

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

This report provides updates on upcoming international meetings in 2024 and 2024 for the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). In addition, the report provides information to the Council and HMS advisory bodies to inform discussion on Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) trip limits for 2025 and 2026.

Upcoming international WCPFC meetings in 2024-2025*

Permanent Advisory Committee to prepare for WCPFC meeting	October 21-23, 2024
21st Regular Session of the WCPFC	November 28-December 3, 2024 (Suva, Fiji)
IATTC-WCPFC-NC Intersessional Joint Working Group	February 5-7, 2025 (Monterey, CA)
Joint IATTC-WCPFC-NC Working Group	Tentatively July 9-12, 2025 (Japan)
Northern Committee	Tentatively July 14-15, 2025 (Japan)

Options for PBF trip limits

NMFS is drafting a proposed rule to implement [IATTC Resolution C-24-02](#) (*Measures for the Conservation and Management of Pacific bluefin tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean*) and establish new catch and trip limits for the 2025-2026 biennial management cycle. The Resolution provides the United States a 1,822 metric ton (mt) biennial limit for 2025-2026 with a one year maximum of 1,285 mt. The proposed rule would revise existing regulations at [50 CFR 300.25\(g\)](#), which are set to expire at the end of the calendar year.

Following discussion at the September 2024 Council meeting, NMFS is considering the following four options for a PBF trip limit scheme for 2025 and 2026 (see Table 1).

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

		Status Quo	Running Start	Run Down the Middle	Pedal to the Floor
2025	Annual Limit	1,285 mt	1,285 mt	1,285 mt	1,285 mt
	Initial Trip Limit	30 mt	50 mt	60 mt	75 mt
	First Reduction Point: if total catch is...	> 985 mt	> 985 mt	> 985 mt	> 885 mt
	<i>Buffer amount:</i>	<i>300 mt</i>	<i>300 mt</i>	<i>300 mt</i>	<i>400 mt</i>
	First Reduced Trip Limit	20 mt	25 mt	40 mt	50 mt
	Second Reduction Point: if total catch is...	> 1,185 mt	> 1,185 mt	> 1,085 mt	> 1,085 mt
	<i>Buffer amount:</i>	<i>100 mt</i>	<i>100 mt</i>	<i>200 mt</i>	<i>200 mt</i>
	Second Reduced Trip Limit	3 mt	5 mt	5 mt	5 mt
2026	Annual Limit*	537 mt+	537 mt+	537 mt+	537 mt+
	Initial Trip Limit	30 mt	50 mt	60 mt	75 mt
	First Reduction Point: if total catch is...	> 1,522 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>	> 985 mt <i>(single year), or</i> > 1,522 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>	> 985 mt <i>(single year), or</i> > 1,522 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>	> 985 mt <i>(single year), or</i> > 1,522 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>
	<i>Buffer amount:</i>	<i>300 mt</i>	<i>300 mt</i>	<i>300 mt</i>	<i>300 mt</i>
	First Reduced Trip Limit	20 mt	25 mt	40 mt	50 mt
	Second Reduction Point: if total catch is...	> 1,722 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>	> 1,185 mt <i>(single year), or</i> > 1,722 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>	> 1,185 mt <i>(single year), or</i> > 1,722 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>	> 1,185 mt <i>(single year), or</i> > 1,722 mt <i>(biennial total)</i>
	<i>Buffer amount:</i>	<i>100 mt</i>	<i>100 mt</i>	<i>100 mt</i>	<i>100 mt</i>
	Second Reduced Trip Limit	3 mt	5 mt	5 mt	5 mt

* Note that any under-harvest from 2025 can be added to the annual limit for 2026, so long as the one-year maximum of 1,285 mt is not exceeded.

In Table 1, the “Reduction Points” are the levels of estimated landings which trigger NMFS to reduce the trip limits. The corresponding “Buffer” amounts indicate how much of the annual or biennial limit remains after each reduction.

