

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

NMFS is providing the information below on the pending Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) proposed rule.

NMFS is developing a proposed rule to domestically implement Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) Resolutions regarding PBF under authority of the Tuna Conventions Act of 1950. NMFS intends to publish this proposed rule in the Federal Register in advance of the November 2018 Council meeting, and will provide additional information in a Supplemental NMFS report should it publish in time. In this report, NMFS is providing an early glance at the proposed action.

At its August 2018 meeting, the IATTC adopted Resolutions C-18-01 (Measures for the Conservation and Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, 2019 and 2020) and C-18-02 (Amendment to Resolution C-16-08 on a Long-term Management Framework for the Conservation and Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean). Resolution C-18-01 maintains commercial catch limits from the previous IATTC Resolution (C-16-08), which applied to 2017 and 2018, and includes provisions such that over- or under-harvest of previous biennial catch limits (under Resolution C-16-08) are applied to the new catch limits. Resolution C-18-02 describes the framework for these under- and over-harvest provisions.

In the proposed rule, NMFS includes catch and trip limits for 2019 and 2020 for U.S. commercial vessels that catch PBF in the eastern Pacific Ocean. The biennial catch limit for both years combined is 600 metric tons (mt)—pending the addition or subtraction of any under-harvest or over-harvest from the previous catch limit for 2017-2018. Catch may not exceed 425 mt in a single year. Consistent with a September 2018 Council recommendation, NMFS would propose a 300-mt limit for 2019. The annual limit in 2020 would be calculated based on the biennial catch limit, the 2019 catch, and the 425-mt single-year limit established in C-18-01. Also based on a Council recommendation, a 15 mt trip limit would be in effect until catch is within 50 mt of the annual limit (e.g., 250 mt in 2019), and a 2 mt trip limit when catch is within 50 mt of the annual limit.

If approved, NMFS would also propose reporting requirements to assist in monitoring and managing the catch limit. NMFS would impose electronic landing receipt (e-ticket) submission timeline requirements and a pre-trip notification applicable to U.S. purse seine vessels. As of July 1, 2019, e-tickets will be required under the California Code of Regulations. NMFS would require that the e-tickets be submitted within 24 hours of any PBF landing.

During the period when the commercial PBF trip limit is 15 mt, purse seine vessels would be required to provide NMFS with a notice of intent to depart on a fishing trip that may result in landing PBF. The vessel may receive a penalty if it lands PBF and the pre-trip notification was not received. The pre-trip notification would assist NMFS in monitoring catch for purposes of reducing trip limits and fishery closure requirements. For the purposes of tracking catch of PBF, NMFS would assume that 15 mt of PBF will be caught on every trip noticed. In each year, this

catch accounting would be used to estimate when catch is expected to reach either the threshold to reduce the trip limit (i.e., within 50 mt of the annual limit) or the annual limit. NMFS would then take inseason action based on those estimates. NMFS would also encourage operators of purse seine vessels to call NMFS in advance of landing with an estimate of PBF catch. Lastly, NMFS would implement inseason actions more quickly by making decisions effective upon posting on the NMFS WCR website, and by broadcasting by radio via a United States Coast Guard (USCG) Notice to Mariners, as opposed to a notice in the Federal Register. NMFS would follow up with a notice in the Federal Register as soon as practicable.

The proposed rule, if published as currently drafted, differs from the September 2018 Council recommendation in two ways. First, the pre-trip notification was not part of the recommendation, but it was discussed at the September 2018 Council meeting without opposition. It is included in the proposed rule as a method to ensure more accurate monitoring of the catch and trip limits. Second, the Council recommended that the trip limit be reduced when catch was within 100 mt of the 2019 catch limit, rather than the 50 mt proposed. NMFS is not proposing 100 mt because the catch and trip limits can be monitored and managed with the new proposed reporting requirements (pre-trip notification, e-ticket submission within 24 hours) and closure procedure (posting on website and USCG Notice to Mariners). Such reporting requirements will allow NMFS to close the fishery when limits are estimated to be reached. Additionally, the proposed rule would follow a similar procedure as used to close the fishery to re-open the fishery in the event catch was underestimated and re-opening would be consistent with the management objectives of the fishery.

PFMC
10/25/2018