

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Members of the Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) have been closely monitoring international management activities and the implications for U.S. stakeholders. Of greatest interest are activities which will or may impact U.S. fisheries for Pacific Bluefin tuna and North Pacific albacore.

Pacific Bluefin tuna:

While still overfished, the Pacific Bluefin tuna (PBF) stock continues to increase¹ and is expected to reach the first rebuilding target ahead of schedule, perhaps as early as the end 2021. Conservation and Management Measures (CMM) 2020-02, which was adopted by the WCPFC last December, includes the following outlook, “The estimated probability of achieving the second biomass rebuilding target (20% of SSBF=0) 10 years after the achievement of the initial rebuilding target or by 2034, whichever is earlier, is 96%;²”

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) has recommended “status quo” management be maintained for 2022 while at the same time acknowledging “increase catches ... are possible under the harvest strategy prepared by the joint tuna Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs) Working Group”³. The HMSAS recommends a one-year measure for 2022 to align the management cycle with scheduled Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) stock assessments. The HMSAS also supports the IATTC SAC recommendation of “status quo” for the next management cycle and asks the Council to recommend such to the applicable U.S. delegation(s).

The above-noted IATTC SAC recommendation has opened the door for other nations harvesting PBF to seek increases for 2022. Given similar efforts in 2019 and 2020, it is logical to assume proposals will be made this year. If increases in harvest are sought, the HMSAS seeks the Council’s support in advocating for equitable distribution of an increase between Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) and the Western Pacific Ocean (WPO) fisheries.

If an increase is agreed upon at the upcoming [Sixth Joint IATTC-NC Working Group Meeting on PBF Management \(July 27 – July 29\)](#) we urge the U.S. Delegation to the IATTC meeting in August to negotiate a more equitable allocation between the U.S. and Mexico. Stakeholders do not feel they were treated fairly when the current EPO split (roughly 9:1 in favor of Mexico) was originally memorialized in Resolution.

¹ See [ISC20 ANNEX11 Stock Assessment Report for Pacific Bluefin Tuna.pdf \(fra.go.jp\)](#)

² See <https://www.wcpfc.int/doc/cmm-2020-02/conservation-and-management-measure-pacific-bluefin>

³ See Recommendation 1.2, Page 1, [https://iattc.org/Meetings/Meetings2021/SAC-12/Docs/English/SAC-12-MISC_Recommendations%20of%20the%20Scientific%20Advisory%20Committee%20\(SAC\)%20to%20the%20Commission%20\(corrigendum\).pdf](https://iattc.org/Meetings/Meetings2021/SAC-12/Docs/English/SAC-12-MISC_Recommendations%20of%20the%20Scientific%20Advisory%20Committee%20(SAC)%20to%20the%20Commission%20(corrigendum).pdf)

North Pacific albacore:

The 2020 Stock Assessment found the North Pacific albacore (NPALB) stock “is likely not overfished relative to the limit reference point adopted by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission ($20\%SSB_{\text{current}, F=0}$).”⁴ This information has been presented at several meetings where HMSAS members participated: (1) The International Scientific Committee (ISC) Albacore Working Group hosted a meeting amongst U.S. and Canadian stakeholders from March 22-25, 2021, to review the results of the recently completed Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE); and (2) the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Islands Regional and Office and West Coast Region U.S. stakeholder meeting on June 1, 2021 which provided an opportunity for U.S. stakeholders to express their priorities and consider future management of NPALB. We address each below:

ISC ALBWG US-Canada Stakeholder Meeting:

At the outset, we very much appreciate the efforts which resulted in completing the MSE modeling process. We also appreciate the efforts and patience of Drs Steve Teo and Desiree Tommasi in presenting this difficult subject matter. The HMSAS remains concerned there is a general lack of understanding surrounding the nuances of MSE, assumptions made in the model and how those impact the model’s results. For example:

- How does the model estimate: (1) the percentage of the stock that migrates to the eastern Pacific; (2) the catchability of those fish; or (3) the stock impact of fish harvested in the Eastern Pacific versus those taken Western Pacific (juveniles vs. spawning age fish).
- Impacts of a rogue nation who has not participated in the MSE process and may not agree to be bound by any management measures; and has shown a history of not prioritizing RFMO engagement/enforcement.
- As stated in the MSE analysis, if a ghost fleet of unmanaged harvesters develops or is revealed, current harvesters will have reduced harvest opportunity.

We would encourage the Council to support any and all efforts to facilitate additional conversations as the management process unfolds in the RFMOs.

June 1 NPALB US Stakeholder Meeting:

Meaningful participation by fishery stakeholders necessitates clear understanding of the measures being discussed. Thoughtful, considered and well-understood reference points (Target, Threshold and Limit) and resulting Harvest Control Rules are supportable by industry. We offer the following thoughts on the topics and comments outlined in [Supplemental NMFS Report 2](#). For clarity, the bullet points listed below are meant to address the bullet points as they are included in the NMFS Report 2.

- We support a consistent and enforceable harvest strategy across the Pacific.

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See

http://isc.fra.go.jp/pdf/ISC20/ISC20_ANNEX12_Stock_Assessment_Report_for_Albacore_Tuna_in_NorthPacific.pdf

- We agree ensuring SSB is maintained above the limit reference point (LRP) should be the top priority.
- We support the inclusion of a Threshold reference point.
- Additional understanding is necessary regarding the implication(s) of various levels of F and how those influence the HCRs.
- Additional conversations are needed regarding controls (TAE vs. TAC). We are concerned about the high amount of NPALB that is being harvested incidentally by fleets purportedly targeting bigeye or other HMS stocks. There is concern how non-targeted catch is defined and how that catch will be managed in the HCRs. We also wish to address a statement included in the NMFS Report where it says, “there were questions on whether effort controls were feasible and could be implemented domestically.” Industry members of the HMSAS believe that effort controls are both feasible and can be implemented.
- In terms of a timeline, moving forward with management proposals (development of HCRs) in 2021 is not recommended – the fishing season is about to start, there is no stock related need for immediate action, there are likely going to be other priorities (tropical tunas, PBF) at the RFMOs this year, etc. We would be supportive of moving this forward next year.

Other items:

We would also like to mention that yellowfin tuna appear to be in good shape after the latest assessment update and risk analysis by the IATTC SAC.

PFMC
06/24/21