

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON  
FUTURE COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA AND WORKLOAD PLANNING

Under this agenda item the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) is asking for an agenda item to be placed on the November agenda which would involve clarification of the Council's assignment to the HMSMT to see if changes could be made to the closure dates or the southern boundary of the Pacific Leatherback Conservation Area (PLCA) to enhance opportunities in the California swordfish drift gillnet fishery. The HMSMT would also like to clarify if its assignment could include other recommended changes if supported by the best available science. To fulfill this assignment the HMSMT would like to include scientists from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southwest Fisheries Science Center and staff from the Protected Resources Division and the Observer Program of the NMFS Southwest Region.

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) strongly supports putting this item, as requested, on the Council's November agenda. The HMSMT would be utilizing the skills of scientists who have expertise in the life history, foraging ecology, and movement of Pacific leatherback sea turtles; spatial-temporal habitat distribution of swordfish; and metric and statistical requirements for rare event sampling.

The HMSAS would also like to point out that starting the HMSMT on this project is particularly timely since NMFS will this coming week be presenting an update to the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council on rulemaking in the Hawaiian shallow-set longline fishery for swordfish, which, if approved, would allow an increase in take from 18 leatherback sea turtles to 26 and from the current 17 to 35 for loggerheads. Clearly, such a rulemaking should be considered Pacific-wide to avoid inequities which might arise between the two Councils.