

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN 2,
ANNUAL CATCH LIMITS AND ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the final revisions to the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Amendment 2 and options proposed to bring the plan into conformity with National Standard 1 (NS1) guidelines. Drs. Stephen Stohs and Suzanne Kohin of the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) presented a review of the steps taken to bring the plan into compliance and how they incorporated prior SSC advice into Amendment 2.

The HMSMT presented four alternatives for the management unit species (MUS) to be included in the FMP. The SSC finds that all three of the proposed alternatives for MUS are preferable to the status quo alternative. All of the potential species in the FMP qualify for international exemption for annual catch limits (ACLs) because they are managed by Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs), such as the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. Many of these species (but not all) are also regularly assessed by RFMOs, and have acceptable estimates of the required status determination criteria (SDC).

The SSC notes that alternatives 3 and 4 include proposals for active Council management of shark species that will require computation of acceptable biological catch (ABCs) and ACLs. The two shark species under consideration are shortfin mako and common thresher sharks. The HMSMT presented catch and catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) data and discussed approaches to calculate overfishing limits (OFLs) and ACLs catch limits for these species. The SSC concurs with the HMSMT that common thresher and shortfin mako may need additional attention because of local importance and low assessment priority by RFMOs.

Common thresher has a coastal distribution (U.S. and Mexico) and a time series of catch and effort data that may make it possible to estimate ABCs and OFLs. Shortfin mako does not have as extensive data and is more widely distributed, especially offshore, which may make it difficult to derive catch limit estimates for this species. The SSC was informed that catch and CPUE trends for common thresher shark may not reflect abundance due to bias induced by management changes over time. The SSC agreed with the HMSMT that if this species is considered for active management, CPUE data would need to be standardized to correct for potential biases. Further, model-based approaches for estimating OFLs and ABCs may be feasible for these species, and would be preferred over average catch methods.

The HMSMT is currently revising portions of the FMP and the SSC notes that there are instances of inconsistent language, particularly the heavy reliance on the annual optimum yield (OY) concept remaining from prior versions of the FMP. Revisions are needed to conform to terms used in NS1 guidelines, and annual catch limits should be recast in terms of OFLs, ABCs and ACLs.