

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) REPORT
ON THE INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES

Regulatory Updates

Final Rule: Tropical Tuna Fishing Restrictions in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO)

On April 11, 2017, NMFS published a final rule ([82 FR 17382](#)) implementing IATTC [Resolution C-17-01](#) (*Conservation of Tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean During 2017*), which was adopted by the IATTC in February 2017. These regulations apply to U.S. commercial fishing vessels that are used to catch tropical tuna in the eastern Pacific Ocean. Most provisions of Resolution C-17-01 are identical in content to the previous resolution on tropical tuna management that expired at the end of 2016. However, resolution C-17-01 and the rule include a new requirement for total allowable catch limits (TAC) for yellowfin and bigeye tuna harvested in purse seine sets on floating objects (97,711 mt) and in sets involving chase and encirclement of dolphins (162,182 mt). Once either TAC is reached, NMFS will close the U.S. fishery for these vessels sizes and set types for the remainder of the 2017 calendar year. These regulations became effective on May 11, 2017, and apply to the 2017 calendar year.

Final Rule: 2017- 2018 Commercial Fishing Restrictions for Pacific Bluefin Tuna in the EPO

On April 21, 2017, NMFS published a final rule ([82 FR 18704](#)) implementing IATTC Resolution C-16-08 (*Measures for the Conservation and Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean*). These regulations became effective May 22, 2017, and apply through 2018. This rule establishes annual and trip catch limits for U.S. commercial vessels that catch Pacific bluefin tuna in the EPO for 2017 and 2018 in accordance with the IATTC resolution and the recommendations of the Pacific Fishery Management Council. The total limit for both years combined is 600 metric tons (mt). In 2017 the limit is 425 mt with an initial trip limit of 25 mt per vessel. When NMFS anticipates that the total catch for the fleet has reached 375 mt, it will impose a 2 mt trip limit for each vessel until the total catch for 2017 reaches 425 mt. For 2018, NMFS will calculate the limit (the remainder of the 600 mt, not to exceed 425 mt in any year) and announce it in the Federal Register. The 25 mt trip limit will, again, apply until the catch is within 50 mt of the 2018 limit, at which time a 2 mt trip limit will be imposed.

Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) Meeting Outcomes

Bycatch Working Group (BYC WG) Meeting

The United States prompted the reconvening of the IATTC's BYC WG with a presentation at the 90th annual meeting in 2016 regarding the dire status of sea turtles in the eastern Pacific, specifically Pacific leatherback - a [NOAA Species in the Spotlight](#). The BYC WG held its 7th meeting May 5 through 6, 2017, in La Jolla, California and discussed sea turtle, shark, and seabird bycatch. The BYC WG reviewed several presentations and reports (see "Presentations" on the [IATTC SAC meeting page](#)) and discussed observer coverage, data reporting, and mitigation measures. Ultimately, the BYC WG made a list of recommendations for the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) to consider ([BYC-07](#)), which were later endorsed by the SAC without changes.

Fish Aggregating Devices (FAD) Working Group (WG) Meeting

The IATTC FAD WG met for a third time on May 7, 2017, and reviewed the objectives outlined in Annex III of Resolution [C-16-01](#). The FAD WG discussed definitions of terms related to FAD fishing and reviewed FAD data collection requirements, information on non-entangling FADs, and outcomes from the Joint Tuna-Regional Fisheries Management Organization meeting on FADs that took place in Madrid, Spain in April 2017. The FAD WG developed a list of conclusions and recommendations that were endorsed by the SAC (see [FAD 02-1](#)). The next FAD WG meeting will take place on July 21, 2017.

IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) Meeting

The 8th Meeting of the SAC to the IATTC was held May 8 through 12, 2017, in La Jolla, California. There, the IATTC scientific staff presented the results of 2016 stock assessments for tunas and tuna-like species in the EPO, as well as their recommendations on tuna conservation, bycatch, FADs, and data collection for consideration at the 92nd IATTC meeting (see [SAC -08-11](#)). In addition, the SAC members developed a separate list of recommendations, which will be included in the meeting minutes for the 8th Meeting of the SAC (not yet available online, but will be posted by the IATTC Secretariat soon and can be found then on the [8th SAC Meeting page](#)).

Potential U.S. Proposals for the 92nd IATTC Meeting

Tropical Tuna

The IATTC has collectively managed yellowfin (YFT), bigeye (BET), and skipjack tunas (i.e., tropical tunas) in the EPO for the last 10 years with various effort and catch controls. With resolution [C-13-01](#) expiring at the end of 2016, it was expected that a new resolution would be agreed to at the annual IATTC meeting in June 2016. At the 2016 SAC meeting, the IATTC scientific staff recommended increasing the closure period for purse seine (PS) vessels fishing for these tuna from 62 to 87 days. However, some member countries expressed concerns about accepting the staff's recommendation for an increased closure periods. These concerns prompted many alternative conservation and management measures to be analyzed. Ultimately, it took two additional meetings (i.e., the Resumed 90th meeting - October 2016 and the 91st Extraordinary meeting - February 2017) to reach agreement on a new Resolution: [C-17-01](#).

Resolution C-17-01 incorporates management schemes of previous tropical tuna resolutions (longline catch limits for BET, corralito, full retention on PS vessels), maintains the 62-day closure period for purse seine vessels, but also includes a new provision: total allowable catches (TACs) for BET and YFT combined for: (1) class 6 vessels making dolphin sets, and (2) class 4-6 vessels making floating object sets.

