

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
COMMERCIAL LICENSING IN THE WEST COAST ALBACORE FISHERY

Albacore harvesters on the West Coast have observed a significant increase in the number of small vessels (under 30 ft) fishing for albacore in the last five years. With the advent of small commercial vessels with 200 horsepower+ outboards, the previously inaccessible areas of albacore off the West Coast are now accessible on a daily basis, sometimes within a couple hours.

Off Washington, some of the Council members may remember the situation in the 1960's and 1970's when many in the recreational salmon fishery purchased commercial licenses and the number of commercial licenses just off the Washington coast increased to over 4,000 vessels harvesting salmon. The increase in commercial salmon vessels overcapitalized the fishery and lead to limited entry for the fishery. Internationally, Resolutions are becoming more specific in the national allocation of the number of vessels or days at sea that Nations are allocated. A large increase in vessel numbers regardless of catch amounts will be used by other countries against U.S. objectives, citing the 2005 albacore effort cap resolutions in the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) that the U.S. supported.

The first step in identifying the magnitude of the potential problem is to quantify the increase in the last five years of the number of commercial licenses issued to small (under 30 ft) vessels and the number making albacore landings. There has been some preliminary work done on this issue by some members of the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT). The HMSAS requests that the Council endorse completion of the work and report to the Council when the work is completed.

We would like to note that there are similar issues in Southern California with respect to swordfish and Pacific bluefin.

PFMC
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