

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON CLIMATE AND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE UPDATE

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) would like to stress that the HMS fisheries on the west coast have been impacted by long term climate variability. About a half a century ago the Los Angeles port complex produced the largest revenue among all U.S. ports. The San Diego port was also a major producer. This was primarily due to the availability of HMS.

Major catches of HMS species have occurred for over a century in the commercial sector. The bluefin tuna recreational fishery started over a 130 years ago and is widely recognized as the first recreational big game fishery in the U.S. Commercial catch of bluefin began off California in 1918 (101 years ago).

Long-term ocean climate variability has had the most dominant effect on cyclical variation in the recreational fishery. Until recently, the recreational fishery was not heavily affected by international regulation. Today the recreational sector is enjoying some of the best bluefin tuna fishing experienced in many decades. The size of the fish being caught has only been seen twice before, once in the late 19th century and once again in the 1930s.

Another possible climate-related anomaly might be seen in southern California swordfish availability. The water off Southern California is an area in the ocean where two swordfish stocks may intersect. Tuna species have been highly variable over the decades beyond what might be attributable to a general decline in stocks.

Fishing communities have been strongly impacted by climate variability. Although bluefin tuna is overfished internationally, California is seeing some of the highest availability ever.

The HMSAS cautions the Climate Scenarios Investigation from not letting regulatory changes be confused with factors caused by environmental changes.