

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) REPORT
ON INTERNATIONAL HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES (HMS) ACTIVITIES

Outcomes of the 92nd Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)

The IATTC held its annual meeting in Mexico City, Mexico from July 24-28, 2017. The U.S. delegation was led by Barry Thom, U.S. Commissioner for NOAA, and David Hogan from the U.S. Department of State. Ryan Wulff and Mike Thompson attended as alternate U.S. Commissioners to represent NOAA and recreational fishing interests, respectively. The U.S. delegation included members of the U.S. government, non-governmental organizations, and the fishing industry. A primary focus of this meeting was to reach consensus on tropical tuna measures for 2018 and beyond, for which the United States submitted a proposal. In addition, the United States submitted proposals on Pacific bluefin tuna, observer safety at sea, and sea turtle bycatch mitigation (for specifics on all U.S. proposals see [Agenda Item H.5a, June, 2017](#)).

Tropical Tuna Conservation

The IATTC agreed to a new Resolution ([C-17-02](#), *Conservation Measures for Tropical Tunas in the in Eastern Pacific Ocean During 2018-2020 and Amendment to Resolution C-17-01*) that updates the current resolution ([C-17-01](#)) applicable to 2017, and adopts new measures for 2018, 2019, and 2020. The amendments to the 2017 measures (paragraph 28) include removing the total allowable catches (TACs) for bigeye and yellowfin tuna caught by purse seine vessels¹, extending the purse seine (class sizes 4-6) closure periods from 62 days to 72 days (based on scientific recommendations), and adjusting the dates of the time/area closure known as “the corralito” so that it does not overlap with the revised closure period dates.

The new measures applicable to 2018-2020 are similar to previous multi-year tropical tuna measures with some notable differences: (1) 72-day closure period (as opposed to 62) for purse seine vessels (class sizes 4-6); (2) measures for purse seine vessels of any size to manage fish aggregating devices (FADs), including limits on the number of active FADs and requirements for ceasing FAD deployments and retrieving FADs before the purse seine closures; (3) an increase in U.S. catch limit for bigeye tuna (BET) caught by large longline vessels from 500 metric tons (mt) to 750 mt per year; and, (4) procedures for transferring BET catch limit among countries.

NMFS anticipates implementing the amendments to Resolution C-17-01 by final rule that would be effective by mid-September, waiving for good cause the general requirement for advance notice and comment. Going directly to a final rule is necessary because the IATTC adopted these amendments to be effective immediately and the amendments have direct implications for U.S. vessels as early as September 28, 2017. Specifically, if this rule were delayed pending publication of a proposed rule and consideration of public comments, U.S. purse seine vessels would not not be subject to the extended 72-day closure period. There would also be a TAC in the regulations that would no longer be required. NMFS is scoping the process to implement the the resolution applicable to 2018-2020.

¹ 97,711 t for capacity class 4, 5, and 6 purse seine vessels in the fishery on floating objects, and 162,182 t for capacity Class 6 vessels in the fishery associated with dolphins.

U.S. Proposals not adopted

Pacific Bluefin Tuna

The U.S. proposal on Pacific bluefin tuna included elements of a rebuilding plan to support discussions at the second Joint Working Group meeting of the IATTC-Northern Committee (NC) to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) that will be held from August 28-30, 2017. The U.S. proposal did receive general support and members expressed a preference that it be considered a position paper rather than a proposal as there was concern about getting out ahead of the joint meeting. The United States requested that the proposal be added to the official minutes of the meeting as a U.S. position paper in advance of the Joint IATTC-NC to WCPFC Working Group meeting.

Observer Safety at Sea

The U.S. submitted proposals to the meetings for both the IATTC and the Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program (AIDCP) to improve observer safety at sea and received more support this year than at previous meetings. The United States worked closely with other countries to revise the proposal to address various questions and concerns. The cost of providing the equipment to observers continued to be a point of contention for some members, and the Commission discussed options for allocating money within the IATTC annual budget. In the end, the Commission did not have enough time to thoroughly discuss options for this proposal and it did not achieve consensus. The U.S. intends to re-submit the proposal to the AIDCP meeting in October and to the annual IATTC meeting in 2018.

Sea Turtle Bycatch Mitigation

The proposal on sea turtle bycatch mitigation was welcomed by members, but almost all expressed some concerns including making it more aligned with the WCPFC measure (China), that circle hooks can increase bycatch of other species (European Union), and that it would be difficult to implement for artisanal fleets (Central American countries). Members of the IATTC agreed to continue discussions on sea turtle bycatch mitigation at the next meeting of the Bycatch Working Group in 2018. NMFS scientist Dr. Yonat Swimmer was elected to co-chair the working group for 2018 with a representative from Venezuela.

Other proposals

The IATTC also discussed long-standing proposals from other nations on port State measures, requiring sharks to be landed with fins-attached, and increasing longline observer coverage. None of these proposals reached consensus.

Future Tuna-related International Meetings

IATTC-related Meetings

Joint IATTC-NC to WCPFC

Working Group*

August 28-30

Busan, Korea

WCPFC-related Meetings²

Scientific Committee

August 9 - 17

Rarotonga, Cook Is.

Special Ssn. - Bridging CMM Trop Tuna

August 22 - 24

Honolulu, HI

Northern Committee*

August 31 - September 1

Busan, Korea

Technical Compliance Committee

September 27 - October 3

Pohnpei, FSM

Annual Meeting

December 3 - 8

Philippines

ISC-related Meetings³

Albacore Management Strategy Evaluation

Workshop

October 2017

Vancouver, Canada

*The Joint Working Group meeting will be held directly before the Northern Committee meeting.

² For more information on future meetings, visit: <https://www.wcpfc.int/meetings>

³ For more information on future meetings, visit: http://isc.fra.go.jp/meetings/future_meetings.html