

BIENNIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

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. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) uses these reference points, as updated by stock assessment results, to determine whether a stock is subject to overfishing (current fishing mortality exceeds the maximum fishing mortality threshold) or overfished (current stock spawning biomass is less than the minimum stock size threshold).

As of the November 2020 Council meeting, NMFS had not yet made these status determinations for three stocks: Pacific bluefin tuna, Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) bigeye tuna, and EPO yellowfin tuna. NMFS must make a best scientific information available (BSIA) determination on the outputs of an assessment produced by an international organization, before determining stock status. NMFS employs “other peer review processes” to determine whether an assessment constitutes BSIA for these stocks ([81 FR 54561; August 16, 2016](#)), including through participation by the U.S. government in these organizations. The principal mechanism is review and adoption by the relevant regional fishery management organization. The 11th meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission’s (IATTC) Scientific Advisory Committee was delayed, preventing NMFS from making BSIA determinations for new EPO yellowfin tuna and EPO bigeye tuna benchmark stock assessments completed by IATTC scientific staff before the Council’s November 2020 meeting.

Since the November meeting, NMFS has made BSIA determinations for all three stocks but has not yet made status determinations for EPO bigeye tuna and EPO yellowfin tuna. Because the most recent EPO bigeye and EPO yellowfin assessments prepared by IATTC use a probabilistic modeling framework, NMFS has experienced some challenges identifying proxies for the status determination criteria identified in the HMS FMP. NMFS staff met with the Scientific Statistical Committee’s (SSC’s) HMS Subcommittee in a February 4 online meeting to discuss possible approaches for deriving these proxies from the stock assessment model outputs. The attached Joint SWFSC-WCR NMFS Report 1 outlines the issues and options related to identifying proxies discussed with the Subcommittee. The full SSC will consider the recommendations of the Subcommittee and advise the Council on the methods used to derive the proxies for these two stocks. Because IATTC’s probabilistic assessment framework will likely be applied to future stock assessments, there is also a broader question of the methods to estimate these proxies.

The Council may approve proxies for the overfishing threshold or the overfished threshold, or both, for EPO yellowfin and EPO bigeye tuna at this meeting. Using that information, NMFS could then determine the status of these stocks and identify whether the Council may be obligated under the Magnuson-Stevens Act to consider additional management recommendations for these stocks. Once these proxies are finalized and related status determinations are made by NMFS, they will be reported in the HMS Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation document.

Council Action:

Approve Proxies for Status Determination Criteria; Consider the Need for Other Status-related Recommendations, Annual Catch Limits or Other Harvest Objectives and/or Management Measures.

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item H.5.a, Joint SWFSC-WCR NMFS Report 1: Proxies for Maximum Fishing Mortality Threshold (MFMT) and Options for Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST)
2. If received, Public Comments are electronic only ([see e-portal](#)).

Agenda Order:

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| H.5 Biennial Harvest Specifications and Management Measures | Kit Dahl |
| a. Reports and Comments of Management Entities and Advisory Bodies | |
| b. Public Comment | |
| c. Council Action: Approve Proxies for Status Determination Criteria; Consider the Need for Other Status-related Recommendations, Annual Catch Limits or Other Harvest Objectives and/or Management Measures | |

PFMC
02/09/21