

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) discussed the outcomes of the 93rd Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) Meeting (August 2018 - San Diego, CA) and had the following analyses, observations, and recommendations:

Albacore reference years

The HMSMT sees no issues with the resolution adopted at the 93rd IATTC meeting regarding albacore, as the intent is simply to streamline data submission. However, we discussed a related issue that the United States may wish to address in the near future. In both IATTC Resolutions regarding albacore (C-05-02 and now C-18-03), there are references to managing effort, but no specific baseline effort levels provided. There was discussion about recent information that China, which has not historically targeted albacore in the eastern Pacific Ocean, may be seeking opportunity to begin doing so. As such, the Council may want to consider recommending a baseline effort level be established through proposed revisions to these resolutions. The Council could task the HMSMT with analyzing and recommending an effort baseline by March 2019, for consideration by the U.S. delegation in advance of the next IATTC meeting. The Council should note that the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) established reference years from which effort should not increase: 2002-2004.

Pacific Bluefin Tuna

Short-Term

The HMSMT discussed implementing the U.S. catch limit for Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF), given the overage that occurred in the last biennial cycle. Because regulatory discards of PBF are wasteful, and PBF are caught incidentally in many of the HMS fisheries, the Council could adopt a goal to avoid a fishery closure and regulatory discards. The HMSMT discussed a suite of options, all of which have pros and cons. A key factor in considering new measures is the short timeframe for domestic implementation to meet U.S. obligations to comply with the IATTC resolution, which takes effect January 1, 2019. The suggestions from the Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) in their supplemental report seem to fall within the scope of existing analyses, which should assist in narrowing the implementation timeline. Therefore, the HMSMT supports the scheme to manage the catch limit as outlined by the HMSAS report (Agenda H.3.b, Supplemental HMSAS Report 1).

Long-Term

The HMSMT supports the U.S. position to not authorize increased PBF catch, in the IATTC or WCPFC management areas, at this time. However, if the discussion of allowable catch increases occurs in the future, the HMSMT suggests the Council analyze, discuss, and make recommendations to the U.S. section of the IATTC regarding allocations. Additionally, in response to discussions in the HMSAS and HMSMT about more complex PBF catch limit management schemes including potential fleet or vessel limits and limited entry, the Council may want to make time to discuss these and other options for future implementation.