

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (“HMSAS”) offers the following comments on the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Report.

Final List of Fisheries for 2018

The HMSAS agrees with the recent reclassification of the Large-mesh Drift Gill Net (DGN) fishery from a Category I fishery (frequent incidental Mortality/Serious Injury of marine mammals) to a Category II fishery (occasional incidental Mortality/Serious Injury of marine mammals). Other Category II fisheries operating off the U.S. West Coast include – California Spiny Lobster Fishery, California Spot Prawn Fishery, Washington/Oregon/California Sablefish Pot, etc. The HMSAS applauds the DGN fishery and its participants for continued efforts to reduce interactions with marine mammals and other protected species and species of concern. With additional mitigation measures being considered and/or researched (i.e., different frequency pingers, break-away panels, deeper net extenders) and the continued commitment of fishery participants to not deploy their gear in areas where such species are known to be present, this fishery is poised to provide a stable supply of locally harvested seafood to the Nation.

Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) for Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) Capacity Limits for purse seine vessels on the IATTC Regional Vessel Register

The HMSAS fully supports the intent of this proposed rulemaking. The HMSAS understands this is meant to address what happened in 2017, when a number of small California based purse seine vessels were omitted from the IATTC vessel registry. The HMSAS would be remiss if it did not offer appreciation to NMFS staff for ensuring those small California-based purse seine vessels who applied to be included on the 2018 IATTC vessel registry, were so included.

Updates on HMS International Activities: Pacific bluefin tuna Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) meeting

The HMSAS appreciates that NMFS will be holding a Management Listening Session before the upcoming May MSE meeting in Japan. Because of the importance of Pacific bluefin tuna to all members of the HMSAS, we would appreciate if the Council would consider allocating funding to send a member of the HMSAS to this meeting.

The HMSAS appreciates the efforts of the Southwest Fisheries Science Center and NMFS in scheduling a MSE workshop on March 28, in La Jolla, to better understand the role and scope of MSE in the management process.

Import Restrictions under the Marine Mammal Protection Act Update List of foreign fisheries

The HMSAS applauds this initiative and hopes the Program's implementation will reduce the competitive disadvantage U.S.-based HMS fishermen face. Imports from nations with less restrictive regulatory programs are often cheaper than domestically sourced fish and fish products. The HMSAS believes that some exporting nations will not be able to obtain the necessary comparability finding. This potential decrease in foreign supply should result in opportunities for U.S.-based harvesters; and the HMSAS supports management actions which will enable that demand to be filled by domestic sources.

Final Rule for 2018 Pacific bluefin tuna trip limits

The HMSAS is disappointed that the final rule may subject U.S. commercial fishing vessels to a 1-metric ton (mt) trip limit – except large-mesh drift gillnet, which would be subject to a 2-mt trip limit – throughout 2018. In our November 2017 Statement, we recommended a 2-mt trip limit for 2018 without regard to gear type – see https://www.pcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/H2c_Sup_HMSAS_Rpt1_Intl_MGMT_NOV2017BB.pdf. The HMSAS recognizes the need stay below the 600-mt biennial catch limit; but believes a 2-mt trip limit would give NMFS and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife ample time to close the fishery in a timely fashion.

Confidentiality of Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data

The HMSAS is concerned about the potential misuse of VMS data for non-law enforcement purposes. In February of this year, a study was published entitled *Fishermen Follow Fine-Scale Physical Ocean Features for Finance* – see <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2018.00046/full>. Within that study is the following statement, “The locations of tuna, salmon and shrimp vessels were obtained from a VMS dataset provided by the National Marine Fisheries Service's Office of Law Enforcement (OLE).” Because members of the HMSAS view VMS data as confidential business information/trade secrets, we are concerned that such information is being used for non-law enforcement purposes.

PFMC
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