

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON CHANGES TO ROUTINE MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2009-2010 SEASONS

Recreational Thresher Shark Management

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) recognizes and supports the work being done by the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) related to the recreational thresher shark fishery. Recreational fishing for thresher sharks is a popular activity and represents an important opportunity for recreational fishermen. It is an overall impression that private boat effort for thresher sharks is expanding, in relationship to other modes.

The HMSAS received and reviewed a report by Craig Heberer at the June 3-4, 2008, joint meeting of the HMSAS and HMSMT. The report summarizes the recreational thresher shark fishery and reports on a series of seminars conducted with the cooperation of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Coast Recreational Fisheries Coordinator and United Anglers of Southern California. The HMSAS would like to note that 95 percent of fishermen surveyed in the seminars support more restrictive recreational bag limits for the recreational thresher shark fishery.

The HMSAS also supports continued research into issues of tail-hooking and survivability of thresher sharks in the catch and release of thresher sharks. If research indicates a high level of mortality of released fish, regulations that limit gear and tactics that minimize thresher shark mortality may be required.

Members of the public and individual HMSAS members recommend that the Council give consideration of the following list of potential management measures to address this issue:

- Seasonal closures
- Alignment of commercial and recreational fishing seasons
- Effort restrictions
- Gear restrictions
- Bag limit changes

Rod McInnis Letter to the Council Regarding Albacore Effort Control (Informational Report #1)

The HMSAS expresses concern that the May 21, 2008, letter sent by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries to the Council calling for “vigor” in addressing potential management initiatives for North Pacific albacore was written without consultation of stakeholders most affected by any potential effort controls. We do agree that a fair and reasonable discussion of ways to maintain current levels of effort as outlined by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) resolutions should be approached if scientific findings show problems with albacore stocks. The HMSAS does not see the requests of the NOAA Fisheries letter as a high priority issue for the Council to take on at this time. The U.S. albacore industry was instrumental in

agreeing to the resolutions, and should be kept up to date and included on details of any effort control initiatives by management bodies.

A minority of the HMSAS submits the following statement regarding the May 21, 2008, letter from the NOAA Regional Administrator, Rod McInnis to Chairman of the Pacific Fishery Management Council, Don Hansen regarding the development of management controls for the North Pacific albacore fishery.

In 2005, the IATTC and the WCPFC adopted resolutions identifying North Pacific albacore populations requiring member and cooperating non-member nations to “take necessary measures to ensure that the level of fishing effort by their vessels fishing for North Pacific albacore tuna is not increased.”¹ Likewise, the International Scientific Committee (ISC) reported that fishing levels would need to be reduced based on future biomass projections if albacore continues to be fished at current rates. Similarly, the first Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report for the U.S. West Coast HMS FMP warned that “[t]he current fishing mortality rate is high relative to commonly used reference points, and may be cause for concern regarding the current stock status of North Pacific albacore.”² The report further cautioned that “if rates of F continue at assumed levels, under most of the scenarios considered within the suite of uncertainty analyses, it is unlikely that the [spawning stock biomass] will rebuild to spawning stock biomass maximum sustainable yield (SSBMSY) levels within a five-year time horizon.”³

At its June 2006 meeting, the Council directed the HMSMT and HMSAS to continue developing the information necessary to characterize current effort in the U.S. North Pacific albacore fishery. Effective management requires managers to be able to both quantify and control fishing effort; however lack of effort data should not preclude the Council and NMFS from acting quickly and with precaution to reduce fishing pressure on albacore.

In 2007, the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) proposed and the Council approved bag limits on North Pacific Albacore on the recreational sector.⁴ While this is an important precautionary step, we note that bag limits in and of themselves will not guarantee effort reduction without parallel constraints on capacity in all sectors. As such, we support NMFS’ intent to begin consideration of possible management controls to ensure that future catch and effort remains within the bounds of historical fishing effort. Towards that end, we recommend that the Council and NMFS take the precautionary step of establishing limited entry programs for recreational charter vessels and commercial fisheries targeting North Pacific albacore along the U.S. west coast.

PFMC
6/7/08

¹ PROP IATTC-73-C1, June 2005

² 2005 HMS Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report, Section 5.3.1, page 106.

³ *Id.*

⁴ “Implement Daily Bag Limits for North Pacific Albacore and Northern Bluefin Tuna Caught by Recreational Anglers in Federal Exclusive Economic Zone Waters Adjacent to California,” Agenda Item C.2.a, Attachment 2, November 2006 PFMC Briefing Book.