

Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management NMFS Report

1. Regulatory Activities

Status of Proposed Rule for Vessel Identification: A proposed rule package has been submitted to the Federal Register requiring U.S. West Coast HMS fishing vessels to display their official number on the port and starboard sides of the deckhouse or hull, and on an appropriate weather deck so as to be visible from enforcement vessels and aircraft. The official number must be affixed to each vessel in block Arabic numerals at least 10 inches (25.40 cm) in height for vessels more than 25 ft (7.62 m) but equal to or less than 65 ft (19.81 m) in length; and 18 inches (45.72 cm) in height for vessels longer than 65 ft (19.81 m) in length. Markings must be legible and of a color that contrasts with the background. Once the proposed rule publishes in the Federal Register, a 30-day public comment period will follow proceeding publication of the final rule. The action will take effect 60 days after the final rule publishes in the Federal.

Status of Recreational Charter Logbook Distribution: A pilot Recreational Charter logbook has been developed in collaboration with the Council's HMS Management Team and the State Fisheries Representatives from Oregon and Washington. The logbooks, along with an instructional cover letter, have been distributed to permitted HMS Recreational Charter vessels by the respective State Fisheries Department representatives. To date, approximately 73 Recreational Charter vessels from Oregon and 39 vessels from Washington have been issued permits and logbooks (August 10 database query).

Status of Application by a Foreign Flag Vessel to Tranship Live Bluefin Tuna within the US EEZ: The NMFS International Fisheries Division received an application from a foreign flag fishing vessel to receive and tranship live bluefin tuna caught by US flag purse seine vessel(s) for transport to Mexico. If and when a permit is issued under Section 204D of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Council will be notified in writing of the decision. A notice will be prepared and sent to US purse seine vessel owners advising them of the permit requirements including, among other things, reporting deliveries of bluefin tuna to the permitted vessel. According to NMFS records, there has been no activity recorded on any of the five previous foreign fishing permits that have been issued.

Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) Tuna Conservation Measures: The U.S. tuna purse seine fishery in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean (EPO) will close November 20 through December 31 for 2005 and 2006. The U.S. longline fishery for bigeye tuna will close in 2006 when the U.S. catch reaches the 2001 catch level of 150 metric tons. NMFS currently has a proposed rule open for comments regarding this action. The comment period closes September 14, 2005. The U.S. longline fishery for

bigeye tuna was to be closed in early September through December 31, 2005. NMFS has filed an emergency rule for this action.

IATTC Resolution on VMS for US Flag Tuna Vessels over 24 meters: The IATTC passed a Resolution at the 72nd meeting in Lima, Peru that directs member nations to place a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) on tuna fishing vessels greater than 24 meters in length. U.S. domestic regulations to implement this Resolution have not been prepared. NMFS seeks Council guidance on the matter.

IATTC: The IATTC held its 73rd annual meeting, June 20-24, 2005, in Lanzarote, Spain. Resolutions adopted are listed in the attachment and potential Council and NMFS roles are listed in the attachment. In addition, tuna conservation measures for 2004, 2005, and 2006 pertaining to yellowfin tuna and bigeye tuna expire in 2006. Council input and recommendations on future measures will be requested prior to the IATTC 2006 meetings.

HMS Fisheries - Observer Coverage Levels: The HMS Observer Coverage Plan Report has not yet been adopted as final by the Council. NMFS Headquarters requires an approved final HMS observer coverage plan for observer budget requesting purposes. NMFS requests Council advice on this issue.

Funding levels available for increased observer coverage of the commercial North Pacific Albacore Troll fishery are far below the amount required to achieve the desired HMS Observer Coverage Plan Report recommendations. Approximately \$1 million would be required to approach the 5% observer coverage recommended by the Plan. NMFS requests Council advice on this issue.

