

BIENNIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES –  
PRELIMINARY

The Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) lays out a biennial process that affords Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) input on identifying key management reference points for HMS stocks. In September, the Council receives an update on status determination criteria (SDC) in a preliminary stock assessment and fishery evaluation (SAFE) report (Attachment 1). National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will use this updated information to determine whether a stock is subject to overfishing (current fishing mortality exceeds the maximum fishing mortality threshold [MFMT]) or overfished (current stock spawning biomass is less than the minimum stock size threshold [MSST]). The Council then has an opportunity to provide input on identifying these management reference points.

HMS are subject to Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) Section 304(i) when the overfishing or overfished status of the stock is primarily a result of “excessive international fishing pressure.” While the Council may propose measures to address the “relative impact of fishing vessels of the United States on the stock,” the broader charge is for the Council to develop recommendations for “international actions.” This differs from stocks fully subject to domestic management, where determinations lead to remedial action by the Council.

HMS FMP management unit species stock assessments are conducted under the auspices of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).<sup>1</sup> The following stock assessments have been conducted in 2019 and 2020, which can affect status determinations for HMS FMP stocks:

2019

- Western and Central North Pacific Ocean (WCNPO) striped marlin
- Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) yellowfin tuna (note: this assessment was not accepted for management)
- Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) skipjack

2020

- North Pacific Albacore (ISC)
- Pacific bluefin tuna (ISC)
- EPO bigeye tuna (IATTC)
- EPO yellowfin tuna (IATTC)
- WCPO bigeye tuna (WCPFC/SPC-OFP)
- WCPO yellowfin tuna (WCPFC/SPC-OFP)

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<sup>1</sup> The International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific (ISC), conducts stock assessments and provides conservation advice formally through an agreement with the WCPFC Northern Committee. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community Oceanic Fisheries Program (SPC-OFP) also conducts stock assessments on behalf of the WCPFC.

The new benchmark stock assessments for EPO yellowfin tuna and EPO bigeye tuna were conducted within a new risk analysis framework instead of the previous “best assessment” approach. The risk analysis framework employs “...a variety of reference models ... to represent plausible alternative hypotheses about the biology of the fish, the productivity of the stocks, and/or the operation of the fisheries, thus effectively incorporating uncertainty into the management advice as it is formulated.” ([DOCUMENT SAC-11-08 REV](#)).

The IATTC’s Scientific Advisory Committee meets August 21 and August 24-26 to review these assessments and make recommendations for their use in management. The WCPFC Scientific Committee meets August 11-20 for the equivalent purpose.

As part of the process of estimating SDC and making stock status determinations, NMFS considers whether these stock assessments constitute “the best scientific information available” or BSIA. This occurs once the regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs) have adopted the assessments for management. NMFS is currently undertaking this review; therefore, any revised SDC estimates (otherwise found in the SAFE document) will be provided in a supplemental NMFS Report.

Through two subsequent meetings (November 2020 and March of 2021), the Council may make recommendations to NMFS about any revised SDC estimates. It also may formulate recommendations on domestic management measures and measures that should be addressed through relevant RFMOs to address stock status.

For HMS, the Council is not obligated to set annual catch limits (ACLs). In those cases where catch limits have been set for U.S. West Coast domestic fisheries (Pacific bluefin and bigeye tuna), these derive from agreements reached internationally through the IATTC. At the same time, the Council is not prohibited from establishing catch control measures, or other measures to address management concerns, through this biennial process.

At this meeting, the Council has the opportunity to scope such new management measures. In this regard, at its June 2020 meeting the HMS Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) raised the issue of the entry of small, high speed vessels into the West Coast commercial albacore fishery ([Agenda Item B.1.a, Supplemental HMSAS Report 1, June 2020](#)), expressing concern about over-capitalization and the potential to complicate U.S. compliance with IATTC Resolution [C-05-02](#) (as supplemented by Resolutions [C-13-03](#), and [C-18-03](#)). This resolution states that “CPCs shall take necessary measures to ensure that the level of fishing effort by their vessels fishing for North Pacific albacore tuna is not increased” and (as supplemented) periodically report such fishing effort using a standard template.<sup>2</sup> The HMS Management Team (HMSMT) noted that the HMSAS request for an analysis of increased participation by these vessels was being addressed by the Eastern Pacific Professional Specialty Group ([Agenda Item D.1.a, Supplemental HMSMT Report 1, June 2020](#)). In June, the Council recommended that it consider the need for new management measures under this agenda item. The Council could decide whether to move forward with

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<sup>2</sup> CPCs: Contracting Parties, cooperating non-Parties, fishing entities and regional economic integration organizations.

considering measures to address this issue and formulate the proposed action. The HMSAS and HMSMT may bring forward additional information to help with this decision.

**Council Action:**

**Review preliminary estimates of reference point values and make recommendations on their use in determining stock status. Consider the need to develop ACLs or other harvest objectives and/or management measures.**

**Reference Materials:**

1. Agenda Item E.3, Attachment 1: Draft HMS Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Document, Status of Stocks.
2. *Agenda Item E.3.a, Supplemental NMFS Report 1: BSIA assessment data from assessments used in status determinations for all HMS MUS.*

**Agenda Order:**

- E.3 Biennial Harvest Specifications and Management Measures – Preliminary Kit Dahl
- a. Reports and Comments of Management Entities and Advisory Bodies
  - b. Public Comment
  - c. **Council Action:** Review preliminary estimates of reference point values and make recommendations on their use in determining stock status. Consider the need to develop ACLs or other harvest objectives and/or management measures

PFMC  
08/12/20