

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON BIENNIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES – PRELIMINARY ACTION

Status Determination Criteria in Stock Assessment and Fisheries Evaluation

In September 2018, the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) was directed to develop a Stock Assessment and Fisheries Evaluation (SAFE) report for the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) to consider. The HMSMT has prepared a new section of the SAFE, related to stock status ([Agenda Item J.3.a, HMSMT Report 1](#)), which includes estimates of maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and status determination criteria (SDC) provided by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (September 2018 Council meeting [Agenda Item H.4.a, NMFS Report 1](#)), which the Council recommended to be reviewed by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in advance of this meeting.

After reviewing the SSC's report ([Agenda Item J.3.a, Supplemental SSC Report 1](#)), the HMSMT recommends that the Council not task the SSC with future review of MSY and SDC for highly migratory species (HMS) stocks, due to the SSC's conclusion that discrepancies are generally small and none of them seemed likely to impact the status determinations. Consequently, the HMSMT does not feel that it is a necessary or prudent use of resources to request the SSC to review the HMS SDC during future biennial cycles, unless something of specific concern is brought to the Council's attention .

Yellowfin Tuna in the Eastern Pacific Ocean Overfishing Stock Status Determination

The HMSMT discussed the notification letter the Council received from NMFS dated November 2, 2018 ([Agenda Item J.3.a, Supplemental NMFS Report 2](#)), on the status of the Eastern Pacific Ocean stock of Yellowfin tuna, to which the Council has one year to respond under MSA 304(i). The HMSMT recommends that the Council wait to provide its response until after the next stock assessment, which is expected to be available in May 2019, for the following reasons:

- Based on the 2018 stock assessment, NMFS determined the stock to be subject to overfishing based on the 2015 through 2017 estimate of fishing mortality being 0.01 (1%) over the maximum fishing mortality threshold.
- More restrictive management measures were recently implemented for 2018-2020.
- The 2019 stock assessment is expected to include data through 2018, which may provide some insights into the level of fishing mortality under the current management regime and may not result in an overfishing determination.

The Council can make recommendations based on this information at the June 2019 Council meeting, which would enable the Council to respond within the one-year deadline regardless of the 2019 status determination.

Pacific Bluefin Tuna Long-Term Management

Regarding the long-term management for Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF), the Council directed the HMSMT and HMS Advisory Subpanel to begin developing a long-term management strategy for PBF, recognizing that the stock is rebuilding and there is an opportunity for U.S. catch limits to increase in future years (see September 2018 Decision Summary). The HMSMT notes that NMFS is currently in the process of proposing management of PBF for 2019-2020 and that the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission is likely to adopt another resolution on PBF in 2020 applicable to 2021 and beyond. The Council should consider developing a schedule to address long-term management of PBF in future agenda planning. The HMSMT views development of management objectives for the future of the PBF fishery as a useful first step in addressing the long-term management of PBF.

The HMSMT also notes that the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean management strategy evaluation (MSE) for PBF is still in its early stages. The domestic development of management objectives and strategies are distinct from the process of developing similar concepts in the international arena for the PBF MSE. However, domestic objectives and strategies could be communicated to the PBF MSE participants for consideration for inclusion in the MSE.

PFMC
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