HMS FISHERIES	Observer Coverage Plan Recommends	NMFS Coverage Level (by Priority or Funding Availability)	Coverage Achieved Aug. 1- July 31, 2005
Pelagic Drift Gillnet - swordfish/sharks	20%	20%	20%
Pelagic Longline - tuna only	20%	100%	50%
CA Purse Seine - tuna	100%	33% (Pilot Level)	33%
North Pacific Albacore Troll	5%	<1% (Pilot Level)	<<1%
Southern California Rec. Charter - HMS	10%	5% planned 2005 (Pilot Level)	Pending Activity
Albacore Rec. Charter (N. of Pt Conception)	20%	Pending Funding	None
Private Vessels - HMS	Undetermined	Undetermined	None

Improved communications with States: NMFS is aware of many State observer programs, especially in the area of HMS recreational charter vessels and their associated Recreational Fisheries Surveys. The SWR Observer Program is committed to a cooperative approach to observer sampling aboard HMS recreational charter fleets of California, Oregon, Washington. NMFS has been in contact with each representative State Observer Coordinator and essential meetings to collaborate fleet observer coverage are planned prior to the November Council meeting.

2. Science Center Activities

North Pacific Albacore Archival Tagging Project. A cooperative albacore archival tagging project was started in 2001 by the SWFSC and the American Fishermen's Research Foundation with deployment target of 120 tags per year. During the start-up years, deployment fell well short of the target. However for 2005, the project is on target of deploying 120 tags on two tagging cruises. The first of the planned cruises occurred in an area off the coast of Oregon-Washington, southwest of Westport, WA from August 1 through 10. A total of 74 albacore were successfully tagged and released with implanted archival tags. Tagged fish averaged 75 cm fork length (FL; 20 lbs) and ranged from 62 cm to 85.5 cm FL. The second cruise is planned for September and will deploy the remainder of the 120-tag target in approximately the same area.

Since 2001, this project has tagged and released 350 albacore off the U.S. West Coast with archival tags. A total of 14 tags have so far been returned. Valuable information collected by each tag provides for determining daily position, time, water temperature, depth and internal body temperature is being analyzed by scientists for studies ranging from understand the stock structure and movements to developing habitat-based assessment models.

Marine Turtle Program. There are seven species of marine turtles that occur in tropical and subtropical regions throughout the world's oceans. All seven species are currently listed as threatened or endangered according to the Endangered Species Act, six are considered endangered or critically endangered by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) Red Data Book (Hilton-Taylor 2000) and are included in Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Despite a worldwide increase in research and conservation of marine turtles, their biology, stock structure, and habitat requirements remain poorly understood. This lack of understanding has, in many cases, precluded effective recovery efforts.

To achieve recovery of depleted marine turtle stocks, the SWFSC Marine Turtle Program carries out research and facilitates conservation programs throughout the world. Focusing mainly on marine turtles in the Pacific, this program implements the actions outlined in the USFWS/NOAA-Fisheries Marine Turtle Recovery Plans. Best multidisciplinary science practices and information generated by the program are applied to support NOAA's mandates at regional, national and international levels using innovative approaches that build and promote diverse and dynamic partnerships among stakeholders including local communities, governmental and nongovernmental

organizations, and international organizations. Results of the program also supports the information requirements of the PFMC and the Western Pacific Fisheries management Council (WESTPAC) to assess and implement fishing practices that avoid incidental capture and mortality of marine turtles.

Since its inception, our program has made a concentrated effort to increase the knowledge of leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) in the Pacific. This highly vulnerable and inadequately understood marine turtle has a distribution spanning tropical, temperate, and sometimes sub-arctic waters. Leatherbacks are declining in many parts of the world and it has been suggested that these declines are the result of decades of egg poaching at nesting beaches coupled with a more recent bycatch problem associated with artisanal and commercial marine fisheries. In the Pacific, the depletion has been so extreme that leatherbacks have been considered in imminent danger of extinction. The species is currently listed as Critically Endangered by IUCN, Endangered under the ESA, and is included in Appendix 1 of the CITES. Unfortunately, the development of appropriate management strategies has been hindered by a lack of empirical information on the distribution and demography of leatherbacks, particularly in marine habitats of the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

Current research on leatherbacks includes aerial surveys and in-water capture efforts near Monterey Bay, California, and nesting beach and aerial surveys in the Western and Eastern Pacific. These efforts have revealed that leatherbacks occur seasonally along the US Pacific coast and that their presence is at least partially influenced by a relaxation of coastal upwelling and consequential occurrence of high densities of jellyfish, *Chrysaora* spp. Through the use of satellite telemetry and genetic analysis on marine turtles found both in the foraging and nesting areas, it has been determined that leatherbacks foraging off the US Pacific coast originate from nesting beaches in the Western Pacific.