

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

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) received an update from Rachael Wadsworth (National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)) on International Management Activities and offers the following thoughts and recommendations.

### **Recommendations:**

The HMSAS recommends that the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council):

- 1. Communicate to the U.S. Delegation to the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Convention (IATTC) Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) – Northern Committee (NC) Joint Working Group (JWG) on Pacific Bluefin Tuna the recommendations outlined below on the results of the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE).**
- 2. The U.S. does NOT submit proposals on matters related to North Pacific Albacore this year; but conduct additional stakeholder engagement for the reasons stated below.**
- 3. Communicate to the State Department the need to get approval to conduct bilateral conversations with Canada on a potential future regime.**
- 4. Support the creation of a Joint Working Group between the WCPFC and IATTC to address management of South Pacific Albacore.**
- 5. Communicate to the U.S. Delegation to the IATTC the importance of ensuring progress is made on circle hooks as part of the tropical tuna negotiation this year.**

### **Pacific Bluefin Tuna**

The HMSAS notes the considerable time, effort and management actions that have been taken over the last decade to turn things around for Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF). The turnaround was a collective effort, led by the IATTC WCPFC-NC Joint Working Group (JWG) and supported by the member countries of both Regional Fishery Management Organizations, including significant leadership by the United States delegation. U.S. fishermen, the Council and the States played a key role in accepting catch restrictions that were needed to rebuild the stock, and this has resulted in an unprecedented recovery a decade ahead of schedule.

Last year, PBF quotas increased for the first time for all countries involved, and NMFS has now implemented new domestic regulations that support increased fishing opportunities. These are important gains but are only temporary at this point. PBF is now at another important crossroads. The HMSAS has consistently advocated for a long-term harvest strategy that will ensure that the stock remains healthy and can support U.S. fisheries for the future. The JWG progressed the development of the long-term harvest strategy over the last several years, including the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) that will allow the countries to select a harvest control rule, reference points and other elements needed to guide future management – see the [Draft Executive Summary of the MSE results](#).

This year's negotiations could have far-reaching impacts on the future viability of the West Coast PBF fishery. The HMSAS carefully reviewed the various MSE results and provides the following recommendations to the Council regarding upcoming U.S. positions on Pacific bluefin tuna:

1. Core Principles for U.S. consideration of a long-term harvest strategy:
  - a. The U.S. should not accept anything less than a 70:30 (West – East) allocation of fishing effort to align with the historic access to the fishery by countries in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.
  - b. Primary objectives of the long-term harvest strategy should be to
    - i. maintain and increase the spawning stock biomass above current levels (and the 2<sup>nd</sup> rebuilding target)
    - ii. prevent overfishing (according to commonly used reference points) and
    - iii. [eliminate / limit] the catch of small fish (particularly age-0) in the Western Pacific Ocean that are critical for stock conservation.
  - c. Recruitment uncertainty continues to be a significant concern and any long-term harvest strategy must be paired with efforts to address the recruitment index and additional conservation measures (in the form of exceptional circumstances) that are responsive to evidence of low or declining recruitment trends. The improvements to the recruitment index and additional conservation measures to respond to changes in recruitment need to be in place as soon as possible, and no later than 2027 to align with the current scheduled stock assessment for PBF.
  - d. Recreational fishing should not be included within management measures or country quotas until all countries with significant landings from recreational fisheries demonstrate accurate monitoring, reporting and controls of their recreational fisheries, consistent with the measures currently adopted and enforced in the U.S.
2. Specific considerations for the selection of a harvest control rule (HCR):
  - a. HCRs 9 – 16 support a 70:30 West/East allocation and should be the basis for negotiations.
  - b. Within HCRs 9 – 16, priority should be given to those that prioritize safety and allow for stability in the short to medium term, specifically HCR 10. This HCR will provide an adequate buffer between the threshold (ThRP) and limit (LRP) and will incentivize action to maintain the stock at or above current levels of SSB.
  - c. Do not support HCRs 5, 6, 7, 13, 14 or 15 that have high risks related to safety and significantly increase catch of WCPO small fish.
  - d. Develop additional measures to be included in the HCR that will reduce catch of small fish and specifically age-0 fish if/when the stock status breaches the ThRP and moves toward the LRP.

### **North Pacific Albacore**

Members of the HMSAS attended and participated in the April 25 Stakeholder Workshop intended to gather input from participants on translating fishing intensity into the harvest strategies for North Pacific albacore (NPA) and on draft criteria for identifying exceptional circumstances. The HMSAS recommends NMFS does NOT submit proposals on those items this year; but rather engages with domestic stakeholders before submitting proposals during 2026.

The HMSAS continues to support effort (TAE) controls as opposed to catch (TAC) on surface commercial fisheries and catch controls on others. In preparing for further engagement with domestic stakeholders NMFS should consider providing more clarity on (1) how will “effort” will

be defined for purposes of management, (2) assuring US fishery participants that any Canadian fishing effort in the US EEZ will be attributed to the US when establishing our historic effort per the US-Canada Albacore Treaty (Treaty), (3) what this could mean to fishery participants if a management response is triggered, (4) the potential management and operational implications of an exceptional circumstance. Getting additional clarity on these items should result in more productive conversations and informed suggestions. When considering an appropriate timeframe for future engagement, the HMSAS recommends scheduling an initial workshop/webinar in early to mid-November as this falls between the end of the NPA fishing season and the opening of the dungeness crab fishery.

The HMSAS hopes the State Department will prioritize allowing discussions on a potential regime under the Treaty so those conversations can begin before the end of the year. There remains an interest in a future regime provided the terms are fair to U.S. fishery participants and don't disproportionately benefit Canadian harvesters. We recommend the Council communicate this desire to the State Department.

### **South Pacific Albacore**

The HSMAS received a briefing from the NMFS on the WCPFC endorsement of the delegation paper put forward by the United States on a framework for terms of reference to establish a Joint Working Group (JWG) between the WCPFC and IATTC that will impact the management of South Pacific Albacore (SPA). The HMSAS supports the U.S. taking the lead on formation of the JWG and the stated goals articulated in the JWG framework. The HSMAS encourages the Council to recommend that the US delegation to the JWG prioritize the interests of the West Coast HMS fleet while pursuing their articulated goals of a common approach to harvest strategy, alignment of catch and effort limits, improving monitoring and data exchange through joint scientific research.

Specifically, the HMSAS emphasizes the importance that the JWG recognize the realities of the U.S. pole-and-troll fleets that target SPA including the de-minimis impact of the U.S.-based SPA surface fishery when considering any potential restrictions or management strategies.

Additionally, the HMSAS request to be updated on the continued efforts to implement the JWG including development of Draft Terms and Conditions and developing a work plan schedule.

### **IATTC Circle Hooks**

The NMFS report outlined the recent IATTC circle hook workshop. This workshop is the second workshop on this topic, following a similar workshop in 2024. Unfortunately, the countries could not reach consensus on any of the substantive matters, notably the definition of large circle hook sizes and best handling techniques that are very well supported by the best available science. The HMSAS remains very concerned about the lack of progress on circle hooks at IATTC and encourages the U.S. delegation to take a strong position on the need to make progress on circle hooks in 2025. Lack of progress on circle hooks is not acceptable and should be considered as part of the tropical tuna negotiation this year. This is necessary to level the playing field for U.S. fisheries.