

Report of the Fourth General Advisory Committee (GAC) to the U.S. Section of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)
Long Beach, California
May 12, 2005

Eastern Pacific Ocean Fisheries Issues - On May 12, 2005, NOAA Fisheries, Southwest Region hosted a meeting of the General Advisory Committee (GAC) to the U.S. Section of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) in conjunction with the U.S. Department of State (DoS).

The U.S. is a member of the IATTC, which was established by the Convention for the Establishment of an Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission signed in 1949 (the Convention). The IATTC was established to provide an international arrangement to ensure the effective international conservation and management of highly migratory species of fish taken by tuna fishing vessels in the eastern Pacific Ocean. While the original Convention does not define a Convention Area, as a matter of practice since 1998, IATTC conservation and management measures generally apply in the waters of the eastern Pacific Ocean bounded by the coast of the Americas, the 40° N and 40° S parallels, and the 150° W meridian. The IATTC has maintained a scientific research and fishery monitoring program for many years and annually assesses the status of stocks of tuna and the tuna fisheries to determine appropriate harvest limits or other measures to prevent overexploitation of tuna stocks and promote viable fisheries.

The Tuna Conventions Act (16 USC 953) establishes a General Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section of the IATTC and a Scientific Advisory Sub-Committee to advise the General Advisory Committee and the U.S. Commissioners. These advisory bodies are formalized and chartered pursuant to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 USC App.7, et seq.) and consist of not less than 5 and not more than 15 members each. The advisory committees are to meet regularly and advise the U.S. Section of the IATTC on all matters of management and science. The U.S. Section to the IATTC is comprised of NMFS, the DoS, and the four U.S. Commissioners appointed to the IATTC by the President. The GAC advises on the development of U.S. positions, strategies, and proposed resolutions presented by the U.S. Section to the IATTC. This advisory body has been instrumental in the U.S. Government seeking input and advice from the public early in the development of U.S. positions and proposed resolutions.

Issues discussed at the 4th meeting of the GAC were the health of the various fisheries in the eastern Pacific Ocean such as those for yellowfin, bigeye, skipjack and albacore tunas, measures for the conservation of tunas, the upcoming annual meeting of the IATTC, June 2005, non-compliance with IATTC management measures, management of fishing capacity, measures to address bycatch, ecosystem approach to management, and status on the Antigua Convention. The GAC held discussions of a proposed U.S. Resolutions package. This draft package included Resolutions on, Conservation of Tunas, Trade Measures, Sharks, Sea Turtles, and Albacore Tuna. Issue papers were presented by the Pacific Fishery Management Council, Western Pacific Fishery Management Council and the Federation of Independent Seafood Harvesters. The issue papers focused on the current bigeye tuna situation in the Pacific Ocean particularly with regard to catch limits on large scale longline vessels of bigeye tuna. The Pacific Fishery Management Council letter also emphasized the need for good communication between the Councils and the GAC. A presentation on the status of tuna stocks in the Pacific Ocean was provided by the IATTC. (For more information contact, J. Allison Routt, NOAA Fisheries, at 562-980-4019).