

## **NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) REPORT ON OUTCOMES OF RECENT REGIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION (RFMO) MEETINGS**

This report provides an update on appointments of U.S. Commissioner and Alternate Commissioner to the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), meetings related to the IATTC, and identifies U.S. priorities for the upcoming IATTC Annual Meeting. Lastly, a list of upcoming international meetings is provided.

### **U.S. Commissioners and Alternate Commissioners to the IATTC**

Per the Tuna Conventions Act, the United States shall be represented in the IATTC by four United States Commissioners. In addition, “the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Commerce, may designate, from time to time and for periods of time deemed appropriate, Alternate United States Commissioners to the IATTC.” In March 2019, Edward Weissman retired as U.S. Commissioner to the IATTC. In June 2019, John Zuanich, Owner and Operator of JZ Trading and longtime participant in the tuna industry, was appointed as Alternate Commissioner to the IATTC. NMFS has solicited nominations for the vacancy of a U.S. Commissioner to the IATTC.

### **IATTC-Related Meeting Outcomes**

#### Joint Tuna-RFMO (t-RFMO) Fish-aggregating Devices (FAD) Working Group

The Joint t-RFMO FAD Working Group met May 8-10, 2019, in San Diego, California. All four of the t-RFMOs (IATTC, Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), and Indian Ocean Tuna Commission) attended the Joint t-RFMO FAD Working Group meeting. The meeting consisted of presentations under several themes including FAD management measures across RFMOs, definitions of FAD terms, research on FADs, etc. Presentations are available online: <https://www.iattc.org/Meetings/Meetings2019/JWGFAD-02/2ndJointWorkingGroupOnFADsENG.htm>.

#### Bycatch Working Group

The IATTC’s Bycatch Working Group (BYC WG) reconvened [for its 9th meeting](#) on May 11, 2019, in San Diego, California. This meeting was co-chaired by Yonat Swimmer (United States) and Manuel Correia (Venezuela). Scientific presentations spanned topics such as monitoring, bycatch mitigation, and safe handling and release vulnerability modeling, East Pacific leatherback sea turtle status updates, seabird bycatch mitigation updates, mobulid ray updates, research using net illumination, purse seine best practices, sorting grids, and access to marine mammal safe

handling and release guidelines. The presentations, several of which were given by NMFS staff, are available at the bottom left of the [10<sup>th</sup> Scientific Advisory Committee \(SAC\) Meeting webpage](#).

Ultimately, the BYC WG made [recommendations](#) to the SAC to the IATTC:

- increase observer coverage on longline vessels and pursue minimum standards for electronic monitoring,
- pursue new bycatch mitigation techniques for seabirds and sea turtles,
- conduct research on mobulids and net illumination,
- facilitate new collaborative research under the Memoranda of Understanding with the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles,
- pursue purse seine best practices, and
- post a marine mammal identification guide on the IATTC website.

The SAC reviewed all of the BYC WG recommendations and endorsed all recommendations except increased observer coverage on longline vessels. The recommendations endorsed by the SAC will be reviewed by the IATTC.

### IATTC 10th SAC

The IATTC's SAC met May 13-17, 2019, in San Diego, California. The IATTC scientific staff presented recent stock assessments and indicator results for tunas and sharks in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). Dr. Steve Teo, NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center, represented the United States at this meeting, along with staff from the NMFS WCR. Information presented at the SAC is available on the [10th SAC Meeting website](#).

As described in [Agenda Item J.3.a, NMFS Report 1](#), the IATTC scientific staff reported large uncertainties in the yellowfin tuna stock assessment model, and concluded that the results produced by the model are not a reliable indicator of stock status. The issues with the yellowfin tuna stock assessment model are similar to those presented at the 2018 SAC meeting for bigeye tuna. In the absence of reliable stock assessment models for both yellowfin and bigeye tuna for 2019, the IATTC scientific staff presented stock status indicators for these species. The results showed that bigeye and yellowfin tuna have been under increasing fishing pressure from purse seine sets associated with floating objects, such as FADs.

The SAC supported the staff's work plan to improve the stock assessments of tropical tunas in time for the Commission to consider management measures for 2021 and subsequent years.

The IATTC scientific staff presented the tropical tuna work plan to the SAC (see [SAC-10-01a](#)), including preparation of benchmark assessments to be reviewed by the SAC at their 11th meeting planned for 2020. The [proposed IATTC scientific staff work plan](#) also covers work planned for stock assessments of other species.

