California Pelagic Fisheries Association

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October 14, 2025

Ms. Kelly Denit
Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

RE: EO 14276 Notice Response

Dear Ms. Denit,

The California Pelagic Fisheries Association (CPFA) is a San Diego-based organization representing U.S. fishermen targeting wild, highly migratory fish species (HMS) in the offshore waters off California. Our members fish sustainably with pelagic longline gear, ensuring that enough fish remains in the ocean without affecting the future health of the stock while minimizing impacts on habitats and non-targeted organisms to maintain healthy marine ecosystems. We fish with a series of baited hooks spaced at regular intervals that brings locally caught seafood to U.S. consumers.[1]

Our members were pleased to see President Trump recognized the efforts of the Nation's commercial harvesters by issuing Executive Order 14276 - *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.* And we appreciate the opportunity provided by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to gather public feedback on the EO's priority needs. We offer our comments below.

Level the Playing Field: Of the listed purposes of EO 14276, a critical one identified is the need to level the unfair playing field that has benefited foreign fishing companies. Interestingly, the U.S. has its own issues regarding unfairness in the domestic markets for North Pacific Ocean swordfish, a healthy stock and one of the most lucrative species on the West Coast. Based on

[1] Longline gear is either set in deeper waters primarily for bigeye tuna (deep-set longline) or in shallow waters for swordfish (shallow-set longline).

the most recent stock assessment, there is no evidence that overfishing is occurring or that there is a substantial depletion in its spawning potential. However, our members do not have access to this stock using shallow-set longlines that specifically target swordfish because the State of California does not recognize it as an authorized gear, and this position is further supported by the Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC). As a result, our members, fishing under a West Coast HMS permit cannot use this gear either inside or outside the 200-mile EEZ while their counterparts fishing under Hawai'i Longline Limited Entry permit use this gear outside the 200-mile EEZ and unload their swordfish catch at U.S. West Coast ports. And to further highlight this unfairness, foreign vessels also fish for swordfish up to the West Coast 200-mile EEZ line even though they cannot land in West Coast ports.

A way to correct this inequity is for the PFMC to consider scoping both a shallow-set longline fishery and a deep-set longline fishery inside the U.S. EEZ. The PFMC's HMS Advisory Subpanel included this solution in their Report on Council Response to Executive Orders and Administration Updates presented at the September 2025 PFMC meeting.

Static Boundary Lines and Advanced Technologies: The West Coast prohibitions are configured on the 200-mile EEZ line and the 150° W. longitudinal line and date back to long held concerns about leatherback and loggerhead sea turtle interactions and efforts to minimize commercial and recreational interactions. However, without taking environmental variability into account, static approaches for spatial management are ineffective as productive habitats shift. Perhaps managers should consider more advanced methods using satellite data to track ocean features and targeted species movements within the context of potential interactions between fishing activities and protected species as an important component for managing pelagic HMS stocks. Many fishery scientists, including those working out of the Southwest Fisheries Science Center, have been at the forefront of advancing such technological advances. Using these species distribution models could help manage U.S. fisheries more effectively. Specifically, real-time environmental information should be used as a tool to help fishermen and also to revisit historic closed areas that have never been updated.

Exempted Fishing Permits: A valuable feature of the Magnuson-Stevens Conservation and Management Act is that it allows NMFS to issue exempted fishing permits (EFPs) for testing alternative fishing practices otherwise prohibited. The use of EFPs for testing alternative gear options that minimize bycatch while remaining economically viable and are subsequently authorized as approved gears is a way to increase fishery production off the West Coast. And the primary focus of these EFPs should be inside the West Coast EEZ.

It is important to note that one drawback of the program is that it requires significant time and investment to understand basic requirements. Perhaps providing assistance, such as the Marine Resource Education Program, could accelerate better understanding of the process by explaining the complexity of fisheries science and management. In addition, establishing a more standardized record-keeping process and a best practices guide could facilitate better documentation, cross-learning from other project ideas, and lessen administrative burdens on EFP staff. Finally, more EFPs could happen with government financial support to help with start-

up costs. Perhaps the administration should also examine providing financial aid to help U.S. fishermen undertake EFPs, as it considers providing financial aid from tariff revenues for U.S. farmers in the agricultural sector.

