

**HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT  
ON INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

**Pacific Bluefin Tuna (PBF)**

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) received a presentation from Ms. Celia Barroso on recent activities related to Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF). We address the stock assessment and two Stakeholder meetings separately.

*Stock Assessment* – According to the 2022 update, the stock is likely at levels not seen since the beginning of the population decline in 1996. The stock is recovering from historically low levels and has proved resilient with the 2020 SSB estimated at 10.2 percent of that, which would be expected in the absence of fishing. However, recruitment continues to be a concern, with observations of low recruitment in 8 of the last 10 years, so continued precaution and emphasis on rebuilding is needed.

The initial rebuilding target was reached in 2019, five years earlier than originally planned by the regional fishery management organizations, and under current conservation measures, the model projects that the stock could recover to the second rebuilding target by 2023 with at least a 60 percent probability. These projection results are highly dependent on assumptions regarding recruitment, so some precaution is warranted.

The stock assessment confirms that overfishing ended in the most recent years if assessed against reference points commonly used by the regional fishery management organizations. In 2022, catches of PBF will likely rise based on the 15 percent quota increases that were adopted in 2021, and the impact of this will not be confirmed until future stock assessments are conducted. The end of overfishing for PBF is a significant milestone for this fishery and the HMSAS recommends that any changes to management measures does not result in overfishing.

We remain concerned that there may be additional efforts by some nations to seek quota increases again during the upcoming Pacific Bluefin Tuna Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) / Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee Joint Working Group (“JWG”) meeting. The HMSAS supports continuation of the current conservation measures until such a time that the second rebuilding target is met. However, in the event increases in catch are agreed upon, the U.S. should ensure that it will not result in overfishing with a very high probability. In addition, we expect that the U.S. would be allocated additional catch (Western Pacific v Eastern Pacific and U.S. v Mexico) in an effort to provide the Eastern Pacific a more equitable split of the pacific-wide harvest and the US a more equitable share of the Eastern Pacific allocation with Mexico.

The HMSAS supports National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) efforts to prioritize and develop a proposal for the JWG that will advance a comprehensive harvest strategy for PBF, with intention to advance management objectives and performance indicators in 2022. These efforts could be furthered by continuation of development of a management

strategy evaluation (MSE) for Pacific Bluefin tuna, including U.S. Analyst capacity. The HMSAS advises that further technical changes, under Operational Management Objectives, are needed to clarify the U.S. proposal to ensure that it achieves the objectives agreed by U.S. stakeholder in the recent workshops, particularly that it will maintain the stock at levels that can achieve MSY.

**We recommend the Council support the HMSAS position(s) and communicate that in the form of a recommendation to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) as the U.S. position.**

Stakeholder Meetings – A number of HMSAS members attended both the April 1<sup>st</sup> meeting focused on the future long-term harvest strategy for PBF and the May 4<sup>th</sup> meeting focused on domestic management of PBF.

April 1<sup>st</sup> meeting. The HMSAS members who participated in this meeting appreciated the opportunity to share their perspectives and generally agree with the information provided in Table 1 of [Agenda Item G.2.a Supplemental NMFS Report 4](#).

May 4<sup>th</sup> meeting. The HMSAS members who participated in this meeting found it very informative and suggest holding meetings like this more frequently. There were a number of topics discussed which may be worthy of additional discussion/conversation (ranching v caging v other forms of delayed harvest), especially as anticipated increases in commercial harvest are allowed.

#### North Pacific Albacore (NPA)

The HMSAS received a presentation from Ms. Celia Barroso on recent activities related to NPA. We address the April 5th Stakeholder meeting and the Draft IATTC Resolution separately.

Stakeholder meeting. The HMSAS members who attended this meeting very much appreciate how this meeting was conducted; in particular the ability of Celia, Valerie Post, and Dr. Teo to communicate these somewhat difficult to understand concepts in ways that were more easily understood.

Last year, the Northern Committee of the WCPFC considered a workplan for NPA. For 2022, the Northern Committee set expectations that included, “Based on MSE results, consider retention or modification of LRP and consider adoption of TRP to complete Task (B)(2).” See Page 56 of the [Summary Report of the 17<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Northern Committee](#). That document also set expectations for 2023 which include, “Further development of harvest strategy including establishment of harvest control rule and threshold reference point to complete Task (B)(2).” (*Ibid*).

