

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON FISHERY
MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT 2 – HIGH SEAS SHALLOW-SET LONGLINE

The primary intent of the Magnuson-Stevens Act is to promote the sustainability of fishery resources in the U.S. and contribute to the national food supply. The supply of swordfish is shifting from our domestic producers, and less regulated foreign fleets are likely taking more turtles per unit of effort. In order to encourage a more holistic management approach, the U.S. must have active fisheries. Having an active, well managed and regulated U.S. fishery also provides leverage to promote Pacific-wide sea turtle conservation. Such a fishery also provides an incentive to develop bycatch-reducing gear and methods that could be exported to other countries' fleets that interact with sea turtles.

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) would like to recommend Alternative 2 (limited entry) for the shallow-set longline (SSL) fishery as the most conservative action alternative listed in the Preliminary Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) (Attachment 1). Under Alternative 2 the HMSAS recommends the following provisions:

- Area closure: Adopt the fishery closure west of 140° W. longitude (Option 2). The HMSAS recognizes the benefit of minimal take of sea turtles resulting from this closure along with lower fuel cost and better quality of seafood by fishing in the area closer to the west coast.
- Gear requirements: Adopt the same gear requirements as under the Hawaii Pelagics Fishery Management Plan (FMP), i.e., circle hooks, mackerel-type bait, etc. The HMSAS recognizes the 89 percent reduction of turtle take with this gear type compared to J-hooks and squid bait previously used in the Hawaii (and west coast) SSL fishery.
- Sea turtle take caps: To be determined by NMFS Protected Resources Division through the ESA section 7 consultation process.
- Number of limited entry permits: Initially issue 10 permits with the ultimate objective of issuing a maximum of 20 permits based on a review of the economic viability and environmental impacts of the fishery at the end of second year after implementation. This is a conservative approach and depends on the economic and environmental impact of the fishery.
- Limited entry permit transfer: No permit transfer (i.e., sale) in the first two years and a minimum of two landings during the two-year time period.
- Limited entry permit qualification option: The HMSAS suggests Option 2 – drift gillnet (DGN) point system. The HMSAS does not want to increase additional fishing effort; under this option the HMSAS would like to see the transfer of fishing from one gear type to the other. To encourage this transfer between gear types the HMSAS recommends that the DGN permit be tied to the new SSL limited entry permit so that the two permits could not be fished at the same time.

- Additional concerns: The HMSAS recommends establishment of a permit review board to review permit qualifications, permit transfers, and any other challenges confronting the management of the fishery. The HMSAS also recommends that a permit application process, as discussed in section 2.2.3.1 in the Preliminary DSEIS (Attachment 1), be part of the Council’s recommendation. This provision would be similar to what was established under the Groundfish FMP limited entry program.

A minority of the HMSAS (Meghan Jeans, Ocean Conservancy) believe that the Council should select the status quo alternative as its final preferred alternative for Amendment 2 to the HMS FMP and discontinue the development of a management framework for a high seas shallow set longline fishery off the west coast of the United States. Rather than seeking to allow a high seas longline fishery, the Council and NMFS should maintain the current prohibition on shallow-set longlining east of 150°W longitude and strengthen this measure by prohibiting Hawaii longline permit holders from fishing in this area and landing their catch on the west coast. Development of a west coast-based shallow set longline fishery is premature and is not based on a comprehensive evaluation of potential impacts or consideration of a reasonable range of alternatives. NMFS must better define the purpose and need for its proposal to allow the fishery and consider a broader range of alternatives to achieve the goal of providing more sustainable fishing opportunities while promoting the recovery of endangered and threatened sea turtles, vulnerable marine mammal, seabird, and fish populations. We also encourage NMFS to prioritize the development of a coordinated management strategy for pelagic fisheries between the Pacific Fishery Management Council (“PFMC”) and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (“WPRFMC”).

PFMC
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