Since C-17-01 was only established for the 2017 calendar year, a new resolution is needed to manage tropical tunas for 2018 and beyond. At the 2017 SAC meeting, the scientific staff recommended that the PS closure period be increased by 10 days (62 to 72 days). They stipulated that if the closure was increased by 10 days, the TACs would not be necessary. However, the SAC requested, like last year, that the IATTC scientific staff provide additional analyses on conservation benefits associated with other management schemes, this time including TACs, limits on FADs, and retrieval of FADs.

Stakeholders in Hawaii have expressed a desire to push for an increase to the BET catch limit for U.S. longline vessels greater than 24 meters in length (large LL vessels), which is currently 500 mt. The United States proposed this at all three meetings last year, but several countries took issue with the notion of increasing catch at a time when the staff recommendation was to increase limits, either with additional closure days or another alternative.

Pacific Bluefin Tuna

At the Resumed 90th Meeting of the IATTC in October 2016, the IATTC adopted Resolution [C-16-08](#) on Pacific bluefin tuna conservation and management for 2017 and 2018. The resolution maintains the previous resolutions' IATTC-wide catch limit of 6,600 metric tons (mt) for 2017 and 2018 combined, and maintains fishing opportunity of up to 600 mt for 2017 and 2018 for the United States. The resolution also outlines next steps in developing a framework for managing the stock in the long-term. This framework also included an initial goal of rebuilding the Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) to the median point estimate for 1952-2014 by 2024 with at least 60 percent probability, and further specifies that the IATTC will adopt a second rebuilding target.

During participation in meetings of the Northern Committee (NC) to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), the United States has repeatedly proposed to set the second rebuilding target and schedule at 20 percent unfished SSB by 2030 ([NC12-DP12](#)). The United States plans to submit a proposal to the 92nd meeting of the IATTC that includes the U.S. preferred second rebuilding target be met by 2030 with a 60 percent probability. This proposal is intended to support the U.S. position going into the 2nd joint IATTC-WCPFC NC working group meeting on the management of Pacific bluefin tuna that will take place in August 2017.

Observer Safety

In response to increasing international concerns for the safety of observers on fishing vessels, the U.S.-sponsored proposals on observer safety at the meetings of both the IATTC and Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program (AIDCP) in 2016 ([IATTC-90 PROP I-1A](#) and [MOP-34 PROP A-1](#)). The proposals included requirements for safety equipment (i.e., 2-Way Communication Device and Personal Locator Beacon) to be provided to observers on large purse seine vessels (at least 363 mt fish hold volume), as well as longline vessels greater than 20 meters in overall length. The WCPFC adopted these minimum safety standards at its meeting in December 2015 ([WCPFC Summary Report](#); pg. 150), and also adopted [CMM 2016-03](#) in 2016, which includes procedures for the protection of Regional Observer Program Observers. At both AIDCP and IATTC meetings, several nations questioned the cost of providing this equipment. At the request of the United States, the IATTC staff provided a summary of the costs for devices that are used by NMFS in [IATTC-90 INF C](#), which was subsequently reviewed at the IATTC meeting in October 2016.

The United States plans to resubmit its AIDCP proposal to the 35th Meeting of the Parties to the AIDCP in July 2017. The United States also plans to submit a revised version of the IATTC proposal to the 92nd Meeting of the IATTC in July 2017. The revised proposal would include additional provisions to prohibit observer harassment or interference as well as a requirement for the IATTC to review these reports from observers.

Sea Turtle Bycatch

The United States plans to submit a proposal for the 92nd IATTC meeting to address binding language, reporting requirements, and specific mitigation measures that are currently lacking in the active IATTC resolutions pertaining to sea turtle bycatch: [Resolution C-04-05](#) (*Consolidated Resolution on Bycatch*) and [C-07-03](#) (*Resolution to Mitigate the Impact of Tuna Fishing Vessels on Sea Turtles*).

Future Meeting Dates

IATTC-related Meetings

35 th AIDCP & 92 nd IATTC	July 17-28	Mexico City, Mexico
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WCPFC-related Meetings

Scientific Committee	August 9 - 17	Rarotonga, Cook Is.
Special Ssn. - Bridging CMM Trop Tuna	August 22 - 24	Honolulu, HI
Northern Committee	August 28 - September 1	South Korea
Technical Compliance Committee	September 27 - October 3	Pohnpei, FSM
Annual Meeting	December 3 - 8	Philippines

ISC-related Meetings¹

BILLWG	June 1 - 7	Keelung, Chin.-Taipei
STATWG	July 7	Vancouver, Canada
SHARKWG	July 8 - 9	Vancouver, Canada
ALBWG	July 9	Vancouver, Canada
PBFWG	July 10	Vancouver, Canada
BILLWG	July 10	Vancouver, Canada
Plenary	July 12 - 17	Vancouver, Canada

Abbreviations

ALBWG = Albacore Working Group
BILLWG = Billfish Working Group
CMM = Conservation and Management Measure
PBFWG = Pacific Bluefin Tuna Working Group
SHARKWG = Shark Working Group
STATWG = Statistics Working Group

¹ Updates may be found at http://isc.fra.go.jp/meetings/future_meetings.html