

BIGEYE TUNA OVERFISHING RESPONSE

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) notified the Council that it must take action to address overfishing of bigeye tuna by June 14, 2005. A similar notification was given to the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (WPFMC). At the June 2005 meeting, the Council moved to begin work on an amendment to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for U.S. West Coast Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species (HMS) as the proper response to address this issue. NMFS Southwest Region agreed to take lead responsibility on developing the amendment package for Council consideration. At their November 2005 meeting, the Council was to have adopted a preliminary range of alternatives for public review. However, because of time constraints at that meeting, the agenda item was deferred for a future meeting. This has also allowed NMFS staff to provide a more complete document for the Council to review.

NMFS has recently advised that since no regulatory action would result from an amendment and that any future regulations would be linked to conservation and management measures adopted internationally, it would be more prudent at this point for the Council to develop a position for international consideration rather than a detailed FMP amendment. Therefore, NMFS believes at this meeting it is more relevant for the Council to consider the draft analysis of management options for a West Coast position on how to control fishing mortality on Pacific bigeye tuna in the eastern Pacific provided by NMFS (Agenda Item J.2.a, Attachment 1). This document provides the Council with the information needed to form a position that has the potential to influence any new conservation and management decisions adopted by the relevant international bodies governing bigeye tuna stocks in the eastern Pacific in future years.

As noted in the Situation Summary for the November 2005 Council meeting, the HMS Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report, available at that Council meeting, includes new information indicating that the Eastern Pacific Ocean bigeye tuna stock is apparently overfished (i.e., the stock biomass is below the minimum stock size threshold). The December 15, 2004, letter notifying the Council that overfishing is occurring states that “the stock structure of bigeye tuna in the Pacific Ocean is unresolved.” NMFS based the determination on two stock assessments, one treating bigeye as a single Pacific-wide stock and the other, conducted by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, for the Eastern Pacific stock only. A reevaluation of this question could lead to a reconsideration of stock status in the Eastern Pacific. However, the most recent NMFS *Status of U.S. Fisheries* report (describing the status of fish stocks through December 31, 2005) retains the conclusion that bigeye tuna are not in an overfished state. If declared overfished, NMFS advises that Council participation in an international solution may be a more practical approach than unilaterally developing a rebuilding plan FMP amendment.

Council Task:

1. **Review and discuss the development of a Pacific Council position on an overfishing response for consideration in the appropriate international forums.**
2. **Discuss any implications of a potential overfished designation for bigeye tuna.**

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item J.2.a, Attachment 1: Draft Analysis of Management Options for Development of a Plan to End Overfishing of Pacific Bigeye Tuna.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview
 - b. NMFS Report
 - c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
 - d. Public Comment
 - e. **Council Action:** Adopt Alternatives for a Pacific Council Position on an Overfishing Response for Bigeye Tuna for Public Review
- Kit Dahl
Mark Helvey

PFMC
02/21/06