



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES
Pacific Islands Regional Office
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Agenda Item J.5

Attachment 1

March 2017

JAN 10 2017

Mr. Edwin Ebisui, Chair
Western Pacific Fishery Management Council
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400
Honolulu, HI 96813

Mr. Dan Hull, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99601-2252

Mr. Herb Pollard, Chair
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101
Portland, OR 97220-1384

Dear Chairs Ebisui, Hull, and Pollard:

I am writing to inform you of the outcomes of the Thirteenth Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (Commission), held in Nadi, Fiji, December 5-9, 2016. This letter also shares NMFS' initial assessment of the regulatory actions that will be needed to implement the recent decisions of the Commission.

Conservation and management measure for tropical tunas

The Commission adopted Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) 2016-01, which will replace CMM 2015-01. The main changes were to roll over certain 2016 provisions to 2017, particularly the high seas fishing effort limits for certain purse seine fleets. Also, the Commission agreed that there will be no catch limits for yellowfin tuna in 2017, and the CMM has been clarified accordingly. Finally, with respect to a footnote in the CMM that allows members to avoid the prohibition on setting purse seines on fish aggregating devices on the high seas in 2017 if they limit their purse seine bigeye tuna catches to certain levels, the CMM was clarified to require that such members limit their purse seine bigeye catches to certain levels in 2017.

Most of the provisions of CMM 2016-01 have already been implemented, but new regulations will be needed to establish fishing effort limits for the U.S. purse seine fleet for 2017, and possibly to reduce the 2017 longline bigeye tuna catch limit, if it is determined that there was an overage of the 2016 catch limit. NMFS intends to implement these provisions as needed under the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention Implementation Act (WCPFCIA).



Because bigeye tuna in the western and central Pacific Ocean is subject to overfishing, we encourage the Councils to continue to consider recommendations to help end overfishing of the stock, and of course the Councils are welcome to consider actions that might mitigate the adverse impacts of the longline bigeye tuna annual catch limits, to the extent consistent with international obligations and applicable law.

Conservation and management measure for Pacific bluefin tuna

The Commission slightly modified the conservation and management measure for Pacific bluefin tuna, adopting CMM 2016-04 to replace CMM 2015-04. The main provisions of the new CMM, like the previous one, are fishing effort limits and catch limits. The changes to the CMM relate to the continuing development of the rebuilding plan for the stock, and to the relationship between the small-fish and large-fish catch limits. The United States does not have any fishing vessels that target Pacific bluefin tuna in the Convention Area, so NMFS does not intend to take any regulatory action to implement the revised measure. Because Pacific bluefin tuna is overfished, we encourage the Councils to continue to consider any recommendations necessary to address the rebuilding of this stock.

Conservation and management measure for the protection of fishery observers

The Commission adopted a version of the U.S.-proposed CMM on fishery observer safety. This measure establishes required actions for flag States, vessels, and other relevant parties in the event of the death, loss at sea, serious illness, assault or harassment of a fishery observer working as part of the Commission's Regional Observer Programme. Many of the provisions in this measure are already covered under existing U.S. regulations and current practices. NMFS will implement any of the provisions that are not.

Conservation and management measure for the eastern high seas pocket

The Commission adopted CMM 2016-02 for the Eastern High Seas Pocket Special Management Area, replacing CMM 2010-02. The new measure requires that members prohibit their fishing vessels from transshipping on the high seas in that area, starting in 2019. NMFS intends to implement this new requirement under the WCPFCIA.

Other decisions

In addition to adopting the measures described above, the Commission made a number of decisions that dealt with procedural and other matters that require no regulatory action by the United States. These decisions included agreeing to a maximum acceptable level of risk of 20 percent for breaching limit reference points, agreeing on a rebuilding timeframe of up to ten years for bigeye tuna, adding vessel master name and nationality to the information provided for fishing vessels on the Commission's IUU Fishing Vessel List, agreeing to a revised list of obligations to be assessed in 2017 and 2018 under the Compliance Monitoring Scheme, revising the scientific data provision rules, and adding manta and mobula rays to the Commission list of key shark species. The Commission also adopted CMM 2016-05, revising the charter

notification scheme previously found in CMM 2015-05. The revisions relate to how members must notify the Commission of chartered vessels, and will not require any regulatory action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'm. d. tosatto', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael D. Tosatto
Regional Administrator

cc: Barry Thom, Administrator, West Coast Region
James W. Balsiger, Administrator, Alaska Region
Michael Seki, Director, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
Cisco Werner, Director, Southwest Fisheries Science Center