

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON COUNCIL
RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NORTHERN COMMITTEE OF THE WESTERN AND
CENTRAL PACIFIC FISHERIES COMMISSION

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) suggests the Council provide recommendations to the U.S. delegation of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) on a range of topics of HMS fisheries management concern prior to their annual meeting scheduled for December 8-12, 2008.

Albacore

Based on recommendations of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific (ISC), the Northern Committee (NC) proposed an interim management objective for North Pacific albacore: to maintain spawning stock biomass above the average level of its ten historically lowest points. The level of fishing mortality necessary to achieve this management objective will need to be determined based on the latest stock assessment analyses. The ISC albacore working group is expected to conduct analyses to determine threshold fishing mortality rates based on this interim management benchmark. Although the interim management measures differ slightly quantitatively from those recommended by the ISC's albacore working group, the HMSMT sees this as a positive step toward developing reference points for management of this species and encourages that the WCPFC to adopt the recommendation of the NC.

The HMSMT reiterates concern that all members of the WCPFC may not be complying with resolution Conservation and Management Measure-2005-03 on the conservation and management of northern albacore. The U.S. has demonstrated compliance with the resolution by defining historical levels of fishing effort by U.S. vessels on North Pacific albacore and demonstrating no increase in effort. We recommend that the WCPFC request that all members formally demonstrate compliance with the resolution.

Bluefin

The NC drafted conservation and management measures (CMM) for northern bluefin tuna based on ISC recommendations stemming from the latest bluefin stock assessment. The draft CMM would require that current levels of fishing mortality on northern bluefin not be increased. Language in the draft CMM also includes requirements for improving data collection and reporting, and coordination with Inter-American of Tropical Tuna Commission contracting parties. Provisions are also included to ensure that small island developing State Members are not unfairly prejudiced by effort limitations. Due to the relatively high fishing mortality estimated by the latest stock assessment, the HMSMT feels that the WCPFC should adopt the draft CMM on northern bluefin.

Striped Marlin

The ISC billfish working group recently conducted new analyses of the "center of biomass" of striped marlin in the North Pacific. Based on catch and effort data used in the latest stock assessment, it appears that roughly two-thirds of the striped marlin biomass in the North Pacific is centered above 20° N latitude. The HMSMT feels that the WCPFC should review the new

analyses and if in agreement, add the northern stock of striped marlin to the list of stocks under the NC's jurisdiction. This will help facilitate the development of conservation and management measures for this species and help dedicate WCPFC resources toward future stock assessment and research efforts. If the WCPFC adds the northern stock of striped marlin to their purview, they should consider implementing management measures to reduce fishing mortality on the stock, given the pessimistic assessment conducted by the ISC Billfish working group in 2007.

Sharks

The HMSMT notes that the Scientific Committee recommended extending CMM-2006-5, the resolution on shark conservation and management, to include vessels less than 24 m length. The resolution includes measures to require WCPFC members to implement the Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nation's International Plan of Action for Conservation and Management of Sharks, to prevent the intentional wasting of sharks, and to prevent landing shark fins without associated carcasses. The HMSMT encourages the WCPFC to extend the CMM to the smaller vessels as recommended by the NC.

IUU Fishing

Illegal, undocumented, and unreported (IUU) fishing, specifically high seas driftnetting, is believed to be increasing in the North Pacific. The NC heard concerns from WCPFC members and encouraged collaboration among parties to eliminate illegal fishing. The HMSMT supports the NC recommendation that the WCPFC draw attention to the issue and highlight the harmful effects of IUU fishing. The U.S. delegation apparently intends to draft a proposal regarding high seas driftnetting in time for the WCPFC December meeting. The HMSMT recommends that the Council offer assistance, given the relevance to the U.S. West Coast fisheries and HMS stocks.

Research and Data Needs

The NC made some specific recommendations regarding the need for improved data collection and basic research on the northern stocks under the WCPFC's jurisdiction. In addition, the NC identified some data gaps and high priority research questions and recommended that WCPFC funds be allocated to address these (e.g., for research on age, growth, and maturity, and for improved data collection and management). In preparation of the Council's recent update to its Research and Data Needs document, the HMSMT reviewed data gaps and research priorities relevant to U.S. West Coast HMS and their fisheries. Most of the NC's concerns are mirrored by the Council and its advisory bodies. Therefore, the HMSMT recommends that the WCPFC adopt the NC's recommendations for multi-national research efforts to address data gaps regarding life history characteristics, biological inputs for stock assessment, and bycatch monitoring and mitigation.

PFMC

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