

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT REGARDING  
COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS ON CONSERVATION MEASURES TO BE  
CONSIDERED BY THE INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) discussed the development of a preliminary set of recommendations for the Council to give the U.S. delegation to the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) relative to bigeye and yellowfin tuna overfishing (and any other relevant issues).

The HMSMT agrees with the suggestion in the Agenda Item J.6, Situation Summary to develop a preliminary set of recommendations based on currently available information. However, the HMSMT notes that information relevant to any recommendations on domestic regulation or international management measures may be impacted by new information which emerges from the May meeting of the IATTC's Stock Assessment Working Group and the June meeting of the IATTC. This suggests currently focusing on a process for communicating actions or measures to regional fishery management organizations, rather than adopting specific measures at this time in the form of a Fishery Management Plan amendment.

The HMSMT recognizes that IATTC resolutions adopted to date have failed to adequately address the problems of bigeye and yellowfin tuna overfishing. Key areas of concern include current capacity controls which may not be adequate to meet stated conservation goals, overcapacity in the fisheries, no requirements to register fish aggregating devices and high take levels of juvenile yellowfin and bigeye tunas.

Because the U.S. catches are minor in comparison to those of other fleets, the overfishing problem cannot be solved through unilateral domestic regulatory measures by the U.S., and can only be resolved through multi-lateral agreements made at the IATTC. The HMSMT suggests that it may be necessary for the Council to encourage the U.S. international delegation to address this problem more forcefully in order to effectively address the situation.

Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Council is required to develop international recommendations to address overfishing of yellowfin tuna (YFT) in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). This would include developing and submitting recommendations to the Secretary of State, and to the Congress, for international actions that will end overfishing in EPO YFT fisheries, as mandated under Section 304(i)(2)(B) of the newly reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act.

The February 2007 U.S. proposed alternatives for expanded area-time closures for tropical tunas (Agenda Item J.4.a, Attachment 1) may be an important conservation measure that merits further study. Additional conservation measures for consideration should include alternative mechanisms for more effective international governance, including vessel monitoring systems, combinations of area-time closures with other management action, capacity controls and mechanisms to enforce compliance. Pending Council guidance, the HMSMT is prepared to address these issues more fully following the June IATTC meeting.