

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
INTERNATIONAL HMS MANAGEMENT

EPO Swordfish

The HMSAS offers the following advice to the Council when it considers the July 14, 2015 letter from William W. Stelle, Jr. (D.2 Attachment 1) asking the Council to take “appropriate” action in response to the declaration by NMFS that the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) swordfish stock is subject to overfishing.

On page 2 of that letter, there is an ISC map reproduced (Report of the Billfish Working Group, July 16-22, 2014) which shows the dividing line between the EPO and Western and Central North Pacific Ocean (WCNPO) swordfish stocks has its northern boundary of the EPO stock well below the U.S.—Mexican border. Unfortunately, the letter then goes on to use the term “North Pacific” swordfish without making the distinction between the EPO and WCNPO stock structure, thus obscuring the fact that US swordfish fishermen under the jurisdiction of the PFMCA *do not fish* on the EPO stock, which is the subject of the over fishing designation. Therefore, under Section 304(i) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) the Council has no obligation to recommend domestic regulations to the Secretary of Commerce. The Council’s only obligation is to make recommendations to the Secretary of State and to Congress for international actions that will end overfishing on the EPO stock.

MSE Workshop

The HMSAS greatly appreciates the briefing it received from Kit Dahl and Cyreis Schmitt on the MSE Workshop presented by the ISC and held in Yokohama Japan this May 24-25. The HMSAS would also like to express its gratitude to the Council for helping fund the attendance of one of the HMSAS members. Generally, the HMSAS believes MSE is a worthwhile exercise, and from what has been reported so far, it seems to be heading in the right direction. It is our understanding the MSE process is likely to take a substantial amount of time (years) and that the process is flexible enough so that it is likely the objectives, as well as measuring the effectiveness of different management measures, will be subject to constant improvement as the process proceeds. The HMSAS notes that the Work Plan for the Northern Committee which was prepared at its 11th meeting last year states that during the period of 2016-2018 the Northern Committee will work on developing target reference points based upon the MSE process, and specifically for 2016 “ to support and then consider the results of ISC MSE Workshop.”

The HMSAS reviewed the Provisional Annotated Agenda for the upcoming meeting of the Northern Committee of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

With specific reference to Pacific Bluefin tuna, we are supportive of the proposed Conservation and Management Measures being presented to the IATTC by the United States. We would like to highlight the following language from that proposal – “Putting on record again that greater than 80% of the impact on the spawning stock biomass of Pacific bluefin [sic] tuna results from WCPO fisheries, and urging joint action with the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

(WCPFC) to recover the stock.” The proposal calls for continuation for IATTC Resolution C-14-06 which we support. However, the HMSAS recommends that the Council support a return to our previously approved 500 ton annual catch limit quota as the stock rebuilds. An Internet news report [<http://FIS.COM> June 20, 2016, 04:00 GMT] states that Mexico will be requesting an increase in their annual catch limit for 2017-2018

These measures are intended to achieve the rebuilding target of the Northern Committee of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, which has been interpreted as a 60% probability of reaching the medium spawning biomass by 2024.

This provides allowances for the meeting the goals of the long term re-building while allowing continued opportunities and access for U.S. fisheries.

We also encourage the Council’s support (where appropriate) in efforts designed to address overfishing in the international arena; with a specific focus on those actions designed to reduce mortality of age 0 and adult Pacific Bluefin tuna and fishing effort on spawning grounds in the Western Pacific. As in March 2016, the HMSAS again recommends a time and area closure of the spawning areas in the Western Pacific for Pacific Bluefin tuna would be effective in rebuilding the stock.