

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES (HMS) MANAGEMENT

This report provides updates on the recently concluded Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) meeting. It also provides information to the Council and HMS advisory bodies to inform discussion on Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) trip limits for 2025 and 2026.

IATTC Outcomes

The IATTC meetings took place in Panama City, Panama from August 27-September 6, 2024. There were twenty proposals put forward for the consideration of the IATTC. The following Resolutions were adopted, and will be posted on the [IATTC Resolution website](#):

Require NMFS rulemaking:

- Two-year rollover of existing tropical tuna management measures for 2025 and 2026, including triggers for these measures to be re-evaluated by the Commission.
- Resolutions on Pacific bluefin tuna, including catch levels for 2025 and 2026 and monitoring and control measures. Both Resolutions closely mirror proposals agreed to at the Joint IATTC-WCPFC-NC Working Group.

Do not require NMFS rulemaking:

- Minimum standards for electronic monitoring.
- Revised shark conservation Resolution including non-binding recommendations for best handling and release practices for sharks caught by purse seine and longline vessels.
- Revised Resolution to consider implementing a fish aggregating device register.
- Revised Resolution that requires additional Regional Vessel Register reporting requirements.
- South Pacific Albacore Resolution tasking the staff with presenting interim reference points for the stock and participating in the Science Management Dialogues to develop a harvest strategy.
- Revised Resolution on climate change tasking the IATTC staff with incorporating climate data into scientific work and convening a climate change workshop.
- Creation of an Ad Hoc Working Group to strengthen the dialogue among scientists, managers and other stakeholders on Management Strategy Evaluations.

PBF Catch and Trip Limits for 2025 and 2026

The recently adopted IATTC Resolution on PBF results in a two-year PBF catch limit of 1,822 metric tons (mt) for the United States in 2025-2026, and the Resolution goes into effect January 1, 2025. The maximum limit in any one year is 1,285 mt. NMFS will implement these measures through a proposed and final rule under the authority of the Tuna Conventions Act. We are also considering revisions to the existing trip limit regulations. We are providing the following information for the Council and advisory bodies to consider in providing guidance on an updated trip limit scheme for 2025-2026. Our goal is to provide adequate fishing opportunity while

ensuring that catches remain within the biennial and one-year limits, and avoiding the potential for regulatory discards.

Current Regulations for 2023-2024

Existing regulations at [50 CFR 300.25\(g\)](#), which expire at the end of the calendar year, include trip limits for the current management cycle. The annual limit is 720 mt with an initial trip limit of 30 mt. The regulations also allowed for adding under-harvest in 2023 to the 2024 annual limit. The trip limits are adjusted based on estimated catch relative to the annual limits, and also based on the time of year. The schedule for reducing the trip limits is outlined below:

- January - June: If cumulative catch is within 320 mt of the annual limit (i.e., cumulative catch reaches 400 mt), the trip limit will be 20 mt. If cumulative catch is within 220 mt of the annual limit (i.e., cumulative catch reaches 500 mt), the trip limit will be 3 mt.
- July - September: If cumulative catch is within 290 mt of the annual limit (i.e., cumulative catch reaches 430 mt), the trip limit will be 20 mt. If cumulative catch is within 200 mt of the annual limit (i.e., cumulative catch reaches 520 mt), the trip limit will be 3 mt.
- October - December: If cumulative catch is within 250 mt of the annual limit (i.e., cumulative catch reaches 470 mt), the trip limit will be 20 mt. If cumulative catch is within 100 mt of the annual limit (i.e., cumulative catch reaches 620 mt), the trip limit will be 3 mt.

Options for New Management Scheme

For 2025 and 2026, NMFS is considering a simplified management scheme for catch and trip limits. Below, we provide specific examples for potential annual catch limits, trip limit tiers, and trigger points for reducing the trip limits.

- **Status Quo:** Annual limit of 1,285 mt. In both years, trip limits begin at 30 mt, then reduce to 20 mt, then 3 mt as catch approaches the annual limit.
 - The initial trip limit would allow for at least 32 trips each year before the first reduction.
 - The first reduction occurs when catch is within 300 mt of the annual limit.
 - The second reduction occurs when catch is within 100 mt of the annual limit.
 - The reduction points in 2026 would trigger when catch is within 300 mt and 100 mt of the total biennial limit.
- **Running start:** Annual limit of 1,285 mt. In 2025, trip limits begin at 50 mt, then reduce to 25 mt, then 5 mt as catch approaches the annual limit. In 2026, the initial trip limit is 30 mt, and the reduced levels are also more stringent at 20 mt and 3 mt respectively.
 - The initial trip limit would allow for at least 19 trips in 2025 before the first reduction. The number of potential trips before the reduction in 2026 would depend on how much of the 2025 annual limit is utilized.
 - The first reduction occurs when catch is within 300 mt of the annual limit.
 - The second reduction occurs when catch is within 100 mt of the annual limit.
 - In 2026, the reduction points would trigger when catch is within 400 mt and 200 mt of the total biennial limit.

- **Pedal to the floor:** Annual limit of 1,285 mt. In 2025, trip limits begin at 75 mt, then reduce to 50 mt, then 5 mt as catch approaches the annual limit. In 2026, the initial trip limit is 50 mt, but the reduced levels are the same as in 2025.
 - The initial trip limit would allow for at least 11 trips in 2025 before the first reduction. The number of potential trips before the reduction in 2026 would depend on how much of the 2025 annual limit is utilized.
 - The first reduction occurs when catch is within 400 mt of the annual limit.
 - The second reduction occurs when catch is within 200 mt of the annual limit.
 - In 2026, the reduction points would trigger when catch is within 400 mt and 200 mt of the total biennial limit.
 - Note that the final trip limit under this proposal is 5 mt, rather than 3 mt as in recent years. We are interested in feedback from the Council and stakeholders as to whether a 5 mt minimum trip limit would provide greater flexibility to gears such as drift gillnet and hook-and-line, or whether it is functionally the same as a 3 mt minimum trip limit.

Table 1. Comparison of proposals for PBF trip limits for 2025-2026.

		Status Quo	Running Start	Pedal to the Floor
2025	Annual Limit	1285 mt	1285 mt	1285 mt
	Initial Trip Limit	30 mt	50 mt	75 mt
	First Reduction Point	> 985 mt	> 985 mt	> 885 mt
	First Reduced Trip Limit	20 mt	25 mt	25 mt
	Second Reduction Point	> 1185 mt	> 1185 mt	> 1085 mt
	Second Reduced Trip Limit	3 mt	5 mt	5 mt
2026	Annual Limit*	537 mt+	537 mt+	537 mt+
	Initial Trip Limit	30 mt	30 mt	50 mt
	First Reduction Point	> 1522 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>	> 1422 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>	> 1422 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>
	First Reduced Trip Limit	20 mt	20 mt	25 mt
	Second Reduction Point	> 1722 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>	> 1622 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>	> 1622 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>
	Second Reduced Trip Limit	3 mt	3 mt	5 mt

* Note that any under-harvest from 2025 can be added to the annual limit for 2026.

These options are intended to simplify the previous management structure, provide adaptive management to avoid exceeding catch limits, and provide increased fishing opportunity to coastal purse seine vessels as well as lower-volume gears to fully utilize the increased catch allowances laid out by the IATTC. NMFS requests that the Council and advisory bodies provide feedback on these proposals, or suggest an alternative proposal to consider as we work to establish a new biennial management regime for 2025-2026.