The April 5<sup>th</sup> Stakeholder meeting carried forward that stepwise approach as is indicated by the materials presented for discussion (see - [NPALB Apr 5 Meeting Summary \(pcouncil.org\)](#)). Both before and after that meeting fishery participants were briefed on the management objectives as well as target and limit reference points. It was generally understood that

obtaining international agreement on Reference Points and the Management Objectives, in the form of a Harvest Strategy, would then pave the way for the development of Harvest Control Rules (HCRs) based on the Harvest Strategy. Given the likelihood of different approaches to controlling harvest of directed fleets (surface fisheries) versus longline fleets which directly or indirectly harvest NPA, the stepwise approach is a logical one. Discussing nuances of HCRs (Total Allowable Effort for surface fisheries v Total Allowable Catch for other fleets) could thwart the ability to get consensus on the foundational elements of the HCRs – target and limit reference points.

Against this backdrop, we address the IATTC Draft Resolution on Harvest Strategy for North Pacific Albacore provided as Supplemental NMFS Report 3.

IATTC Draft Resolution on Harvest Strategy for North Pacific Albacore. The first indication that the U.S. was going to include HCRs in a proposed resolution was when HMSAS members received a copy of the Draft Resolution on Wednesday, June 1. As noted above, fishery participants did NOT discuss the possibility of HCRs in advance of this Council meeting. We note that some participants have already started their seasons; and those that have not departed are busy getting their vessels ready for departure. Based on reports from U.S.-based longline vessels and albacore vessels returning from the South Pacific, there is optimism about this upcoming season.

While we agree that the Draft Resolution is a good start to a Resolution on a Harvest Strategy for North Pacific Albacore, it does not address some critical issues we think are important to maintain U.S. access for the U.S. fleets such as:

- While the Draft Resolution specifically mentions the troll and pole-and-line fisheries that target this stock in the convention area of the IATTC, there is no mention of the potential impacts of the longline fleets that operate across the Pacific. **We recommend the language introducing Section 1 be amended to read, “A harvest strategy shall be adopted for all fisheries which harvest NPA in the Convention Area.”**
- There is no discussion of controlling the incidental harvest of NPA by fleets operating across the Pacific. At present we are unaware of any generally accepted metric for determining whether a trip is targeting albacore or some other species. **We recommend developing guidelines for determining targeted v non-targeted harvest.**
- In the Management Objective 1(a)(iv), “To the extent practical...” This could benefit from including the MSE's performance indicator that there should be a low probability of management changes resulting in a 30 percent or greater decrease between consecutive assessment periods<sup>1</sup>.

Aside from the arguments raised above, we offer the following as additional support for our recommendation:

- Time is not of the essence from a biological standpoint.

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<sup>1</sup> North Pacific Albacore Tuna Management Strategy Evaluation: A Primer for Managers and Stakeholders

“[T]he 2020 stock assessment of North Pacific albacore from the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) indicates that North Pacific albacore tuna is neither being overfished nor is it in an overfished state;”

The HMSAS supports NOAA’s intention to advance a comprehensive harvest strategy to the IATTC for North Pacific Albacore, with an intention that any future harvest strategy adopted in the WCPFC be compatible. We also agree with and generally support Section 1, clauses a – e as currently provided in the Draft Resolution, including Management Objectives, Reference Points, Acceptable Levels of Risk, and Monitoring, with modifications as presented above. The HMSAS is concerned that there has not been sufficient time to review, discuss, and develop a position on the contents of any proposed HCRs. The HMSAS requests that NOAA allow for further discussions with stakeholders on the HCRs. In particular, additional specificity is needed to outline an appropriate total allowable catch and/or total allowable effort to control impacts from non-target fisheries and provide clarity on actions at reference points. The HMSAS further recommends that the Council instruct NMFS to move forward with seeking international agreement on Management Objectives, Reference Points, Acceptable Levels of Risk, and Monitoring while seeking further consultation from domestic stakeholders on Harvest Control Rules so that fishery participants have had a chance to review, discuss, and develop a position on the contents of any proposed HCRs.

#### Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction

The [Meeting Report of the May Council Coordinating Committee](#) makes mention of the fourth session of the United Nations Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. On May 30, a new draft of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction was published. See - [IGC 5 - Further revised draft text final \(un.org\)](#). The HMSAS encourages the Council to receive regular updates on the development of this Agreement and perhaps give a general endorsement to the two-fold process outlined in the Council Coordination Committee Meeting Report.

PFMC  
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