NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) REPORT ON
OPAH STOCK CONSIDERATIONS

As noted in the situation summary, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) considered whether to include opah as an ecosystem component (EC) or management unit species (MUS) when preparing Amendment 2 to the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). This report provides a brief overview of recent opah landings data through 2022 for Council and advisory body discussion.

Opah (*Lampris* spp.), also called moonfish, are large endothermic fish occurring in deep open ocean waters throughout the Pacific. This species is caught by HMS gear types, particularly pelagic longline. Figure 1, below, summarizes opah landings over the past decade. Roughly two-thirds of opah landings to the West Coast are from Hawaii-permitted longline vessels, with the remaining one-third coming from West Coast-based vessels.
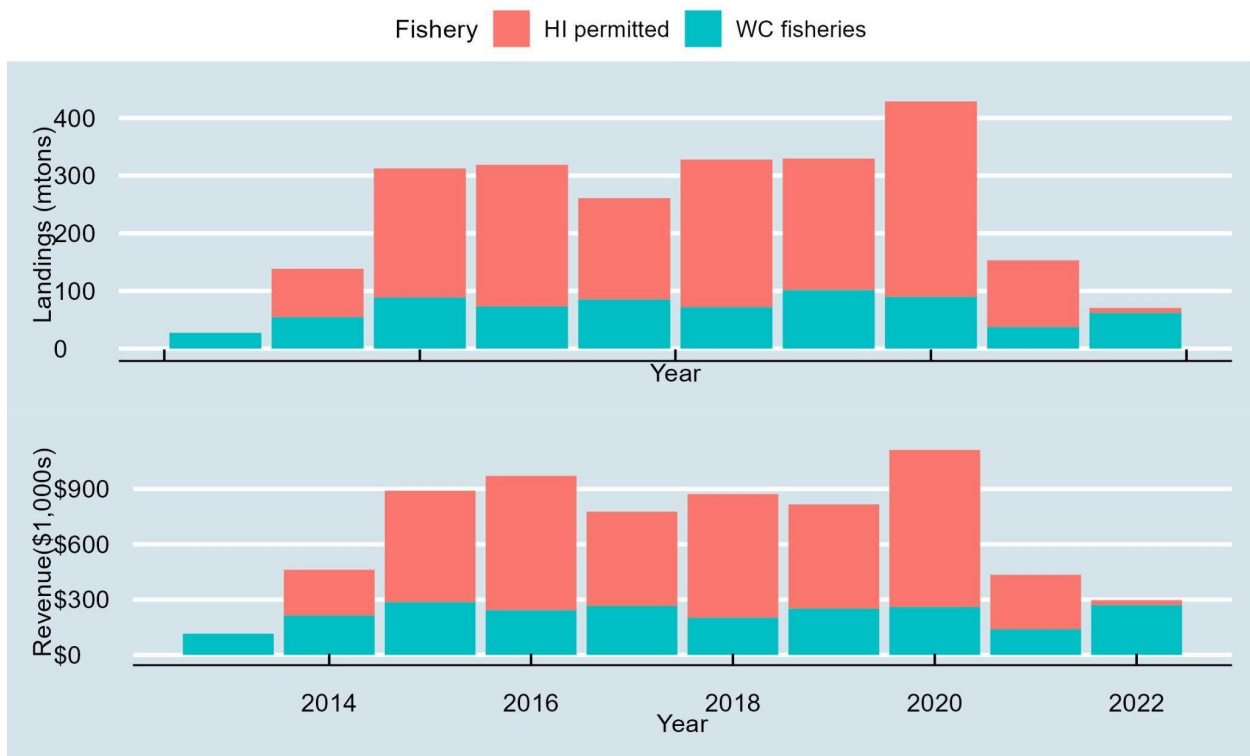

Figure 1. Landings of opah to the U.S. West Coast by source.

Opah appear to be a component of the suite of species targeted by West Coast HMS fishermen. Landings by West Coast vessels have ranged from roughly 50-100 metric tons (mt) per year since 2014. Most of these landings have been from West Coast-based deep set longline vessels fishing outside of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Overall, from 2014 through 2022, opah accounted for about 8 percent of revenues for vessels fishing under the HMS FMP. From 2019 to

2022, opah accounted for about 13 percent of revenues for West Coast-based deep-set longline vessels.

Opah landings brought between $200,000 and $300,000 in annual revenues to West Coast-based vessels every year from 2014 to 2022 (the lone exception being 2021, which was an anomalously low year for most HMS fishery landings). During the development of deep-set buoy gear (DSBG), opah were considered as a potential target species. However, DSBG fishermen have largely foregone use of the "opah hook" due to tangling and low catch. Only three individual opahs have been caught in DSBG to date.