

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE (NMFS) REPORT ON A PACIFIC BLUEFIN TUNA STAKEHOLDER MEETING AND INPUT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF COUNCIL HARVEST STRATEGY

On May 2, 2019, NMFS West Coast Region hosted a stakeholder meeting in Long Beach, California to discuss management of Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF). The purpose of this meeting was to consider a set of management objectives and tools that could inform Council discussion of a long-term harvest strategy for the U.S. commercial PBF fishery (see [September 2018 Decision Summary](#)). Forty-five participants attended, representing recreational and commercial fishing interests, CDFW, and NOAA. This report provides an overview of the meeting and includes stakeholder recommendations for management objectives and tools. NMFS did not require the recommendations to achieve consensus in the room; therefore, this report includes all stakeholder recommendations that resulted from the meeting discussions.

Stock status and current management of PBF

The meeting began with an overview of the status of the PBF stock and current management measures, including agreements of the IATTC and implementing regulations. Purse seine fishing industry participants expressed concerns with the recently published final rule to implement IATTC Resolutions C-18-01 and C-18-02 for the domestic commercial fishery. In particular, these participants expressed frustration and possible complications with the 24-hour pre-trip notification. The participants suggested alternatives, such as a pre-landing phone call by the buyer.

Objectives for U.S. commercial PBF fishery

Participants discussed both long-term and short-term objectives for the commercial PBF fishery. The initial discussion focused on providing a high-value/high-quality PBF product to the market. Ideas included using longline gear to target PBF, farming PBF off of the U.S. West Coast, and further developing a hook-and-line fishery for PBF. Some participants noted the positive (and historical) impacts of fishing with gears like purse seine on the broader community; for example, not only fishermen and buyers benefit from these harvests, but so do processors, canneries, and consumers. Participants acknowledged that the different gears target different markets.

Management tools

After a discussion of stakeholder objectives, NMFS presented example management tools. NMFS began by describing the rationale for current PBF regulations, and changes made between the latest proposed and final rulemaking implementing those regulations. NMFS presented management measures for Atlantic bluefin tuna, which includes gear allocations and an individual transferable quota system. NMFS discussed management tools identified by the HMSAS in their [September 2018 report](#), and potential pros and cons. Participants then engaged in a discussion of tools to consider for the U.S. commercial fishery in both near-term and longer-term timeframes. Again, participants reiterated their frustration with the pre-trip notification, but engaged in a constructive discussion and offered alternative ideas on management tools.

Other topics

Lastly, participants discussed interests that were not necessarily related to management objectives or tools. There is an interest in seeing more funding for research into PBF migration patterns and hotspots, so that management measures can better account for the spatial distribution of the stock. In particular, fishery-independent data, such as from aerial transects, could be beneficial.

Stakeholder Recommendations

The following is a summary of recommendations discussed during the meeting.

Fishery Management Objectives:

1. Maximize value with high-quality PBF.
2. Fully utilize the U.S. catch limit, as this will assist in future negotiations.
3. Provide flexibility for harvest operations to maximize profits; for example, allow vessels to choose to target different stocks without losing opportunities to target PBF.
4. Support fishing communities and related industries (e.g., canneries).
5. Maintain fishing opportunity for all fishing sectors (e.g., purse seine, hook-and-line).
6. Incentivize catch of larger fish, but without penalty or regulatory discards.

Management Tools:

1. Explore using longline gear and ranching for PBF in U.S. waters.
2. Research methods to improve size selectivity.
3. Consider pre-landing or daily call-in by vessels or markets, to assist in tracking of catch. This was discussed as an alternative to a pre-trip notification.
4. Consider an earlier threshold, or trigger, to reduce trip limits and make the trip limit intermediate in quantity compared to current limits; for example, reduce the trip limit to 5 or 7 metric tons when within 100 mt of the annual limit (the current regulations reduce the trip limit to 2 mt when within 50 mt of the annual limit).
5. Use e-tickets before July 1, 2019, which is when e-tickets will be required by the State of California. *NMFS notes that this deadline is soon approaching, and exploring this recommendation will not be feasible at this time.*
6. Consider an individual vessel quota (IVQ) system once a certain threshold for catch is reached. The example provided by a stakeholder during the meeting was specific to purse seine vessels. For example, if the annual limit is 400 metric tons, after 250 mt has been caught, begin allocating tonnage to specific purse seine vessels.
7. Allow transfer of fish if a purse seine vessel wraps more than the trip limit. *NMFS notes that this is distinct from a transshipment, which is defined in regulations implemented under the Tuna Conventions Act as unloading fish from a vessel that caught fish to another vessel (50 CFR 300.21). The regulations implementing the High Seas Fishing Compliance Act define a transshipment as “offloading or receiving or otherwise transferring fish or fish products from one fishing vessel to another. Excluded from this definition is net sharing, which means the transfer of fish that have not yet been loaded on board any fishing vessel from the purse seine net of one vessel to another fishing vessel. Fish shall be considered to be on board a fishing vessel once they are on a deck or in a hold, or once they are first lifted out of the water by the vessel.”*
8. Explore the use of temporary pens.

9. Include VMS on purse seine vessels to assist in reporting. If VMS is already on board, use it for reporting catch.
10. Consider allocations by gear-type. Take into consideration influx of private vessels fishing under commercial permits.
11. Consider IVQs possibly to apply only to purse seine vessels, with caution for consolidation effects.

NMFS perspectives

The management tools recommended by stakeholders fall into two categories: (1) those which can be evaluated for implementation in the near-term, and (2) those which likely need more time to be evaluated for implementation. For example, a near-term tool for consideration could be a pre-landing call-in option as a modification to the final rule, whereas an IVQ system for commercial management of PBF would require more time to implement.

If stakeholders and the Council wish to further explore near-term options for changes in domestic management of commercial PBF, NMFS encourages the Council to consider scheduling a discussion of such alternatives soon. Notably, the IATTC is expected to negotiate a new resolution for PBF, applicable to 2021, during its annual meeting in the summer of 2020. Council recommendations in advance of the IATTC's annual meeting in 2020 could inform U.S. positions at that meeting. Additionally, NMFS anticipates preparing a proposed rule after the IATTC annual meeting in 2020 to implement a new resolution on PBF. Therefore, the Council's schedule for discussion on the PBF harvest strategy could be streamlined with implementation of Council recommendations for the management of the U.S. commercial PBF fishery.