

HMS INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) - Nominations: *A Federal Register* Notice for the solicitation of nominations and applications for the General Advisory Committee (GAC) and Scientific Advisory Subcommittee to the U.S. Section of the IATTC has been published. The purpose of these advisory panels is to provide public input and advice to the U.S. section to the IATTC in the formulation of U.S. policy and positions at meetings of the IATTC and its subsidiary bodies. Nominations must be submitted on or before March 31, 2006.

International Tuna Management: In November 2005, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published a final rule to implement the 2005 and 2006 management measures for the purse seine and longline fishery to prevent overfishing of the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean (ETP) tuna stocks, consistent with recommendations by the IATTC and approved by the Department of State (DOS) under the Tuna Conventions Act. The final rule closes the U.S. longline fishery in the Convention Area in 2006 when bigeye tuna landings reach 150 metric tons (mt). Longline vessels will not be subjected to this closure if the permit holder declares to NMFS under the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region that they intend to shallow-set to target swordfish (50 CFR 660.23). NMFS will provide notice of closure of the longline fishery. These actions ensure that U.S. vessels fish in accordance with the conservation and management measures that the IATTC recommended in June 2004. These actions are taken to limit fishing mortality on tuna stocks caused by purse seine fishing and longline fishing in the Convention Area and contribute to the long-term conservation of tuna stocks at levels that support healthy fisheries.

IATTC Summary to Date: The GAC to the U.S. Section of the IATTC met on November 1, 2005 and also held an information gathering conference call on January 25, 2006. Key issues to be addressed for the June 22-30, 2006 IATTC annual meeting in Busan, Korea, include: obtain a workable and permanent bycatch resolution; adopt a trade measures resolution; adopt a sea turtle resolution requiring circle hooks for deep longline sets; adopt a binding resolution to conserve tuna for 2007- 2009; adopt a resolution addressing FADs in the bigeye tuna (BET) and yellowfin (YFT) purse seine fisheries; adopt a resolution addressing BET in longline fisheries; change definition of List of longline fishing vessels over 24 meters (LSTLFVs) from a measurement of length to something more meaningful. The 5th Meeting of the GAC will be held on June 1, 2006, in Long Beach, California.

2005 Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Annual Meeting: The second annual meeting of the Commission (WCPFC2) was held December 12-16, 2005, in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia.

Conservation and management measures for bigeye and yellowfin tuna - Given the recommendations of the Scientific Committee to address overfishing on western and central Pacific Ocean bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks, this became one of the most substantial issues deliberated at the meeting. The Commission ultimately adopted a decision that included separate conservation and management measures for longline fisheries and for purse seine fisheries. Longline fisheries account for most of the bigeye

tuna catch in the WCPFC Convention Area, and purse seine fisheries account for most of the yellowfin tuna catch and also take substantial amounts of relatively young bigeye tuna. The primary element for the longline fisheries is that in each of the next three years, Commission Members must limit the catch of bigeye tuna by their longline vessels to the average annual amount caught during 2001-2004 (or, for China and the U.S., the amount caught in 2004). Members whose vessels caught less than 2,000 mt in 2004 would be limited to 2,000 mt. This measure is consistent with the bigeye tuna measure adopted by the IATTC that put limits on longline bigeye tuna catches in the eastern Pacific Ocean in 2004-2006.

North Pacific and South Pacific Albacore Resolutions - The measures in the resolution for the North Pacific essentially mirror those adopted by the IATTC for the eastern Pacific Ocean: Members must limit fishing effort by their vessels fishing for North Pacific albacore in the Convention Area to “current” levels. Reporting of fishing effort and catches is also required to ensure compliance. The measures for the South Pacific call for members to not increase the number of their fishing vessels actively fishing for South Pacific albacore in the Convention Area south of 20° South latitude above the levels from the 2000-2005 period. The decision for the South Pacific will be revisited at WCPFC3.

Bycatch (Fish) - The Commission adopted a measure for non-target fish species, proposed by the Forum Fishery Agency, that calls for members to encourage their vessels operating in fisheries managed under the Convention to avoid the capture of all non-target fish species (e.g., mahi mahi, rainbow runner, and wahoo) that are not retained, and to promptly release any such captured fish to the water unharmed.

Bycatch (Turtles) - The Commission adopted a measure on sea turtle bycatch, which merged separate proposals from the United States and the FFA. The adopted measure urges members and non-members to take a number of actions to mitigate sea turtle bycatch, minimize harm, and collect data, through, inter alia, the implementation of the Food and Agriculture Organization Guidelines and existing gear technologies (e.g., circle hooks) and handling techniques.

Capacity - Japan tabled a proposal to address fishing overcapacity. This is a high priority for the United States, but is one that has been controversial in this forum due to the nature of license arrangements and the fisheries development aspirations of developing countries in the region. After substantial debate, the Commission adopted a non-binding resolution on capacity that urged Commission members and non-members to reduce any purse seine capacity that entered the fishery after earlier resolutions urging controls on increases in capacity were adopted, beginning in 1999.

2006 WCPFC Related Meetings - The Scientific Committee (SC2) meets 7-18 August in Manila, Philippines. The Northern Committee (NC2) meets 11-13 September in Tokyo, Japan. The Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC2) meets 18-22 September in Brisbane, Australia. The Third Annual Meeting of the Commission (WCPFC3) meets 11-15 December in Apia, Samoa.