



**Western
Pacific
Regional
Fishery
Management
Council**

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November 9, 2004

Mr Don McIsaac
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Pl., Ste 200
Portland
Oregon 97220-1384

Dear Don:

At its 124th meeting, this Council made the following recommendation concerning the level of fishing mortality on bigeye and yellowfin tunas in the Pacific Ocean.

The Council noted that the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish (SCTB) has expressed concern over the past 4 years about the level of fishing mortality of yellowfin tuna (YFT) and particularly bigeye tuna (BET) in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO), and has suggested that effort should not increase. Nevertheless overall fishing effort has increased and the most recent stock assessment shows a greater than 60% risk of overfishing for BET in the WCPO. In the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) BET is judged by Inter American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) to be in an overfished condition, because of high fishing mortality and recent low recruitment. Therefore the Council recommended that:

- i. pursuant to its responsibilities under MSFCMA, that the US delegation to the Western and Central Pacific Fishery Commission request the Commission take action to reduce overall regional fishing mortality on BET and YFT.**
- ii. the BET quota estimation for the area to the east of 150W should be based on multi year averages, rather than on a single year's catch.**
- iii. a formal process should be implemented by the Pacific and Western Pacific Councils for allocating the BET quota between different longline fishing sectors.**
- iv. NMFS should investigate the potential for using the Vessel Monitoring (VMS) system for reporting BET catches in real time for both the California and Hawaii longline fleets.**

v. The NMFS should also be cognizant of the aspirations of Guam and Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas to develop their own longline fisheries. It was also noted that should such fisheries develop they would almost certainly be limited entry fisheries in line with Hawaii and American Samoa longline fisheries.

The Council has strongly communicated its concerns to both NMFS and the State Department to ensure that both agencies are aware of the gravity of the situation concerning Pacific bigeye tuna. We have also noted the less parlous state of yellowfin, which still generates concerns due to gross under-reporting of catches in the Western Pacific by the Philippines and Indonesia, and the level of fishing mortality in this region of the Pacific. Further, our missive to the State department has included mention of blue marlin, which appears to be fully exploited in the Pacific, and which, like bigeye, will require longline effort reduction or at least no major increases in longlining.

As you are aware, the latest stock assessments for bigeye in the Western and Eastern Pacific show that the overfishing is likely occurring and the stock will be overfished within this decade unless action is taken immediately. The Council is pleased that action has been taken by the IATTC to address this issue in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, but was concerned in the manner by which NMFS implemented the US longline quota, which impacts longline vessels from Hawaii. We hope that in the future there is better communication between the Pacific Islands and Southwest Regions, and that quotas are developed with more consultation, with both the Western Pacific and Pacific Councils to avoid the confusion surrounding this issue earlier this year.

Further, developing a quota is simply one of several steps which need Council input, namely monitoring and reporting bigeye catches, and allocating the quota between Hawaii-based and California-based longline fleets. For this reason, this issue should be high on the agenda to be discussed when our Councils convene a joint meeting in 2005. Mahalo!

Sincerely,



Kitty M. Simonds
Executive Director