

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON SWORDFISH FISHERY MANAGEMENT POLICY CONNECTIONS

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) used the questions in Agenda Item G.2, Supplemental Attachment 1, to organize our comments for the Council's discussion of policy connections in the West Coast swordfish fishery.

1. What are some actions the Council has identified for the West Coast swordfish fishery and how do they relate to any stated policy objectives?

The HMSAS does not support putting hard caps on marine mammals but agree that hard caps are warranted for endangered sea turtles. However sea turtles should be co-managed and protected equally by both the California and Hawaii pelagic longline fleets based on science.

The HMSAS supports inclusion of the following elements in the draft Swordfish Plan:

- Continuation of the industry's efforts to reduce finfish bycatch. Marine mammal bycatch should be discussed in the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) Take Reduction Team (TRT) process.
- Making both deep-set buoy gear (DSBG) and "H gear" (modified buoy gear with buoy lines strung together on a horizontal line) legal gear types under the HMS Fishery Management Plan (FMP).
- The HMSAS and Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) leading a rational discussion on criteria for permitting DSBG fishery participants.
- The development of a shallow-set longline (SSLL) fishery outside the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and exempted fishing permit (EFP) testing of pelagic longline inside the EEZ.
- The EFP for drift gillnet (DGN) fishing inside the Pacific Leatherback Conservation Area (PLCA).
- Allowing two boats to participate in the EFP to test pelagic longline gear inside the EEZ, as recommended by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC).
- Creation of a federal permit for swordfish as part of the HMS FMP.

The HMSAS notes that DGN and longline fisheries are the only proven economical and viable fisheries that can enhance our local seafood supply.

With regard to Goals 1 and 2 in the draft Swordfish Plan, the HMSAS reminds the Council that DGN fishermen have made many efforts to minimize bycatch such as:

- Adding and using pingers
- Increasing net mesh size.
- Lowering the top of the net
- Accepting seasonal and area closures
- Communicating among boats to avoid bycatch.

Fishermen also support the use of new technologies such as Ecocast to identify and communicate potential bycatch hotspots.

Fishermen are also working on more actively tended gear (what we like to call “Ecosets”: i.e., shorter set lengths at night with limited soak time).

Regarding Goal 3, we strongly support measures to ensure economic viability of the fishery and the fisherman.

2. What mix of gear types in the West Coast swordfish fishery would best address the Council’s goals and objectives, including reducing reliance on imports of foreign-caught swordfish?

The HMSAS believes that the complete mix of gear types – DSBG, shallow-set and deep-set longline DGN, and harpoon – should be utilized in addressing the Council’s goals and objectives. Each has advantages in different times of the year, in different locations, and under different weather conditions. Studies comparing turtle bycatch between domestic and foreign fleets have been presented to the Council. (March 2015 at Agenda Item H.4.b, HMSMT Report; Bartram, et al., 2010). Also, SWFSC economist Dale Squires presented an analysis of bycatch rates and mortality impacts from foreign fleets at a previous Council meeting.

3. Has the Council adopted a goal to end the DGN fishery at some point in the future and transition fishery participants to a different gear type or close the fishery outright?

No. See answer to Question #2, which recommends studying and utilizing all available gear types and fishing methods with the goal of encouraging an economically viable commercial fishery for swordfish and thresher shark with significantly better bycatch performance.

4. What would it take to get DSBG implemented as a legal gear type on the West Coast?

As noted in Supplemental Attachment 1, the Council would have to amend the HMS FMP to have DSBG defined as an authorized legal gear type. As part of this process, there should be a rational and scientifically-based discussion of capacity questions that might apply in varying degrees to different gear types and fishing methods. In this regard, HMSAS advice could be utilized by the Council as a valuable resource.

5. What should the Council consider when designing a Federal permitting scheme for the West Coast swordfish fishery?

The HMSAS believes limited gear endorsements on the existing federal HMS permit would be the most economic and efficient procedure for a federal permitting scheme. Gear endorsements could be limited entry for some gear types and open access for others.

6. What is the policy connection between the use of pelagic longline gear (both deep-set for tuna and shallow-set for swordfish) inside the West Coast exclusive economic zone (EEZ) versus outside the EEZ?

The HMSAS emphasizes that the EEZ is an arbitrary dividing line and supports a rational discussion based on scientific evidence to identify time and area closures to resolve potential user group conflicts within the EEZ.

7. Why is it important to coordinate with the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (WPFMC) on a longline fishery outside the EEZ authorized under the Pacific Council's HMS FMP?

Hawaii permitted vessels have been unloading in California for many years. It is important for both Councils to cooperate in achieving viable U.S. HMS fisheries and in managing and conserving species that are found in both Council jurisdictions

8. What is the connection between potential bycatch in a West Coast swordfish longline fishery based on pelagic longline fisheries in other regions of the US, and bycatch impacts in foreign fisheries?

Figure 1 and 2 in Agenda Item G.2, Attachment 1, demonstrate the transfer effect caused by not ensuring successful U.S. fisheries.

9. How should the Council sequence the implementation of management measures for the West Coast Swordfish fishery?

The HMSAS prioritizes potential actions under the draft Swordfish Plan as follows:

1. Conducting the DGN EFP inside the PLCA is top priority.
2. Issuing an EFP to test DSBG "H gear"
3. Issuing an EFP to test pelagic longline inside the EEZ
4. Scoping for authorizing SSLL fishery outside the EEZ
5. Continuing the EFP for DSBG beyond the current two years
6. Implementing protected species hard caps for swordfish fisheries

PFMC
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