

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON ALBACORE MANAGEMENT

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) discussed albacore management issues at our May meeting. Specifically, we received an update on the U.S./Canada albacore treaty, reviewed the U.S. and Canadian landings data by catch area (see Supplemental Attachment 1), reviewed the resolutions of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), and discussed potential measures to present to the Council and Industry representatives for review and concurrence on how best to move forward with implementing those resolutions.

U.S./Canada Albacore Treaty

The U.S. and Canadian representatives met in Vancouver, B.C., on April 25-26, primarily to exchange catch information and discuss whether vessels had followed the proper procedures under the treaty. With regard to continuing the treaty, it is the Team's understanding that the following options are available for consideration: (1) take action to terminate the treaty and rescind reciprocal access rights; (2) develop provisions to propose for a new treaty; or (3) continue with reduced fishing at 75% of current level, as already expressed in the current treaty. Because there is uncertainty as to what will happen at the IATTC meeting in June relative to U.S. fishing effort on albacore, the U.S. was not comfortable discussing the future of Canadian fishing effort in U.S. waters until the potential need for U.S. effort reduction was resolved through the IATTC process. The two countries agreed to get together in November (at the end of the fishing season) to continue discussions.

The primary concern expressed to the Team was relative to potential development of an albacore catch quota for the U.S. and whether that quota would be shared with Canadian vessels. U.S. fishermen would like all of the catch caught in U.S. waters (by both U.S. and Canadian vessels) to be considered in setting the U.S. quota, and did not support continuation of the treaty. Development of an albacore quota has not been discussed yet; therefore, how the U.S. quota would be set has not been determined.

Implementation of the IATTC and WCPFC Resolutions

The HMSMT reviewed the IATTC and WCPFC resolutions for northern albacore tuna that the U.S. is obligated to implement; both of the resolutions (adopted in 2005) state that the total level of fishing effort for North Pacific albacore tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean not be increased beyond current levels. To fulfill this commitment, the Council could consider initiating a plan amendment to consider a limited entry program for albacore troll vessels; this plan amendment would likely take a few years to complete, but review of historical catch data in preparation of the amendment process could begin now. The Council may also wish to consider developing options for limiting albacore fishing effort in other fisheries, such as recreational fisheries.

Current Control Date

The Council adopted a control date of March 9, 2000, for all highly migratory species (HMS) commercial fisheries, including charter vessels. If the Council would like to move forward with developing a limited entry program for albacore, the Council could either use this previously adopted control date, or adopt a new one under this agenda item, for albacore fisheries (with the previous control date remaining in effect for the other HMS fisheries, until changed). The Council may wish to seek legal guidance on whether the previously adopted control date is "too old."

HMSMT Recommendation:

1. Provide guidance to the Team on how to move forward with implementing the IATTC and WCPFC resolutions; suggestions include:
 - a. Begin developing a plan amendment to consider a limited entry program for albacore troll and baitboat fleets
 - b. Develop options for limiting albacore fishing effort in other fisheries, such as recreational fisheries
 - c. Set a new control date for albacore fisheries (either at this meeting or at a subsequent Council meeting)