

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM (HMSMT) REPORT ON
INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Recommendations on Implementation of Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)
Resolution on Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF)

The IATTC adopted Resolution C-16-08 (*Measures for the Conservation and Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean*) at the October 2016 meeting. This Resolution establishes a 600 metric ton (mt) biennial commercial catch limit for PBF in the eastern Pacific Ocean for 2017 and 2018, and catch is not to exceed 425 mt in either year. These are the same catch limits adopted in the previous IATTC Resolution and implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for 2015 and 2016.

During implementation of IATTC Resolution C-14-06, NMFS, upon consideration of public comment and landings data, implemented a 25 mt trip limit until catch was within 50 mt of the annual limit, at which time a 2 mt trip limit would be imposed. (At the November 2014 meeting, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) recommended an initial 20 mt trip limit until 250 mt – i.e., 50 mt from the average annual limit in Resolution C-14-06 – was caught, at which time a 2 mt trip limit would be imposed for the remainder of the year.) Trip limits are a useful tool to avoid exceeding the annual limit of 425 mt and allowing incidental landings before a complete fishery closure is required. The HMSMT does not have specific suggestions on the size of the trip limits, but notes that the 2 mt trip limit was determined using both a Council recommendation as well as an analysis of historic incidental landings. The average of incidental landings from 2004-2013 was 0.128 mt,¹ suggesting that landings by fleets that do not target PBF will typically not be impacted by a 2 mt trip limit.

Recommendations to the U.S. Delegation of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)

The WCPFC will be discussing a Northern Committee (NC) recommendation to modify Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) 2015-04 on PBF at their December 2016 meeting. The NC proposal revises the current CMM to allow countries to transfer some of their catch limit applicable to fish less than 30kg to their catch limit applicable to fish greater than 30kg for 2017-2020. The reverse – transferring larger fish catch limits to smaller fish catch limits – is not allowed. While the HMSMT does not offer a specific recommendation, it notes disagreement among scientists on the advantages of catching fewer juvenile fish at the cost of catching more adults. Some scientists believe that catching fewer juveniles could have a greater conservation benefit than catching a commensurate weight of adults. However, the IATTC Scientific Staff provided a report in which they indicate the need to further protect the spawning population.²

¹ Regulatory Impact Review for Proposed Rule to Implement IATTC Resolution C-14-06 (80 FR 38986, March 9, 2015); <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=NOAA-NMFS-2014-0151-0010>

² <http://www.iattc.org/Meetings/Meetings2016/June/pdf-files/IATTC-90-04a-Tunas-billfishes-and-other-pelagic-species-in-the-EPO-2015.pdf>

Center For Biological Diversity (CBD) Petition on PBF

The CBD petitioned NMFS for a rulemaking under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Management Act. In its response ([Agenda Item J.3, Attachment 1](#)), NMFS referred the decisions on two components of the petition to the Council because of the Council's role in the rulemakings pertaining to changes in the West Coast Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). These two components are: (1) including PBF on the list of prohibited species, or, alternatively establishing annual catch limits and minimum size requirements to protect age classes 0-2; and (2) identifying specific values to be used as reference points to determine overfishing or overfished state. In their September 2016 statement, the HMSMT provided a comment in which it concurred with NMFS' response and suggested deferring decisions on reference points to a later date (see agenda item [J.3.a, Supplemental HMSMT Report 2](#)).

Regarding the petitioner's request to identify specific values for reference points (maximum sustainable yield [MSY], optimum yield [OY], status determination criteria [SDC], and overfishing limit [OFL]) for PBF, the HMSMT notes that the Council could take this up in either 2017 or 2018, as explained below:

- A. The HMS FMP states that the biennial process, "...may be used to identify, adopt, and review revised estimates of MSY, OY, and any related SDC based on the best scientific information." Specifying reference points for PBF (or any other stock) was not addressed in the current biennial cycle; the next cycle occurs in 2018. The Council could defer consideration of management reference points for PBF until then.
- B. The Council will consider a "housekeeping" amendment to the HMS FMP in March and June 2017 that could inform how the Council specifies reference points; the Council could concurrently identify PBF reference points.

The HMSMT seeks guidance on whether and when to work on specifying reference points for PBF and any other HMS FMP stock. Additionally, the choice of domestic reference points should consider concurrent processes within the IATTC and WCPFC to develop reference points.

PFMC
11/19/16