

JOINT CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE (CDFW) AND
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL
ACTIVITIES

As NMFS reported in the regulatory updates ([Agenda Item J.1.a Supplemental NMFS Report 4](#)), the commercial fishery for Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) closed on August 28, 2017, because the 2017 catch limit of 425 metric tons (mt) had been exceeded ([82 FR 40720](#)). When implementing [IATTC Resolution C-16-08](#) (*Measures for the Conservation and Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean*), based on a Pacific Fishery Management Council recommendation, NMFS established a 25 mt catch limit until catch was within 50 mt of the annual limit (i.e., 375 mt in 2017), at which time a 2 mt trip limit would be imposed. The aim of the 25 mt catch limit was to improve inseason management of the fishery. The 2 mt trip limit was intended to prevent large-scale targeting of PBF while allowing the retention of PBF that is harvested in smaller quantities (e.g., incidentally) and avoiding exceeding the annual limit. From 2011 to 2014 (prior to implementing a 25 mt trip limit in 2015), the average catch of PBF by a coastal purse seine vessel was about 30 mt per trip. 62.5 percent of trips by these vessels targeting PBF landed greater than 25 mt of PBF. From 2006-2016, the annual average of PBF catch by other fleets (e.g., drift gillnet, surface hook-and-line) was less than 50 mt, and these vessels landed less than 2 mt per trip.

In August, as NMFS was preparing the Federal Register Notice to reduce the trip limit to 2 mt, additional landings that exceeded the limit occurred and NMFS instead proceeded to close the fishery. CDFW actively tracks commercial landings of PBF through collection of commercial landing receipts as well as dockside monitoring and catch sampling in coordination with NMFS. From January 1 through August 12, 2017, there were only five commercial landings that exceeded 20 mt and preliminary landings were approximately 208 mt (49 percent of the annual catch limit). On August 11, CDFW and NMFS prepared to issue notice that the catch limit would be reduced to 2 mt per trip as soon as 375 mt were caught.

From August 13 through August 18 an additional 270 mt were landed for all commercial sectors in California, including 9 landings that exceeded 20 mt in just 4 days. These landings surpassed not only 375 mt, but exceeded the 425 mt annual limit and there was not enough time for NMFS to issue notice of a reduced trip limit before the annual limit was exceeded. Regardless, had a trip limit reduction notice been issued, catch already onboard would have been allowed to be landed. Thus it is likely that the 2017 catch limit would still have been exceeded that week, particularly since some vessels were at sea and had catch onboard.

Given the 2017 landings to date, the 2018 catch limit will be less than 130 mt. To avoid exceeding the 2018 catch limit and, therefore, the biennial limit of 600 mt adopted in Resolution C-16-08, NMFS is considering revising the commercial PBF fishery management measures under the Tuna Conventions Act. NMFS, during this meeting and through the rulemaking process, will seek comment from the Council, its advisory bodies, and the public for new measures that would improve monitoring and tracking of catch to reduce the likelihood of

exceeding the 2018 catch limit of this depleted stock and allow for landings in smaller quantities, such as of incidental catch.

Potential management measures could be a smaller initial trip limit (instead of the current 25 mt trip limit) or a single, small trip limit to be implemented throughout the entire year unless the fishery is closed. Revisions would be implemented by proposed and final rulemaking. Taking into account comment from this September 2017 Council meeting, NMFS intends to have a proposed rule published concurrent with the November 2017 Council meeting to allow for additional input at that time on the management of the 2018 catch limit. NMFS intends to have the final rule effective January 1, 2018.