

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) REPORT ON YELLOWFIN TUNA OVERFISHING RESPONSE

In November 2018, NMFS provided notice to the Council that the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) yellowfin tuna stock is subject to overfishing, based on estimation that the ratio of $F_{2015-2017}$ to F_{MSY} is equal to 1.01, using the F-multiplier reported in the 2018 assessment (see [Agenda Item J.a.3, Supplemental NMFS Report 2](#)). In response, the Council expressed interest in reviewing the results of a draft 2019 assessment before providing recommendations under MSA 304(i) to address the status of the stock.

Updated Assessment for 2019

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) scientific staff prepared a draft 2019 assessment of the stock (see [SAC-10-07](#)). The results indicate that the ratio of $F_{2016-2018}$ to F_{MSY} has increased, based on the F-multiplier reported in the assessment. However, IATTC scientific staff assert similar concerns with the F-multiplier in the 2019 yellowfin assessment as those raised for the 2018 bigeye tuna assessment, which NMFS ultimately determined did not represent the best scientific information available (BSIA) for that stock. The results of the 2018 bigeye tuna assessment indicated an unprecedented change in the F multiplier, caused mainly by the addition of new longline index data. IATTC scientific staff identified several issues with the longline index that need to be addressed and recently reported that these issues also apply to the EPO yellowfin tuna assessment. In addition to the draft 2019 EPO yellowfin assessment, IATTC scientific staff also reported on stock status indicators (see [SAC-10-08](#)) and inconsistencies in abundance indices for the EPO yellowfin assessment (see [SAC-10-INF-F](#)). All of this work was recently reviewed by the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) to the IATTC during its 10th meeting in La Jolla, California on May 13-17, 2019. NMFS scientists participated in this meeting as well. The SAC requested that IATTC staff present a set of options for management measures for tropical tunas, consistent with the staff's work plan to improve the stock assessments of tropical tunas, at the next meeting of the SAC in 2020.

Work Plan

Because the aforementioned issues with the draft 2019 EPO yellowfin assessment render the F-multiplier unreliable for determining management measures, IATTC scientific staff have formed a tropical tuna work plan intended to improve both the bigeye and yellowfin assessments (see [SAC-10-01a](#)). This work plan accounts for recommendations of a panel of experts, including a NMFS scientist. The work plan includes preparation of benchmark assessments to be presented to and reviewed by the SAC at their 11th meeting planned for 2020. The work plan also includes projects that extend beyond 2020 which are intended to continue to improve the assessments.

A key driver in the timeline for the work plan is to improve the assessments before management measures need to be decided for 2021 and subsequent years, as management measures under the current IATTC resolution [C-17-02](#) expire at the end of 2020. NMFS expects that the IATTC will make these decisions at their annual meeting in 2020.

NMFS Recommendations

NMFS has yet to make a determination as to whether the 2019 EPO yellowfin tuna assessment represents BSIA for that stock. Given the analysis presented and reviewed to-date, an affirmative determination appears unlikely. Without a new assessment determined to be BSIA for the EPO yellowfin stock, the stock status will remain based on the 2018 assessment. Therefore, in the interim, NMFS recommends that the Council (and its advisory bodies) make recommendations under MSA 304(i) based on the following: (1) the stock status information provided in the 2018 EPO yellowfin assessment, (2) recently implemented management measures described in [Agenda Item J.a.3, Supplemental NMFS Report 2](#), and (3) new information regarding uncertainties in the stock assessment model.