

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

Since its meeting in June 2004, the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) has been working on recommendations for a limited entry amendment for the West Coast-based high seas longline fishery and also examining ways to re-structure both the former high seas swordfish longline and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) driftnet fisheries, so these fisheries might be modified to maintain an acceptable cumulative level of impact on protected species, such as sea turtles. This summer, a subcommittee of the team worked with NMFS' Southwest Region and Southwest Fisheries Science Center staff on new, updated projected takes and mortalities of sea turtles in both fisheries, information recently presented at this Council meeting to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) by Mr. Jim Caretta. These include scenarios involving modified bait and hook types under given effort levels, methods shown in the Atlantic to greatly reduce turtle takes, and now being tested in the Pacific by the Hawaiian fleet. It also includes projected turtle mortalities, given the reduced effort of the driftnet fleet in recent years.

Because the HMSMT expects the limited entry amendment to take years before implementation, it hopes that using new fishing methods and controlled effort, certain intervening measures can be implemented for these fisheries without jeopardizing turtles and seabirds. Perhaps these measures can be put in place through the framework process, which envisions an expedited regulatory process. Proposed interim options with analyses could be presented to the Council in November, along with the HMSMT's scheduled progress report on the high seas longline fishery amendment.

In the meantime, an Experimental Fishing Permit (EFP) for the shallow set longline fishery, incorporating the new gear technology, would allow a subset of the longline fishing fleet to resume fishing. Each EFP would necessarily be limited to a segment of the longline fleet of less than 10 vessels.

To enhance the economic viability of the drift gillnet fishery, the HMSMT seeks guidance from the Council on whether or not it should start examining changes in time/area closures for the drift gillnet fishery.

1. This can be conducted through the framework process without an amendment to the highly migratory species (HMS) fishery management plan (FMP).
2. Fishing effort in the drift gillnet fishery is now substantially lower than when the initial drift gillnet closures were established.
3. As an example, preliminary analysis of opening the area closure south of Point Sur shows that the drift gillnet takes and mortality of leatherbacks (the key species of concern to this fishery) might not bring the drift gillnet fishery into jeopardy.

HMS funding is necessary to support the HMS FMP in order to prepare a draft Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation document for the Council by June 2004.

The HMSMT can continue meeting and constructing draft work products that can be quickly turned into final products should sufficient funding be found to support the HMS FMP. To this end, the HMSMT can meet in La Jolla prior to the November Council meeting, recognizing the need for a 30-day notice. At the November Council meeting, proposed options for the drift gillnet and longline fisheries can be presented under the guidance of the Council.

PFMC
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