

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL (HMSAS) REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The HMSAS received a presentation from Rachael Wadsworth and Amanda Munro (NMFS), regarding outcomes of recent international negotiations, including the 9th IATTC – WCPFC Northern Committee Joint Working Group on Pacific bluefin tuna (JWG), the WCPFC Northern Committee (NC), and the recent IATTC annual meeting. The international negotiations resulted in significant advances for West Coast HMS fisheries, particularly regarding Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF).

The HMSAS appreciates the preparation and work that went into these negotiations and efforts of the U.S. delegation, including NMFS and the State Department, to secure progress on priorities identified by the HMSAS. The HMSAS would like to thank Dorothy Lowman for her many years of service as Co-Chair of the JWG. Dorothy served this role since the JWG's formation and we owe her significant thanks for her many years steering PBF into an emerging success story.

The HMSAS makes the following key recommendations:

Pacific bluefin tuna:

- **The HMSAS recommends the Council communicate the importance of progressing the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) and a precautionary long-term harvest strategy in 2025 to ensure maintaining the population at sustainable levels and preventing overfishing throughout the range of the stock.**
- **Adopt, as informal alternatives, the commercial Pacific Bluefin Tuna (PBF) Commercial Harvest Strategy as outlined below.**

North Pacific albacore:

- **The HMSAS recommends the Council request further guidance from NMFS regarding the timing of stakeholder workshops to advance concepts for domestic implementation of RFMO actions.**

Pacific bluefin tuna

The U.S. made important progress at the JWG and subsequent IATTC negotiations, including securing agreement on a new two-year resolution on PBF. The measures adopted at IATTC will:

- Increase quotas significantly for U.S. fleets, allowing the purse seine, growing rod and reel, and other gear types targeting PBF to increase landings, while also providing a more equitable balance of quota between countries in the Eastern and Western Pacific, as well as the quota distribution between the U.S. and Mexico. The quota increases were limited to levels that will allow the population to continue to grow based on the model projections; and
- Accelerate progress and adopt the long-term harvest strategy, based on the MSE, in 2025.

The HMSAS notes these significant accomplishments have taken many years to come to fruition, but provide important and needed additional fishing opportunities for West Coast fishermen. While this is very encouraging, important work must continue in 2025 to get the long-term harvest strategy in place. Without a long-term harvest strategy, all of these gains remain at risk. We recommend the Council strongly encourage NMFS to remain focused on the MSE and related preparations needed to adopt the long-term harvest strategy in 2025. In addition, the HMSAS notes that the analysis should include adequate assessment of uncertainty, including biological assumptions and recruitment, as part of the MSE.

The IATTC elected HMSAS Member Josh Madeira as the next Co-Chair of the JWG and the U.S. announced that an intersessional meeting of the JWG will be held in February 2025 in Monterey, California. The Monterey Bay Aquarium and the U.S. delegation will host the JWG meeting and details will be provided to the Council as they are confirmed through RFMO announcements. Given the timing of the next discussions on PBF are only a few months away, the HMSAS requests that NMFS prioritize capacity to conduct MSE analyses and prepare for the upcoming JWG intersessional meeting. The outcomes of the JWG intersessional meeting are very important to set the stage for adoption of the long-term harvest strategy in July 2025. The HMSAS recommends the Council support attendance at the JWG for at least five HMSAS members.

Pacific Bluefin Tuna Commercial Harvest Strategy

While the HMSAS did have a good conversation on a potential commercial harvest strategy for PBF, due to the late submission of [J.2.a REVISED 2 Supplemental NMFS Report 2: NMFS Report on International HMS Management](#), we were unable to conduct sufficient outreach with potentially interested fishery participants. To that end, we are offering the following preliminary comments to assist the Council in identifying a range of options for further discussion in November.

The HMSAS prefers to retain the current management framework that includes a smaller buffer as we get later in the year. We believe it sufficiently protects non-purse seine fishery operations and reduces the possibility of underutilization of the resource as has occurred for each of the last six years. A potential implication of underharvest of the PBF quota is increased efforts by other nations to take that quota from us.

The HMSAS recommends removing the **status quo** option as it would continue to hinder participation in the fishery by the purse seine fleet. We are supportive of the **running start** option and a version of the **pedal to the floor** option which includes an initial trip limit of 60 mt (as opposed to 75mt). Either of these would better enable the U.S. to maximize utilization of the catch limit while being mindful of the need to rebuild markets. Without regard to the option chosen, we recommend the following seasonal management framework:

2025

The annual limit will be 1,285 mt with an initial trip limit of 50 mt/60mt. The trip limit will be reduced as follows:

- January - June: If cumulative catch is within 300 mt of the annual limit (i.e., cumulative catch reaches 985 mt), the trip limit will be 5 mt for the remainder of the year.

- July - September: If cumulative catch is within 200 mt of the annual limit (i.e., cumulative catch reaches 1,085 mt), the trip limit will be 5 mt for the remainder of the year.
- October - December: If cumulative catch is 100 mt of the annual limit (i.e., cumulative catch reaches 1,185 mt), the trip limit will be 5 mt for the remainder of the year.

2026

The 2026 annual limit will be dependent upon landings in 2025. If the 2026 annual limit ends up being 1,285 mt, the values outlined above would apply. If it is a different number, we recommend a pro rata adjustment to the management triggers described above.

North Pacific swordfish

The HMSAS notes the WCPFC Northern Committee adopted a recommendation to explore the feasibility of conducting an MSE for North Pacific swordfish. The HMSAS supports this and requests that NMFS continue to keep the Council and stakeholders informed on any next steps or opportunities for engagement through the MSE process. The HMSAS encourages NMFS and the U.S. delegation to continue to provide oversight over the developments on this species that are important for West Coast stakeholders.

PFMC

9/21/2024