements. It appears that there have been few if any problems with performance of the contractor; we have not received any complaints to date. A complicating factor this year, however, was that Canadian vessels were faced with new requirements under the Trade Act of 2003. The U.S. Customs and Border Service imposed additional pre-port-call reporting and bonding requirements, and NMFS went to great efforts to ensure that Canadian fishery officials and fishermen would have complete and up-to-date information about these new requirements. We received excellent cooperation both from port managers and industry, as well as from the Customs and Border Service. However, we are aware that a number of Canadian fishermen had difficulties. We hope to minimize any such problems next year.

**IATTC** - The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) met June 24-27, 2004, in Lima, Peru. The United States was represented by all four U.S. Commissioners or Commissioners designate. The most significant action taken was adoption of a revised, multi-year conservation and management program for the tuna fisheries. What had been slated as a 6-week purse seine closure in the summer of 2004 was changed to be a 6-week closure with two potential time frames (summer and end-of-year); each Party would choose the time period in which purse seine fishing by its vessels would be prohibited. The measure also calls for 6-week purse seine closures in 2005 and 2006. Longline fishing would also be controlled in 2004-2006, with specific tonnage limits of bigeye tuna for some nations and with other nations (including the U.S.) to hold their longline catches to the levels reached in 2001. Other actions agreed to include: calling on each nation that has vessels fishing for species for which the Commission has established conservation and management measures to establish a VMS program, except that a nation that has such a program is not required to establish a new one; continuing its bycatch reduction program for juvenile tuna through 2006; and adopting a program to promote

research, gear development, and outreach to promote new and additional efforts to mitigate the impact of tuna fishing on sea turtles. Finally, it was reported that 10 current IATTC member nations have signed the new IATTC Convention (called the Antigua Convention) but none have yet deposited instruments of ratification. Therefore, the Antigua Convention has not yet gone into effect.

In this context, it should be noted that the IATTC recommendation to limit longline catches of bigeye tuna in the eastern Pacific is likely to affect fishing vessels both from the West Coast and in the central and western Pacific (especially Hawaii longliners). The SWR and Pacific Islands Region (and our respective science centers) are working together to ensure that the best available data are used to establish the U.S. catch limit.

**Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission** - The convention for the central and western Pacific commission has entered into force. However, the first plenary session has not yet been held and no specific conservation and management measures have been recommended for implementation. There was a recent meeting in the region focusing on the need to control fleet capacity, and especially purse seine capacity, and some recommendations were made to impose limits, although there was not unanimity on the importance of this action. There also is apparently some difference in view as to whether the commission is to focus on high seas fishery management to complement management of individual nations' exclusive economic zones or is to focus on the management of fisheries in all areas of the species' range. It is clear, however, that this commission and the IATTC will have to expand cooperation to deal with conservation of bigeye tuna and other species that clearly travel across the boundaries of both organizations' areas of competence. Representatives of each organization have attended meetings of the other organization but formal collaborative mechanisms and processes are not yet in place.

Meanwhile, the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish (SCTB, a regional scientific organization) met in August to review and discuss the condition of central and western Pacific stocks. This has implications for U.S. vessels as bigeye tuna is one of the principal stocks of concern and it has not yet been determined if bigeye are one stock or two stocks in the Pacific. In either case, however, the stock has been under heavy fishing pressure and there is a possibility that overfishing is occurring. The SCTB meeting may result in a better understanding of the situation. Results of the meeting will be reported to the Council in September.