

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

Outcomes from the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) Workshop in Vancouver, British Columbia

The Albacore Working Group (ALBWG) of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species (ISC) in the North Pacific Ocean hosted the 3rd MSE Workshop in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, October 17-19, 2017. Representatives from NMFS' West Coast and Pacific Islands regional offices, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), and its HMS advisory bodies were present. Members from Canada, Japan, Taiwan, the World Wildlife Fund, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission were also present. Workshop participants revised and agreed to management objectives and performance indicators that were developed at the previous workshop. Participants also agreed to test two harvest control scenarios including: 1) a B_{target} , $B_{\text{threshold}}$, B_{limit} , and F_{target} ; and 2) based on the IATTC harvest control rule for tropical tunas ([Resolution C-16-02, Harvest Control Rules for Tropical Tunas \(Yellowfin, Bigeye, and Skipjack\)](#)), which includes B_{target} , B_{limit} , and F_{target} . Lastly, participants also developed a variety of target, limit, threshold reference points, and harvest control rules to test in the initial MSE.

The ISC ALBWG aims to report preliminary results of the initial MSE, which will be performed during the upcoming months, to the IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee meeting in May 2018. The results of this initial MSE will then be reviewed at the July 2018 ISC meeting and subsequently presented to the Northern Committee at its September 2018 meeting. Pending decisions by the Northern Committee, the ALBWG may host another workshop to make any revisions in advance of the second round of MSE. A final report with the outcomes of this workshop is expected to be available after the ISC meeting in July 2018.

Final Rule for the Conservation of Sharks in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO)

NMFS intends to publish a Final Rule in early December 2017, implementing provisions of IATTC Resolution C-16-05 (Resolution on the Management of Shark Species) to promote the conservation of shark species in the EPO. The proposed rule published on August 7, 2017 ([82 FR 36724](#)). One comment was received during the 30-day comment period from an individual in support of the rule. The final rule will require purse seine vessel owners, operators, and crew to follow specified release requirements for sharks in the EPO. The rule will also prohibit longline vessels targeting tuna or swordfish in the EPO from using "shark lines" (i.e., a type of fishing gear used to target sharks and consisting of an individual hooked line or hooked lines attached to the floatline, or directly to the floats, of longline gear and deployed in the water column at depths shallower than the mainline.).

This final rule is necessary for the conservation and management of sharks in the EPO and for the United States to satisfy its obligations as a member of the IATTC.

Final Rule to Modify 2017 Fishing Regulations for Tropical Tunas in the EPO

NMFS published a final rule to implement changes to the 2017 tropical tuna regulations on September 29, 2017 ([82 FR 45514](#)), which was effective upon publication through the rest of the

2017 calendar year. The changes were agreed to at the 92nd Meeting of the IATTC in July 2017 under Resolution [C-17-02](#) (*Conservation Measures for Tropical Tunas in the Eastern Pacific Ocean During 2018-2020 and Amendment to Resolution C-17-01*). The changes are specific to commercial purse seine vessels, which were being managed under a total allowable catch (TAC) scheme and a 62-day closure period until C-17-02 was adopted. The C-17-02 changes removed the TACs requirements and replaced them by extending the established closure period from 62 days to 72 days (vessels only have to observe one of the following closure period options: July 29, 2017 to October 8, 2017, or November 9, 2017 to January 19, 2018). Additionally, so that there was not overlap in timing, the area closure (known as the corralito) off of the coast of Ecuador was shifted to October 9, 2017 to November 8, 2017. Original and amended regulations, per C-17-01 and C-17-02 respectively, will expire December 31, 2017.

Proposed Rule for Tropical Tuna for 2018-2020

NMFS will propose regulations under the Tuna Conventions Act to implement provisions included in Resolution C-17-02 (*Conservation Measures for Tropical Tunas in the Eastern Pacific Ocean During 2018-2020*), which was adopted at the July 2017 IATTC meeting. This proposed rule would apply to U.S. commercial fishing vessels that use purse seine or longline gear and fish for tropical tuna (i.e., yellowfin, bigeye, and skipjack tuna) in the IATTC Convention Area¹ during 2018 through 2020. The proposed rule would maintain several purse seine regulations in effect for 2017 including a 72-day fishing closure period, a time/area closure in the EPO for 31 days, and a requirement that all tropical tuna be retained on board and landed, except in specified circumstances. In addition, this proposed rule would revise several measures including the regulations related to force majeure, increase the existing bigeye tuna catch limit from 500 mt to 750 mt for U.S. longline vessels greater than 24 meters in overall length, include new regulations on transfers of bigeye tuna longline catch limits between IATTC member and cooperating non-members, and include new management measures on fish aggregating devices. NMFS expects this proposed rule to publish by mid-November 2017.

