

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT FOR LIMITED ENTRY
IN THE HIGH SEAS PELAGIC LONGLINE FISHERY

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) is very concerned about the lack of dedicated highly migratory species (HMS) funds. The lack of funds prevents the Council from addressing critical HMS fishery management plan (FMP) issues.

The HMSAS recognizes the Council and Executive Director have steadfastly pursued dedicated HMS funding from NMFS. The HMSAS encourages the Council to continue to pursue these much-needed funds.

Segments of the HMS fishery have suffered economic losses and are in jeopardy of going out of business because of the Endangered Species Act-based regulations promulgated by NMFS that banned the West Coast-based high seas longline swordfish fishery.

Given the lengthy federal rulemaking process that could be required to amend the FMP, the HMSAS encourages the industry to apply for exempted fishing permits (EFPs) (e.g., for a limited number of vessels to test gear and bait modifications) for high seas longline swordfish fishing. Per the HMS FMP and federal EFP requirements, the EFP applications would be reviewed through the Council process.

If funds become available, to also provide relief from negative economic impacts, the HMSAS recommends using FMP framework provisions to modify time and area restrictions currently in place for the drift gillnet (DGN) fishery. The HMSAS requests the Council direct the HMS Management Team (HMSMT) to provide proposed DGN management measures for Council consideration at the November 2004 meeting.

Also contingent on funding, the HMSAS recommends the Council direct the HMSMT continue work on developing an FMP amendment to establish a high seas swordfish target longline fishery. This fishery would be modeled upon the recent Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (WPFMC) swordfish fishery, i.e., including hook, bait, and total number of set requirements.

For the long-term, if a high seas swordfish target longline fishery is allowed, the HMSAS supports developing a limited entry program for that fishery.

Finally, related to development of a high seas longline fishery modeled on the WPFMC swordfish fishery, the HMSAS recommends the Council request special dispensation from NMFS (for example, under the FMPs abbreviated rulemaking provisions) to expedite development, review, and implementation under the federal rulemaking process.