

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON
INTERNATIONAL REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION (RFMO)
MATTERS

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) met and discussed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding Regional Fishery Management Council Participation in International Regional Fishery Management Organizations governing Pacific Ocean highly migratory species. Although the HMSMT has no specific recommendations on the MOU, the HMSMT highlights that interagency coordination and information exchange are key to effective HMS management and conservation.

The HMSMT suggests the Council provide recommendations to the U.S. delegation of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) for the following HMS species: yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna, striped marlin, and albacore tuna.

At their recent meetings, the IATTC failed to institute new management measures for yellowfin and bigeye tuna which are currently experiencing overfishing in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). The IATTC staff had tabled a proposal for conservation measures based on management goals to reduce the catch of yellowfin and bigeye tuna by 20 percent and 30 percent, respectively. The proposal was developed from conclusions based on the 2007 stock assessments and scientific advice stemming from them. The HMSMT recommends that the Council communicate to the U.S. delegation to the IATTC that the lack of conservation measures on the international level is having serious consequences on our ability to manage fisheries domestically. The U.S. west coast fishers permitted under the Council's HMS plan can do little to curb overfishing given their minimal landings (less than one percent of EPO catch for each stock; 2007 HMS SAFE Report), and the problem can only be solved in the international arena. The U.S. delegation should recommend that the IATTC examine whether total allowable catch limits would be more effective than time and area closures in controlling yellowfin and bigeye tuna catch. That effectiveness would include, among other things, a better ability to monitor compliance with the resolution.

Regarding the recent pessimistic assessment of striped marlin in the North Pacific (Interim Scientific Committee [ISC] 2007), the HMSMT believes that the IATTC should reassess the status of striped marlin in the EPO. The latest IATTC Fishery Status Report indicates that the striped marlin population in the EPO is well above maximum sustainable yield and that fishing effort has been declining and should lead to increased abundance; however, a comprehensive stock assessment for striped marlin in the EPO has not been published since 2003. The Council should inform the U.S. delegation to the IATTC that an updated stock assessment is necessary in order to address international management needs. The Council can do little to address conservation concerns for striped marlin for U.S. west coast fishers since commercial landing of striped marlin under a Council HMS permit is already prohibited.

Finally, the U.S. has shown that it remains in compliance with the IATTC's resolution on north Pacific albacore conservation by demonstrating that albacore fishing effort remains within the band of effort adopted by the Council to characterize the U.S. west coast albacore fishery. It is not clear that other member nations are similarly in compliance. The Council should ask the U.S. delegation to the IATTC to inquire about compliance of the other member nations given the ISC's updated conservation advice based on the most recent stock assessment (ISC 2007).

PFMC
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