

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON BIENNIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) reviewed the latest information in the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) report on the status of management unit species in the highly migratory species (HMS) fishery management plan (FMP) ([E.3.a, Supplemental Joint NMFS-SWFSC Report 1](#)). Two key discussion topics are highlighted here with recommendations. First, we discussed the new tropical tuna assessments, including the atypical review schedule this year with delays in international meetings, the new approaches in the 2020 Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) benchmark assessments, and the potential “implications for evaluating the results of these assessments relative to status determination criteria (SDC) specified in the HMS fishery management plan,” as indicated in the NMFS report. Second, we discussed the potential ramifications for stocks with status concerns, like Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) and eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) yellowfin tuna (YFT), if the IATTC does not adopt new resolutions to replace those that expire December 31, 2020.

2020 Tropical Tuna Assessments and Status Determinations:

The HMS FMP specifies that proxy reference points from international assessments that are determined to be the best scientific information available (BSIA) can be used for the purpose of calculating SDCs. During the 2018 HMS biennial management cycle, the Council requested that its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) review the estimates used to calculate SDCs selected by NMFS at that time and to consider the suitability of proxies selected. In their report, the SSC conveyed that the HMS subcommittee was able to confirm the values presented by NMFS. Additionally, the SSC commented that it should not be necessary for them to routinely review the proxies used for HMS status determinations. Ultimately, the Council directed the HMSMT to develop a Stock Assessment and Fisheries Evaluation (SAFE) report for Council consideration, incorporating the estimates used by NMFS.

Given the IATTC scientific staff’s new approaches to benchmark assessments for EPO bigeye and YFT this year, *the HMSMT requests the Council consider setting aside time on the SSC’s November meeting agenda for them to review the proxies selected for status determination.* Should these assessments be determined to be BSIA following review by the IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) in September, they could then serve as the basis of a 2020 status determination for those stocks. Because the 2020 assessment results for both stocks are based on risk assessments instead of base-case models, it may be useful to have the SSC review the suitability of proxies selected from these new benchmark assessments for calculating SDCs. A status determination for these stocks is typically in progress by this time in the biennial management cycle with any resulting Council obligations conveyed by the November meeting; therefore, SSC review at the November meeting would minimize the impact of international meeting delays on the Council’s schedule for the HMS biennial management cycle.

Stock Status Concerns

As noted in Agenda Item [E.3.a, Supplemental Joint NMFS-SWFSC Report 1](#), the Council has already made international and domestic recommendations to address the stock status of PBF and EPO YFT pursuant to Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) Section 304(i). The Council’s recommendations were premised on measures that had been agreed to internationally and

implemented as regulations for U.S. West Coast commercial fishing vessels under the Tuna Conventions Act of 1950 (TCA). However, if the IATTC does not adopt new measures to replace the current IATTC resolutions intended for the conservation and management of PBF and tropical tunas that expire at the end of 2020, NMFS would not have authority under the TCA to maintain those regulations. Such a situation may not only be problematic for the conservation and management of those stocks and fisheries, but also for meeting obligations under MSA 304(i). While the HMSMT considers “no management measures to end overfishing under an international agreement” (excerpt from MSA 304(i)) a worst-case scenario, the HMSMT is concerned about the time needed to adequately prepare and react should the IATTC not adopt those resolutions.

The HMSMT believes it is important to consider the options available if regulations for PBF and tropical tunas expire. Because the IATTC meeting, if it occurs, is expected to take place after the November Council meeting, the Council will not meet to address the expiring regulations until March 2021. According to the HMS FMP, the final meeting in this Biennial management cycle is in March 2021. Consequently, *the HMSMT recommends the Council task the HMSMT with examining options for potentially taking action under the MSA in coordination with the HMSAS and report to the Council at its November 2020 meeting.* For example, the HMSMT could consider criteria and justification for an emergency rule as outlined in the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries Management Policy Directives](#).

Scoping New Management Measures: Albacore Fishery Participation

At its June 2020 meeting, the Council recommended that it consider the need for new management measures under this agenda item given anecdotal reports of small, high speed vessels entering into the West Coast commercial albacore fishery 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) ([Agenda Item B.1.a, Supplemental HMSAS Report 1, June 2020](#)). This resolution states that “CPCs¹ 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. A joint session of the HMSMT and HMSAS was held to present the Eastern Pacific Professional Specialty Group (EP PSG) data summaries of North Pacific albacore effort and participation.

The HMSMT will present a summary of the EP PSG data analysis to the Council.

In addition, the HMSMT notes that there have been similar data summary requests raised for the Southern California region with regards to swordfish and PBF. Should the Council want these additional analyses, the HMSMT could coordinate with the EP PSG to produce similar data summaries as those presented here for albacore at the November 2020 Council meeting under this agenda item.

PFMC
09/14/20

¹ CPCs are defined as IATTC members and cooperating non-members