Accelerate EFP Consultation Process: To ensure the use of the highest fishing standards and address potential impacts when granting EFPs, NMFS prepares the required analyses and consultations under the National Environmental Policy Act, Essential Fish Habitat, Endangered Species Acts, and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. These consultations can take an inordinate amount of time to prepare and complete. We believe this process needs to be reversed so that these consultations become simpler and more efficient in preparing. The agency could remedy this if it had the resources to undertake these mandated consultations simultaneously rather than sequentially. We recommend increasing the budgets of the NMFS Protected Resources and Sustainable Fisheries divisions to alleviate this bottleneck.

Accelerate the EFP Review Process: The research and development of new fishing methods through the use of EFPs is an important aspect of managing sustainable fisheries. However, the entire process of undertaking the EFP to approving the method as an authorized gear needs to be shortened. The case of the deep-set buoy gear (DSBG) swordfish fishery off the West Coast is a good example. Amendment 6 to the Fishery Management Plan for West Coast Fisheries for HMS, that allows DSBG as a federally permitted gear type for targeting swordfish in Federal waters, took over nine years from the time the Council began scoping and making its final recommendations in September 2019 to final approval by NMFS in March 2023. The inclusion of the PFMC's extended input resulted in applicants being subjected to the timing of the Council's meeting schedule, and a larger investment in Council staff time. Because many other NMFS regions have not used these same procedures in the EFP approval process, the agency should review efforts for national consistency, and at the very least, require council consultations only on an "as-needed" basis.

We would be remiss not to mention that the PFMC supports an Ad Hoc HMS Fisheries Innovation Workgroup that includes four Council members. The workgroup has provided recommendations for identifying innovative HMS gears, examined procedures to improve the EFP process, including potential modifications to its HMS operating procedures, and considered acceptable levels of bycatch in HMS. However, it is the last topic that often hampers the group's progress. What is considered acceptable levels of bycatch should be left to the NMFS biologists.

Graying of the Fleet: Another factor inherent to seafood production is the reality of the "graying of the fleet," something affecting all U.S. fisheries. This trend of the increasing average age of commercial fishermen, resulting in part from young entrants not entering the industry, is problematic. To reverse this trend requires promoting opportunities for young, enthusiastic men and women to enter the industry. To this end, we support congressional efforts to reauthorize the Young Fishermen's Development Act to support commercial fishing training for new apprentices and existing young harvesters.

Acknowledge Exceptional Fishing Standards: Much has changed in longline fishing gear since the PFMC imposed its prohibition on the use of that gear in 2004. Even going back to the mid-90s, industry has worked with NMFS scientists in developing effective bycatch reduction technologies such as hook design, bait type, and seabird deterrent measures to reduce interactions with non-targeted megafauna. These advances have enabled the U.S. to maintain the highest longline fishing standards globally. But HMS fishing methods can always improve. CPFA members recently received an EFP from NMFS' West Coast Region for targeting robust HMS stocks inside the EEZ, testing modified longlines. The EFP will allow them to conduct fishing trials to explore new configurations and areas for gathering information on whether these gear modifications can achieve optimum yield while continuing to minimize bycatch. As the U.S. continues to champion the transformation of longline gear into a more selective fishing method, we believe the agency could improve its communication with U.S. seafood consumers so they understand that U.S. managed seafood uses the highest fishing standards available.

In closing, we thank the agency for the opportunity to share our thoughts. A chief aim stated in Executive Order 14276 is promoting and increasing domestic production within sustainable fisheries. This priority, if successful, will help augment the supply of domestic seafood and increase related industry jobs. However, despite its recognized importance as a source of nutrition and sustenance, commercial fishing lags in its recognition as an important food production system from harvesting to distribution to use. A greater emphasis on the connection between seafood production and consumption can help distinguish our industry's efforts alongside those of the Nation's top food producers for advancing food security.

Sincerely,



Dave Rudie
President, California Pelagic Fisheries Association

Cc: Ryan Wulff, ryan.wulff@noaa.gov