Proposed rule for Pacific bluefin Tuna trip limits in 2018

NMFS anticipates publishing a proposed rule by late November 2017 to revise commercial Pacific bluefin tuna regulations for 2018. This rule would impose a 1-metric ton (mt) trip limit for all commercial U.S. vessels except for drift gillnet vessels, which would be subject to a 2-mt trip limit, throughout all of 2018 or until the 2018 catch limit is reached and NMFS closes the fishery. [Resolution C-16-08](#) provides two limits: 600 mt over two years (2017 and 2018) and no more than 425 mt in a single year; this year, the United States exceeded 425 mt. Preliminary estimates indicate 480 mt was caught in 2017, therefore the 2018 catch limit will be approximately 120 mt.

At its September 2017 meeting, the Council recommended NMFS implement a 1-mt trip limit in 2018 such that United States could avoid exceeding its biennial limit while allowing catch in small quantities, such as from incidental catch. NMFS, however, is proposing a 2-mt trip limit for drift gillnet vessels because it would further minimize the potential for regulatory bycatch during trips when PBF is caught incidentally. While the large majority of landings by vessels

¹ The IATTC Convention Area includes the waters bounded by the coast of the Americas, the 50° N. and 50° S. parallels, and the 150° W. meridian. This area includes the United States West Coast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

other than purse seine have been less than 1 mt, some landings exceeded 1 mt, and a single landing exceeded 2 mt (see Tables 1 and 2 for summaries of landings data). In particular, all but one of the landings that exceeded 1 mt were landed by drift gillnet vessels. Additionally, because recent landings by vessels other than purse seine have not exceeded 40 mt in a single year, the risk of exceeding the 2018 catch limit is appears to be low. NMFS is soliciting comment from the Council, its advisory bodies, and the public on the proposed trip limit; in particular, NMFS requests that stakeholders consider if the 1 mt and 2 mt trip limits are appropriate for the purposes of minimizing the potential to exceed the 2018 catch limit and prevent regulatory discards where possible.

The Council also recommended NMFS re-open the fishery for the remainder of 2017 to allow incidentally caught Pacific bluefin tuna to be landed and for proper record keeping for stock assessment purposes; however, NMFS, in consultation with the U.S. Department of State, decided not to act on that recommendation, because re-opening the fishery after exceeding the 2017 annual limit was not contemplated under Resolution C-16-08 and would result in the United States being considered out of compliance with the resolution by other members. However, the U.S. will explore options to consider such flexibility during discussions at the 2018 annual meeting of the IATTC. Lastly, fisheries likely to discard Pacific bluefin tuna during the remainder of 2017 include the drift gillnet fishery, which has observer requirements where discard information should be collected.

Table 1. Annual average and maximum PBF landings (metric tons) by all vessels in a fleet in years PBF was landed from 2007-2016. NPALB = North Pacific Albacore. Source: Pacific Fisheries Information Network.

Fleet	Avg.	Max.
Large-mesh drift gillnet	5.47	< 20
Longline (West Coast and Hawaii)	0.1	< 1
NPALB Surface hook-and-line	0.047	< 1
Unknown or Non-HMS Fishery	0.1	< 1
Other hook-and-line*	4.74	< 35
Purse seine*	199	< 450

*Fleet targets PBF.

Table 2. Average landing (metric tons) per trip, and number of trips with landings less than or equal to 1 metric ton, between 1 and 2 metric tons, and greater than 2 metric tons for 2007-2016. NPALB = North Pacific Albacore. Source: Pacific Fisheries Information Network.

Fleet	Trip Avg.	Trips \leq 1 mt	Trips $> 1 \leq 2$ mt	Trips > 2 mt
NPALB Surface Hook-and-Line	0.01	27	0	0
Large-mesh drift gillnet	0.16	340	9	1
Longline (West Coast and Hawaii)	0.07	6	0	0
Unknown or Non-HMS Fishery	0.1	38	0	0
Other hook-and-line (e.g., rod-and-reel)*	0.09	487	1	0
Purse seine*	21.11	9	2	55

*Fleet targets PBF.