

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) REPORT ON PACIFIC BLUEFIN
TUNA (PBF) MANAGEMENT

The Joint Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)-Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee Working Group on Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) (Joint WG) met to make recommendations to the IATTC and WCPFC on the future management of PBF. The Joint WG recommended the IATTC adopt a resolution that largely rolls over the existing resolution for one year (see draft resolution <https://www.wcpfc.int/file/524458/download?token=-eUe3ga6>). In this case, the U.S. catch limit for 2021 would be 425 mt. In anticipation of the IATTC adopting a Resolution for 2021 consistent with the Joint WG recommendation, NMFS has prepared options for the Council to consider for domestic implementation of the future resolution. The IATTC is expected to meet late in 2020. NMFS will be working to implement the forthcoming resolution and anticipates publishing the proposed rule before the March 2021 Council meeting.

Currently, there are 3 main components to management of PBF:

- 1) Trip limits: Applicable to all commercial vessels, the trip limit is 15 mt until catch is within 50 mt of the annual limit, at which point the trip limit is 2 mt until the annual limit is met. If the annual limit is 125 mt or less, the trip limit will be 2 mt for the entire year. The point at which the trip limit is reduced will be referred to as the buffer. Since 2015, the buffer has been 50 mt.
- 2) Pre-trip notification: Purse seine vessels must submit a pre-trip notification by email 24 hours in advance of departing on a trip. NMFS will assume that 15 mt will be caught on each trip noticed and may take inseason action based on that assumption
- 3) E-ticket: Buyers of PBF landed in California must submit an electronic landing receipt to E-Tix within 24 hours of PBF landings.

While trip limits have been in effect for PBF since 2015, the pre-trip notification and e-ticket requirements were established in 2019. During the 2nd PBF Stakeholder Meeting held virtually in May 2020 (See [D.1.a Supplemental NMFS Report 3, June 2020](#)), NMFS heard stakeholder views on current and future management of PBF. Acknowledging views expressed during the stakeholder meeting, the fishery performance in 2019 and 2020 to date, and those expressed by the Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (See [E.1.a Supplemental HMSAS Report 1](#), September 2020), NMFS offers two approaches for stakeholders and the Council to consider. NMFS also notes the constrained timeline to implement a rule this year, which should be considered when developing management options intended to take effect by the start of the 2021 PBF fishing season.

1) Two-tiered approach

This approach would have an initial trip limit and a second trip limit when catch is estimated to reach the buffer. This is similar to the current trip limit approach, with some potential changes explained further here. This option could increase the trip limit to 20-25 mt before reducing to 2 mt upon reaching the buffer. This option should increase the buffer from 50 mt to 100-125 mt (or more). The increase in size of the buffer would serve to cover catches by hook-and-line and gears that catch PBF incidentally (both of which have seen increased catch in recent years). The increased buffer would also help to avoid exceeding the annual catch limit. Lastly, this approach continues requiring buyers to submit e-tickets within 24 hours of a PBF landing.

2) Three-tiered approach

This approach would have an initial trip limit, an intermediate trip limit, and a third lower trip limit when catch is estimated to reach the buffer. This option could have an initial trip limit of 20-25 mt until catch reaches 200 mt (or some other intermediate catch amount), then a 10-15 mt trip limit until catch reaches the buffer, at which point the trip limit is reduced to 2 mt. The use of an intermediate trip limit could result in needing a buffer that is smaller than the two-tiered approach buffer because the rate of harvest will slow down to an intermediate level and increase the potential for U.S. vessels to utilize the entire catch limit. This option could increase the buffer from 50 mt to 75-125 mt (or more) for the reasons outlined above. This approach also continues requiring buyers to submit e-tickets within 24 hours of a PBF landing.

NMFS has also prepared a table to inform the Council of total catches by fishery group by month for 2019 and 2020 to help inform the discussion on management approach for 2021.

Table 1. Commercial catch of PBF by fishery group by quarter of the year (.e.g., 1 = January-March) in 2019 and 2020. 2020 data is incomplete; Pacific Information Network was queried October 9, 2020. To maintain confidentiality, catch has been rounded and may inform the discussion on the approaches described above. “Other” includes longline, drift gillnet, and North Pacific albacore surface hook-and-line.

	Quarter	Purse Seine	Hook-and-line	Other
2019	1		1	3
	2		7	1
	3	227	23	2
	4		7	7
	2019 Total	227	38	13
2020	1		1	3
	2		12	1
	3	110	57	2
	4	8	16	5
	2020 Total	118	86	11