

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES
INCLUDING U.S.-CANADA ALBACORE TREATY AREA FISHERY UPDATE

Recommendations to the US Section of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission on North Pacific Bluefin Tuna.

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) understands that pursuant to the amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), when an internationally fished stock, such as bluefin, is declared overfished, and the cause of that overfishing comes from the efforts of international fleets, other than the U.S. fleet, the Council has the obligation to make recommendations to the Congress and the Secretary of State regarding means to resolve the issue. Therefore, the HMSAS suggests that the Council make the following recommendations to the U.S. Section of the Inter- American Tropical Tuna Commission:

- The U.S. should seek to align its interests with those of Mexico when negotiating new bluefin conservation measures and country quotas with Japan and other Asian countries;
- The U.S. should open negotiations by clearly and firmly stating that U.S. fishing has not contributed in any way to the current poor status of the North Pacific Bluefin stock;
- The U.S. should also emphasize that its traditional quota of 500 metric tons, even if fished to the limit, has no significant impact on the bluefin stock;
- The U.S. should use the best scientific information available to convince other interested parties that conservation measures must include the immediate reduction of effort that targets the 0-1 year classes and 6 and older year classes of bluefin; and
- The U.S. should explore the possibility of negotiating an international time and area closure to protect bluefin spawning areas.

The HMSAS also requests the Council either have the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) develop, or ask the West Coast Region of NMFS to develop, by the June Council meeting a white paper explaining the well managed and restrictive U.S. fishery for bluefin. This is critical to the survival of those who fish for bluefin because of the extreme effectiveness of Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGO) publicity to the plight of the stocks. In 2015 the U.S fleet caught very little bluefin tuna because they had great difficulty in selling it. This lower catch, not due to a scarcity of the fish, nor to a lack of capacity to catch it, will have an adverse impact on future negotiations for a U.S. quota of any size. History has shown that if a fleet does not catch its full quota, it eventually loses it to other countries. We recommend that uncaught quota not be transferred to other countries in the interest of the conservation of the species.

The HMSAS has reviewed the harvest limit area (HLA) options paper (Agenda Item F.4, Supplemental Attachment 5) regarding U.S. quotas of bigeye tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). It appears that the stock of bigeye in the EPO is being fished at near maximum sustainable yield (MSY) levels and the status of the population of bigeye that occupies the Northeastern Pacific Ocean (NEPO), is unknown. Therefore the HMSAS believes that the HLA options paper is premature and should not receive additional attention at this time. HMSAS suggests that the current conservation measures for bigeye tuna be maintained as is.

US/Canada Albacore Treaty

The HMSAS requests that the Council relay to the Department of State our concern over the time it takes to receive catch and landing data by the Canadian albacore fleet in the U.S. and Canadian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZs), and in offshore regions. This needs to be expedited, as US landing data, although not complete, can be accessed anytime during the season through the PacFIN database unlike Canadian landings. The HMSAS also would like to see accurate landing data of US vessels unloading in Canadian ports. We would like to see the percent of total albacore caught in Canadian EEZ waters that are harvested within 12 nautical miles of the Canadian shore.

The HMSAS also requests that any catch and landing data of albacore landed in Alaska and Canada by Alaskan fishermen be collected and made available to the Council.

At this time it is premature to discuss any future fishing regime under the Treaty. There is the entire 2016 season ahead of us and there is virtually no Canadian data available. Albacore organizations such as Western Fishboat Owners Association (WFOA) and American Albacore Fishing Association (AAFA) have had little discussions with their membership. The HMSAS had a productive dialogue with David Hogan, U.S. State Department and look forward to continuing dialogue.

The HMSAS is concerned that premature deliberations by the Council and input of various entities to the Council could cloud any future negotiations and outcomes which would be a detriment to the U.S. albacore fishermen in the long-term.

Recommendations for Northern Committee (WCPFC) MSE Objectives - North Pacific Albacore Workshop

First and foremost, the HMSAS stresses that our long-term goal is to maintain a North Pacific albacore fishery that is equitable to U.S. Fishermen and sustainable with regulations that are enforceable on all nations that harvest North Pacific albacore, either as a directed fishery or bycatch in another directed fishery.

The HMSAS reviewed Agenda Item F.4, Supplemental Attachment 2, Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) list of objectives and questions concerning the objectives produced by John Holmes of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species (ISC) Albacore Working Group (ALBWG). At this point in time the HMSAS has limited time to conduct a detailed review and comment on specific concerns under each objective.

The HMSAS understands that the MSE process is a way to set certain long range, fair, and equitable standards for albacore stock management in the North Pacific. The MSE was created as a vehicle where the fishing industry and stakeholders could have better input into the management process. Such input theoretically would serve to solve issues and glitches in potential future management before issues arise with stock assessments and processes creating management measures.

Therefore the HMSAS recommends that the Council establish a way to gather more detailed input from both the HMSAS in conjunction with the HMSMT prior to the May 24-25 MSE meeting in Yokohama, Japan. The HMSAS requests the Council authorize a webinar for the HMSAS and HMSMT soon to discuss these objectives and questions. These bodies also will review the November 10, 2015, Council letter to Regional Administrator Michael Tosatto that contains recommendations that has not been commented on. This process should be carried out after some communication on email between HMSAS and HMSMT members to first sort out priorities for comment. A final recommendation could then be completed during the webinar. Because of the scheduling problems and as was done by the Council for advice to the Council Representatives to the WCPFC in December, we suggest that the Council have the Council Representatives to the MSE Workshop receive recommendations on the MSE positions directly from the HMSAS and the HMSMT.

The MSE is being done first on albacore since stocks are now good and not as controversial as other species. The MSE is important as it will also be the roadmap for MSE on other HMS species and involvement of U.S. stakeholders is important and necessary.

PFMC
03/12/16