

NMFS REPORT ON THE NORTHERN COMMITTEE,
FIFTH REGULAR SESSION, NAGASAKI, JAPAN

The Fifth Regular Session of the Northern Committee (NC) took place at Nagasaki, Japan, on 7-10 September, 2009. The meeting was attended by members from Canada, Cook Islands, Japan, Republic of Korea, Chinese Taipei, United States of America and Vanuatu. The NC is one of three subsidiary bodies (the Scientific Committee and the Technical and Compliance Committee being the others) that advise the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC or Commission). The NC provides conservation and management measure advice to the Commission primarily on temperate fish stocks (i.e., North Pacific bluefin, North Pacific albacore, and swordfish) as well as on other species. The NC prepares their recommendations on the findings of the International Scientific Committee.

Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF)

The NC adopted an interim management measure for 2010 for bluefin tuna, which was proposed by Japan. This measure will be considered for adoption by the WCPFC at their plenary meeting in December. The interim management objective is to ensure that the current level of fishing mortality rate is not increased in the Convention Area. To achieve this objective, Commission Members, Cooperating Non-members and participating Territories (CCMs) will take measures to ensure that total fishing effort by their vessel fishing for Pacific bluefin in the area north of 20° North shall not be increased from the 2002-2004 level for 2010. However, the measure will not apply to fisheries in the Korean EEZ or artisanal fisheries. In taking such measures, CCMs shall take account of the need to reduce the effort on juvenile (age 0-3) to the 2004-2004 level to recommend to the WCPFC. Other key provisions include requiring CCMs to strength efforts to improve data collecting systems an reporting how each CCM implemented efforts to curtail their fishing effort.

Albacore

The NC adopted a proposed CMM to replace CMM 2005-03 for north Pacific albacore, which was proposed by the United States. Like the bluefin measure, the measure will be presented at the plenary meeting for the full Commission to consider adopting. Revisions to the CMM include all CCMs reporting annually to the WCPFC both catch and fishing effort by gear type. Catches shall be reported in terms of weight. Fishing effort shall be reported in terms of the most relevant measures for a given type, including at a minimum for all gear types, the number of vessel-days fished and shall use the 2002 -2004 period as the measure of current level of effort. The WCPFC Executive Director shall communicate this conservation and management measure to the IATTC and request that the two Commissions engage in consultations with a view to reaching agreement on a consistent set of conservation and management measures for North Pacific albacore, and

specifically, to propose that both Commissions adopt as soon as practicable uniform conservation and management measures that include clear and explicit baseline levels and any reporting or other measures needed to ensure compliance with agreed measures.

Swordfish

The NC reviewed a new swordfish stock assessment conducted by the ISC, which showed that the stock is above B_{MSY} and fishing mortality is below F_{MSY} . Investigation of stock structure concluded that there are two stocks in the North Pacific, one in the west and the other in the southeast. Because the stock is healthy the NC concluded that no conservation need be proposed for NP swordfish at this session. The U.S. suggested that the current status of the stock presents the Committee with an opportunity to establish reference points in a situation where there is apparently not a need to reduce fishing mortality.

Striped marlin

The NC had little to say about the Scientific Committee failing to recommend, again, that striped marlin be designated a northern stock. There was a brief discussion of the progress of the NC's working group (to explore potential ways to reduce incidental catches of striped marlin), which was acknowledged to be nil. The NC agreed that the group should press on and try to produce something in time for the Commission meeting in December. The United States offered to provide a convener for the group (the ISC's Chair of the striped marlin working group) to convene a discussion in the margins of TCC5 and WCPFC6 with the view to preparing a draft interim CMM for striped marlin for WCPFC6's consideration.

Sharks

The NC agreed that, on the condition that the schedule for assessments of albacore and Pacific bluefin would not be delayed that the ISC be tasked with considering assessments for mako and blue shark but with no timetable associated with these assessments. Any such work would be undertaken in collaboration with the Scientific Committee to the WCPFC to avoid duplication.

Work Program for the NC 2010-2013

The NC revised the work program for the NC 2010-2013. Key additions included: request a report from the Secretariat for NC6 on compliance with the data submission obligations for each CCM; requested the Executive Director to write to IATTC in relation to efforts to develop a CMM for Pacific bluefin and north Pacific albacore promoting harmonization of measures, to the extent possible; and agreed to convene a 2-day workshop prior to NC6 on identifying reference points for NC stocks.