These options are based on revisions to our original proposals which the Council discussed in September, as described in [Agenda Item J.2.a, Supplemental CDFW Report 1](#). We made one adjustment to the options, which is to remove language indicating that the initial trip limit in 2026 would be lower if total catch exceeded 1,422 mt at the beginning of the year. Since the annual limit for 2025 is 1,285, this case should not occur.

In terms of how many trips can be undertaken by coastal purse seiners before the trip limit is reduced, the options are compared below.

- Under the “Status Quo” proposal, a maximum of 33 trips can be completed before the first reduction, followed by a maximum of 10 trips before the second reduction.
- Under the “Running Start” proposal, a maximum of 20 trips can be completed before the first reduction, followed by a maximum of 8 trips before the second reduction.
- Under the “Run Down the Middle” proposal, a maximum of 16 trips can be completed before the first reduction, followed by a maximum of 3 trips before the second reduction.
- Under the “Pedal to the Floor” proposal, a maximum of 12 trips can be completed before the first reduction, followed by a maximum of 4 trips before the second reduction.

Note that the actual number of trips undertaken by coastal purse seiners will depend on the levels of effort and landings by lower-volume gears, as well as the actual landings of PBF resulting from purse seine trips.

Considerations for trip limits

The rulemaking for new trip limits is necessary to satisfy U.S. obligations as members of the IATTC and implement Resolution C-24-02 on PBF. Any of the above options would satisfy U.S. obligations by implementing the biennial catch limits and annual maximum limits. NMFS is interested in feedback from the Council regarding which option would best utilize the U.S. annual catch limits while providing opportunity to multiple types of PBF fishing vessels and avoiding regulatory discards to the extent possible.

Over the past decade, the majority of PBF landings have been from coastal purse seine vessels, with smaller amounts caught by commercial hook-and-line, drift gillnet, and other gear types. Higher initial trip limits allow purse seiners to catch more PBF on each trip, but may reduce the number of individual trips that can be taken before the limits are reduced. We also understand, based on discussions with the HMS Advisory Subpanel, that a trip limit of 30 mt or lower serves as a disincentive for purse seiners to target PBF, so the “Status Quo” proposal may not result in enough purse seine effort to trigger the reductions (or fully utilize our catch limits).

Another point of consideration in selecting a trip limit scheme is the amount of the annual catch limits which will be “reserved” for lower-volume gears. Table 2 below shows total landings of PBF (in metric tonnage of landed weight) by all non-purse seine gears for the past five years.

Table 2: Total PBF Landed Weight by Non-Purse Seine Gears, 2019-2023

Year	Total (mt)
2019	44.52
2020	109.91
2021	165.48
2022	163.31
2023	182.73

Non-purse seine gears have recently caught less than 200 mt of PBF each year, although there is a trend of increasing annual landings. From the perspective of preserving some of the annual catch limits for non-purse seine gears, a second buffer (i.e., the amount of the annual limit which can only be caught on low-volume trips) of 200 mt in each year should ensure that lower-volume gears can continue to land PBF in similar volumes as in recent years. Larger buffers also preserve opportunity for potential new entries to the fishery (e.g., exempted fishing permit vessels), and help reduce the chance of overshooting the annual limits if several purse seine vessels make high volumes of landings in a short time period. However, setting the buffer too high raises the risk of failing to fully utilize our annual catch limit, especially given that lower-volume gears can fish at any time of year including when trip limits are high. The “Status Quo” and “Running Start” proposals include a 100 mt final buffer in 2025, whereas the “Run Down the Middle” and “Pedal to the Floor” proposals include a 200 mt second buffer in 2025. All four proposals would use a 100 mt second buffer in 2026.

Figure 1 below displays average landings of PBF by month, to give an idea of the timing of recent PBF fishing effort. The highest-volume months indicate time periods when coastal purse seiners have tended to land relatively high volumes of PBF, either targeting them or catching them opportunistically. However, it is important to note that PBF catches in recent years have been managed cautiously under rebuilding plans, with relatively restrictive trip limits. Fishing behavior in terms of effort levels and the timing of landings may change if the new management scheme has higher trip limits than the current scheme.

