

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

Outcomes of the Northern Committee Meeting and the Joint Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Northern Committee Working Group Meeting on the Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna

The Thirteenth Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee (NC) occurred August 28-September 1, 2017, in Busan, Republic of Korea. The NC meeting broke at midday on Monday, August 28 and the Second Joint Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)-WCPFC NC- Working Group on Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) conservation management (Joint WG) convened. The NC reconvened later during the week to complete its business. The Joint WG meeting was co-chaired by Dorothy Lowman, as the IATTC representative, and Masanori Miyahara, as the NC representative. Additional attendees from the IATTC included Mexico and the European Union. The NC meeting report is available here: <https://www.wcpfc.int/meeting-folders/northern-committee>.

Pacific Bluefin Tuna

Three documents related to PBF were adopted: one by the Joint WG, and two by the NC. These documents are described in more detail below.

1. Outcomes of the Second Joint WG – Adopted by the Joint WG

The Joint WG worked from an initial proposal from Japan (Draft Expected Outcomes of the Second Joint IATTC-WCPFC NC Working Group on the Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna ([WCPFC-NC13-2017/DP-11](#))). This proposal included a framework for both rebuilding and long-term management of PBF. After substantial discussions and revisions by the Joint WG members, the proposal was adopted as the Outcomes of the 2nd Joint IATTC-NC Working Group on PBF (Outcomes), which can be found in the NC [Meeting Report](#) as Attachment E, Annex 2. In addition the Joint WG adopted draft elements of a Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS). Both the Outcomes and draft CDS documents were submitted to the NC as Joint WG recommendations. The Outcomes document will also be sent to the IATTC for consideration.

2. Harvest Strategy for PBF – Adopted by the NC

The United States inserted the content of the Joint WG Outcomes document into its proposal on a Harvest Strategy for PBF ([WCPFC-NC13-2017/DP-12](#)). Following a template adopted by the WCPFC in 2014, the Harvest Strategy for PBF is organized into six sections: 1) management objectives, 2) reference points, 3) acceptable levels of risk, 4) monitoring strategy, 5) decision rules, and 6) performance evaluation. The NC adopted this proposal ([Agenda Item J.3 Supplemental Attachment 2](#)). Several key sections are described in more detail below.

Reference points: Paragraph 2 includes the initial rebuilding target that both the IATTC and WCPFC had already adopted, as well as the newly adopted second rebuilding target. This initial rebuilding target is the median spawning stock biomass (SSB) during the assessment period, 1952-2014 (currently estimated to be 41,000 mt) and is to be achieved by 2024 with at least a 60

percent probability. The second rebuilding target of 20 percent unfished SSB, is calculated assuming future recruitment will be similar to the average level of recruitment observed over the stock assessment period. This second rebuilding target (currently estimated to be 128,893 mt) is to be achieved with at least a 60% probability within 10 years of achieving the initial rebuilding target and no later than 2034. The IATTC is also expected to adopt this second rebuilding target in 2018 in accordance with the schedule specified in IATTC [Resolution C-16-08](#).

With regard to recruitment scenarios, an important outcome was to clarify that the recruitment scenario used to estimate progress towards achieving the initial rebuilding target (i.e., SSB projections) may be different from the recruitment values used to estimate the quantity associated with the second rebuilding target. To estimate progress towards the initial rebuilding target, the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) projections will use the lower value of either the low recruitment scenario (resampling from the relatively low recruitment period (1980-1989)) or the recent recruitment scenario (resampling from the last 10 years). Because the second rebuilding target is scaled in terms of depletion, using lower recruitment values would have resulted in a lower estimate of the associated quantity. The value associated with the second rebuilding target 20 percent unfished SSB is based on average recruitment.

The Joint WG will start to discuss in 2018, and aim to finalize no later than 2019, guidelines for the management strategy evaluation (MSE), including at least one candidate long-term target reference point (TRP), two candidate limit reference points (LRPs) and candidate harvest control rules (HCRs), which will be provided to the ISC. Those candidate TRPs, LRPs and HCRs will be tested and changed if appropriate during the MSE development process which, as described below, is currently scheduled to be completed by 2024 .

Decision rules: The decision rules, paragraph 5, includes a mechanism that could allow the WCPFC to approve an increase in catch of PBF if the SSB projections show that the probability of meeting the initial rebuilding target (i.e., median SSB) during the initial rebuilding period increases to at least 75 percent.

Emergency rule: At previous NC meetings Japan had advocated for the development of an emergency rule, and its development was specified in paragraph 5 of WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) 2016-03: “An emergency rule shall be considered in 2017 which stipulates specific rules all CCMs shall comply with when drastic drops in recruitment are detected.” Although not stated in the CMM text, the idea was to use the Japanese troll index as the indicator triggering a response. However, further review from the ISC revealed practical difficulties in responding in a timely fashion and defining “drastic drop.” Because of these issues, the monitoring strategy, paragraph 4, prescribes monitoring rebuilding progress through assessment-based projections as a basis for deciding whether harvest controls need to be changed.

Performance evaluation: The performance evaluation, paragraph 6, requests the ISC to start MSE work on PBF in 2019 with a goal of completing it by 2024. The ISC is requested to organize workshops in early 2018 and 2019 to identify specific management objectives, including level of risks and timelines.

3. Revised WCPFC CMM for PBF – Adopted by the NC

The NC also adopted a proposal to revise WCPFC [CMM 2016-04](#) (*Multi-Annual Rebuilding Plan for PBF*) that is consistent with the new harvest strategy described above and includes an attachment with details for a CDS, including a schedule and proposed elements to be included in the CDS. The revised CMM can be found at [Agenda Item J.3 Supplemental Attachment 2](#). The 14th Regular Session of the NC will be hosted by Japan from September 4-7, 2018 – with a technical working group meeting on Pacific bluefin tuna CDS to be held directly prior.

North Pacific Albacore

The U.S. and Canada submitted a joint proposal to reformat the previously adopted Precautionary Management Framework for North Pacific Albacore ([WCPFC-NC13-2017/DP-13](#)). The NC had already adopted the content of this proposal in 2014, and it was included as Attachment D to the Report of the NC10. The intent of the United States was to create a stand-alone document that would be easier to locate and to more accurately rename the content as an *interim harvest strategy* for North Pacific albacore, as opposed to a precautionary management framework. This would also make it consistent with the elements specified in CMM 2014-06, Conservation and Management Measure to Develop and Implement a Harvest Strategy Approach for Key Fisheries and Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

Although the United States initially created a proposal with identical text, the other NC members requested to make non-substantive updates to the text to make it consistent with the current MSE process, in addition to other minor edits. The proposal was adopted by the NC and can be found at [Agenda Item J.3 Supplemental Attachment 2](#).