

PLANNING FOR FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN (FMP) IMPLEMENTATION

Since approval of the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) FMP early last year a funding shortfall has curtailed Council-related HMS FMP activities. The limited funding received provides for part-time Council staffing, three meetings of the Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS), four meetings of the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT), and about \$5,000 in discretionary travel. In early March 2005 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) notified the Council of supplemental funding to reinstate HMS activities. Because of the lack of funding in 2004 and early 2005, a number of Council HMS initiatives have been on hold while several new issues have emerged. With the need to restart these activities the Council has the opportunity to do some planning and prioritization of HMS-related work over the next six months to a year. The Council may wish to discuss the following issues, listed in rough order of priority:

Bigeye tuna overfishing. NMFS has formally declared overfishing is occurring on Pacific bigeye tuna and asked the Council to respond with measures to limit fishing mortality on this stock by June 14, 2005. At the March meeting, Mr. Mark Helvey informed the Council that NMFS is developing a strategy, which will focus on channeling Council initiatives to international organizations involved in HMS management. Because the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the preparation of an FMP, plan amendment, or proposed regulations to address overfishing (16 U.S.C. 1854(c)(3)), he suggested an FMP amendment would be needed to institute such a framework.

Developing sea turtle bycatch mitigation measures for the high seas longline fishery. Currently West Coast longline vessels are prohibited from targeting swordfish because of the incidental take of ESA-listed sea turtles. Vessels operating from Hawaii under a pelagic limited entry permit (pursuant to the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (WPFMC) FMP) may target swordfish under gear and operating requirements that demonstrably reduce sea turtle interactions. Framework provision under the HMS FMP could be used to implement a similar regulatory framework for West Coast vessels.

Establishing a limited entry program. During 2004 the HMSAS and HMSMT started to develop concepts and baseline information for a limited entry program for the high seas longline and drift gillnet fisheries, which would be implemented by FMP amendment. However, neither body has met since last September so no further progress has been made on this issue.

Exempted fishing permit (EFP) applications. NMFS has received two EFP applications for the HMS fishery. At the September 2004 Council meeting the HMSMT noted that EFPs could be used to test shallow-set longline techniques for turtle bycatch mitigation, currently prohibited east of 150° W longitude. The HMS FMP states that the HMSMT will develop a protocol for Council review and approval of EFP applications, which would be adopted as a Council operating procedure. The protocol has not yet been developed, so the Council will need to consider an interim procedure for these applications. The Council may wish to assign initial review of these applications to the HMSAS and/or the HMSMT.

Stock Assessment Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report. Under the HMS FMP the HMSMT is scheduled to deliver a draft and final SAFE Report at the June and September Council meetings. The Team has not had the opportunity to meet and begin planning the structure and contents of the first SAFE Report. Therefore, providing a draft report at the June meeting will not be possible. However, if the team is able to meet in advance of the June meeting, they could develop an outline for the SAFE report for presentation at the June meeting, with the final Report submitted at the September meeting.

Review of observer sampling protocol. The Council requested NMFS to prepare an observer sampling protocol for HMS fisheries. A NMFS contractor has completed this project and it is now ready for review by Council bodies (HMSAS, HMSMT, and Scientific and Statistical Committee) at Council discretion.

Design of HMS logbooks. An HMS logbook requirement is coming into effect as of April 11, 2005. NMFS is seeking input from the HMSAS and HMSMT on the design and distribution of a logbook for Oregon and Washington charter recreational fleets. (California already has such a logbook program in place.)

Appointment of a representative from the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) scientific staff to the HMSMT. Appointing an IATTC scientific staff member to the HMSMT would improve coordination, increase science expertise, and raise visibility in the international arena. IATTC offices are located in La Jolla, California, so additional travel costs would be modest. At the March Council meeting, the Council replaced one NMFS Southwest Region Science Center Representative on the HMSMT with a NMFS Southwest Region representative. Three Science Center positions remain, one of which is currently vacant.

Council participation in HMS forums. Attachment 1 lists upcoming meetings of international HMS-related organizations and the WPFMC.

Joint Council meeting with the WPFMC. In a September 27, 2004, letter Ms. Kitty Simonds, Executive Director of the WPFMC, proposed a joint meeting of the two Councils in 2005. Such a meeting would help coordinate Council action on HMS issues of common interest. (The letter was provided to the Council as part of briefing materials for the November 2004 meeting.)

The Council may wish to provide guidance on the prioritization of these issues (including any additions to or deletions from the list) and give direction to the HMSAS and HMSMT on future work to address these issues.

Council Task:

Council Discussion and Guidance

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item I.2.a, Attachment 1: Schedule of Meetings of Fishery Organizations in 2005 Relevant to Highly Migratory Species.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview
- b. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- c. Public Comment
- d. Council Discussion and Guidance

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