

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT
HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES

U.S. – Canada Albacore Treaty Meeting: Delegations to the Treaty met in Portland, Oregon on May 23-24. The U.S. delegation was represented by Council members and staff, the harvesting and processing sectors, the Oregon Albacore Commission, the states of Oregon and Washington, Department of State, NMFS, NOAA’s Office of Law Enforcement, and the U.S. Coast Guard. Canada was represented by their Department of Fisheries and Oceans including enforcement, Consulate General, harvesters, and the Canadian Highly Migratory Species Foundation.

After the data exchange for the 2011 fishing season, the Canadians offered a fishing regime proposal for 2012 and beyond. The reason for their proposal is that no fishing regime currently exists for 2012 because the previous one expired at the end of the 2011-fishing season. The Canadian proposal addressed three key themes: restricting vessel size when replacing a vessel allowed to fish in the U.S. EEZ; prohibiting the leasing/transfer of Canadian vessel licenses with permits to fish in the U.S. EEZ; and contributing funds to scientific research. The U.S. harvesters have repeatedly raised the first two issues as problematic and this was Canada’s initial effort to resolve concerns about increased capacity and aggressive fishing behavior. The Canadians did not offer to reduce the 110 vessels that were allowed to fish in the U.S. EEZ during the last regime.

The U.S. delegation considered the proposal and internally discussed offering an interim fishing regime for 2012 but in subsequent bilateral discussions with the Canadians, acknowledged that the U.S. delegation was not in a position to offer an agreement for reciprocal fishing in 2012. The meeting was concluded by the United States stating that the 2012 suspension should not be viewed as a step for getting rid of the Treaty but rather as a way to strengthen it and that we would be working towards a 2013 regime. Both countries agreed to continue working and sharing additional data that would be taken up by both the Data and Economic Working Groups.

Scientific Advisory Subcommittee (SAS) to the U.S. Section to the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) Meeting. On May 30, 2012, the 3rd Meeting of the SAS to the U.S. Section to the IATTC met in Carlsbad, California. The SAS drafted recommendations to be presented to the General Advisory Committee (GAC) to the IATTC. These recommendations include, but are not limited to: 1) support of IATTC staff recommendations for tuna conservation measures in 2012 – 2013 for yellowfin, bigeye, and skipjack tuna, 2) support for IATTC staff recommendations for North Pacific albacore tuna that calls for the establishment of an *ad hoc* working group to develop an operational definition of the “current levels” of effort specified in Resolution C-05-02 and that the resolution be amended to require that the 6-month reports also include information on effort in addition to the currently required reporting on catch; 3) support for providing similar conservation measures to silky sharks as was done last year for oceanic whitetip sharks; 4) support for efforts to facilitate discussions between Mexico and Japan and other IATTC members for improving coordination and communication on issues related to Pacific bluefin conservation., and 5) support for the sea turtle recommendations of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles. Lengthy discussions also revolved around the impact of FAD fishing with the SAS suggesting the GAC consider the

importance of synthesis and evaluation of reported data to monitor compliance of proposed FAD management measures.

General Advisory Committee Meeting. On May 31, 2012, the 18th Meeting of the General Advisory Committee (GAC) to the U.S. Section to the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) met in Carlsbad, CA. Dr. Rick Deriso of the IATTC gave a presentation that highlighted stock status updates for the yellowfin, bigeye, skipjack, and North Pacific albacore tuna. Jeremy Rusin, chair of the SAS, presented committee recommendations to the GAC for consideration at the 2012 annual IATTC meeting. Lengthy discussions revolved around the recent vessel buyback workshop and the IATTC Capacity Working Group. Other regional fisheries management organizations have recently passed resolutions on capacity. Potential impacts of these resolutions and how they may be handled by the IATTC were discussed. There was agreement that the vessel buyback programs as currently proposed would be difficult to implement and would not likely have any conservation benefits. Other lengthy discussions revolved around but were not limited to: 1) IATTC Resolution C-05-02 (Resolution on Northern Albacore Tuna) and its potential effect on U.S. and Canada Albacore Treaty; 2) cross-training observers to serve in both eastern Pacific Ocean and the Western and Central Pacific Ocean; 3) the Antigua Convention and its U.S. legislative status; 4) the potential for individual boat quotas as a conservation measure; and 5) proposals and resolutions, both current and potential, which may be discussed as part of the 2012 IATTC meetings.