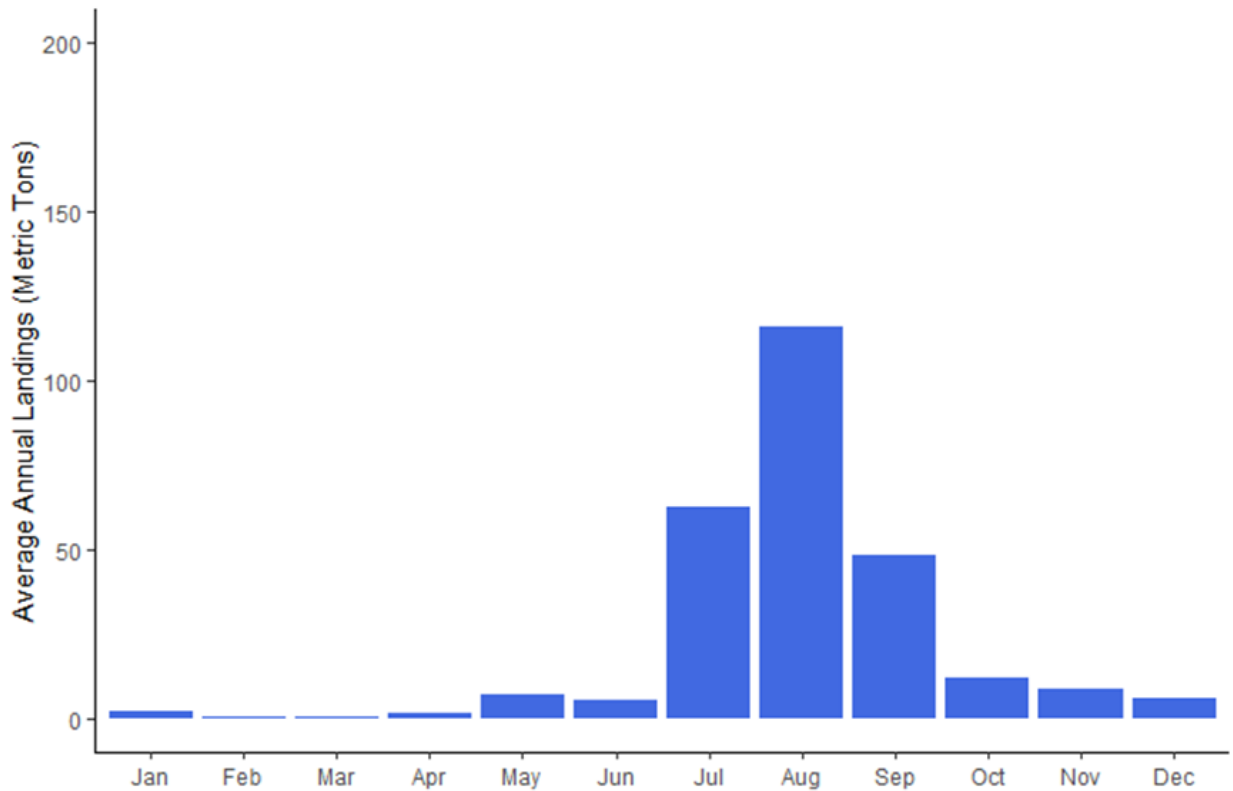


Figure 1: Average Bluefin Landings by Month (2014-2024)

Seasonal buffers

In addition to selecting one of the above options, NMFS is considering whether to implement the trip limit scheme with a “seasonal buffer,” as in the current scheme ([50 CFR 300.25](#)). Under the current regulations the reduction points adjust throughout the year, such that more of the total catch limit is available to higher-volume gears as the year progresses. This may help reduce the chance of coastal purse seiners catching a large proportion of the annual limit early in the year, precluding opportunity for smaller-volume gears through the rest of the year. However, smaller-volume commercial gears are free to target PBF throughout the year under any of the trip limit levels, and their landings contribute to the annual catch limits. NMFS seeks feedback from the Council on whether to maintain this seasonal component for the revised trip scheme. We can implement any of the above options with or without the seasonal component.