The IATTC Staff Recommendations to the IATTC are available online ([SAC-10-19](#)). The SAC adopted a separate list of recommendations which is not yet available online. The IATTC Staff and SAC recommendations will be reviewed by the IATTC at the 94th IATTC meeting.

### U.S. General Advisory Committee (GAC) and Scientific Advisory Subcommittee (SAS)

The SAS and GAC met June 4-5, 2019, in La Jolla, California. Over the course of two days the SAS and GAC discussed the status of EPO fisheries, stock assessment results, the recent IATTC SAC meeting and recommendations, and overviews of the IATTC intersessional working group.

The SAS and GAC also discussed potential U.S. priorities for the upcoming IATTC meeting. These priorities are presented in more detail in the following section.

### **U.S. Priorities for 94<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the IATTC**

#### Terms of Reference for IATTC Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE)

The IATTC scientific staff is planning a series of MSE workshops for bigeye tuna, beginning in 2019. The United States intends to submit a proposal outlining Terms of Reference to guide the IATTC MSE work. The intent is to ensure clear objectives for the MSE and associated stakeholder workshops, and the procedure for incorporating stakeholder input into the IATTC scientific staff's MSE work. The GAC supported this proposal.

#### Amendment to Sea Turtle Bycatch Mitigation Resolution

To address critical threats to sea turtles, and advance successes of mitigation measures used in U.S. longline fisheries, the United States presented a proposal to strengthen the existing sea turtle bycatch resolution ([C-07-03](#)) at the last two IATTC plenary meetings. The U.S. proposal includes a menu of mitigation options for longline vessels which already apply to the U.S. fleet in the Pacific, including circle hooks and finfish bait. With momentum from the WCPFC's adoption of a similar measure at its 2018 meeting, the United States is hopeful this proposal will be adopted this year, thereby decreasing impacts on sea turtles in the Pacific Ocean and leveling the playing field for U.S. fishermen. The GAC provided some editorial comments, but generally supported the proposal, in particular because it promotes consistency with WCPFC measures.

#### FAD Management

The United States is interested in advancing progress on FAD management and reducing impacts to the marine environment. One option the United States is still exploring is a proposal requiring FADs to be made of materials with low risk of adverse environmental impacts. The proposal may include a list of materials prohibited for use on FADs, such as plastics, and a timeline for these requirements.

#### Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) management

The IATTC adopted two Resolutions on PBF in 2018: [C-18-01](#) and [C-18-02](#). Resolution C-18-01 provides catch limits and data reporting requirements, whereas C-18-02 details a long-term harvest strategy. Paragraph 12 of C-18-01 states that the Resolution shall be reviewed at the 2019 annual meeting to consider revising the catch limits.

Japan intends to propose a conservation and management measure, including increases in PBF catch limits, to the Northern Committee in September 2019. Japan has not quantified its desired increases. This proposal is expected to be a topic of discussion at the Joint IATTC-WCPFC Northern Committee Working Group (Joint Working Group) meeting scheduled for September 3-

5, 2019 (i.e., before the Northern Committee meets). It is uncertain how this information will apply to the upcoming IATTC meeting, which will occur before the Joint Working Group meets.

### **International Meetings in 2019**

Below is a list of upcoming international meetings in 2019 related to Pacific HMS in which United States government representatives will participate.

#### IATTC and Joint RFMO-related Meetings<sup>1</sup>

Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program	July 15-16	Bilbao, Spain
94 <sup>th</sup> Annual IATTC Meeting	July 17-26	Bilbao, Spain
Joint IATTC-Northern Committee WG*	September 3-5	Portland, OR

#### WCPFC-related Meetings<sup>2</sup>

Scientific Committee	August 12-20	Pohnpei, FSM
Catch Documentation Scheme Technical Meeting	September 2	Portland, OR
Northern Committee*	September 3-6	Portland, OR
Technical & Compliance Committee	Sep. 27 - Oct. 1	Pohnpei, FSM
U.S. Permanent Advisory Committee	TBD	Honolulu, HI
WCPFC Annual Meeting	December 5-11	Papua New Guinea

#### International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC)-related meetings<sup>3</sup>

ISC Plenary	July 11-15	Chinese Taipei
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\*These meetings may occur concurrently.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on future meetings, visit: <https://www.iattc.org/MeetingsENG.htm>

<sup>2</sup> For more information on future meetings, visit: <https://www.wcpfc.int/meetings>

<sup>3</sup> [http://isc.fra.go.jp/meetings/future\\_meetings.html](http://isc.fra.go.jp/meetings/future_meetings.html)