

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) received an update on International Management Activities impacting HMS stocks from Celia Barroso, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries West Coast Regional Office. The HMSAS notes that several significant decisions are expected this year at the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), including action on important West Coast fisheries such as North Pacific albacore (NPA), Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF), and swordfish. In addition, the WCPFC will renegotiate the tropical tuna measure that is likely to influence all other decisions, including northern stocks. The HMSAS appreciates the Council's continued active participation in these discussions.

The HMSAS requests that the Council communicate the following priorities to NOAA Fisheries for international decisions in 2023:

- **North Pacific albacore:** Adopt a harvest control rule at IATTC and WCPFC that completes measures passed in 2022 and ensures that management covers the full range of the species, including from 0 to 20 degrees North throughout the Pacific. Additional detailed comments are below.
- **Pacific bluefin tuna:** Acknowledging that the stock is approaching the second rebuilding target, the HMSAS continues to support a precautionary approach for PBF. The HMSAS requests that the U.S. delegation focus on making substantive progress on a comprehensive long-term harvest strategy and East- West allocation as a precondition to any discussions on revisions to current management measures.
- **Swordfish:** Propose and adopt a proposal at WCPFC to cover management from the equator to 20 degrees North and ensure it is consistent with the measure passed in 2022.
- **US – Canada Treaty:** U.S. participants in the NPA fishery look forward to the April 18–19, 2023, in-person talks with the Canadian delegation focused on a potential regime.
- **Circle hooks:** Advance a proposal to align guidance on circle hook sizes based on the best available science and advice from relevant working groups.
- **North Pacific striped marlin:** NP striped marlin in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) is the primary source stock for West Coast Exclusive Economic Zone waters and is an important recreational fishery target. We recommend that the U.S. delegation continue to press hard to take action on the depleted status of the stock as delay is likely to worsen the condition of the stock and transfer the conservation burden to future fisherman.

North Pacific albacore

The HMSAS would like to thank National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for following through on the Council's previous request to engage with stakeholders early in 2023 to inform the U.S. position for upcoming international decisions. The HMSAS appreciates NOAA's workshop with stakeholders held on February 15th and for seeking input on a range of issues to help define the

specifics of a harvest control rule (HCR). Industry stakeholder involvement will be important in finalizing a U.S. position. The HMSAS remains concerned that many of the concepts presented were not easily understandable to most industry participants. We appreciate NMFS remaining open to hearing from industry outside of the Council process.

Development of the U.S. position is on a short timeframe and NMFS intends to have a negotiation position for the July WCPFC Northern Committee meeting. Therefore, this may be the last realistic chance for Council input into the formulation of a U.S. position on the NPA HCR.

The HMSAS supports NMFS' first draft of the HCR proposal and offers specific feedback and suggestions. The HMSAS supports the following points in the draft proposal:

- The HCR covers all harvest across the entire range of the species.
- The EPO surface (directed) fishery is under effort constraints and non-target fisheries are under catch constraints.
- Allows harvest removals over the target reference point fishing intensity (F_{45}) as long as the average biomass remains at F_{45} over 10 years.
- The formula for setting fishing mortality (F) if the stock were to go below the biomass threshold and above the limited reference point (LRP).
- The stability provision that limits changes in F in a management period.
- A minimum level of fishing (F_{min}) as defined in this proposal and the concept that fishing would continue at F_{min} even if biomass goes below the LRP.
- The harvest ratios provision that allocates catch per member at appropriate reference years if the biomass drops below the threshold reference point (ThRP).
- The inclusion of language to allow changes if exceptional circumstances are identified.

The HMSAS notes the following points for further clarification and improvement in the proposal:

- Further specify the management to the Target Reference Point (TRP) that is determined based on future projection ("next 10 years"), consistent with the management strategy evaluation (MSE) output.
- Clarify the implementation of the F formula as it applies below the ThRP pursuant to a defined management period.
- Further clarification on the "rebuilding provision," including whether/how additional management measures could be adopted as well as inclusion of a provision to ensure that rebuilding to the ThRP will occur within 10 years of the stock assessment finding that biomass has declined below the LRP.
- We are concerned that other countries may use the exceptional circumstances provision to undermine the harvest strategy and suggest adding "unexpected and significant changes" and other language as appropriate.
- Further clarification would be appreciated on which fisheries would be subject to catch controls versus those subject to effort controls.

In addition, the HMSAS requests that NOAA continue to advance proposals that will ensure that North Pacific albacore management is consistent across the IATTC and WCPFC, including from the equator to 20 degrees North in the WCPO.

The HMSAS requests that the Council submit these comments to NMFS as a Council position to inform further revisions to the draft proposal.

Pacific bluefin tuna

The HMSAS continues to emphasize the growing importance of this fishery that is providing additional fishing opportunities to West Coast stakeholders. In addition, the HMSAS notes the new information from NMFS that confirms overfishing has ended – this is an important milestone for this fishery and international efforts must maintain this progress.

The HMSAS remains concerned that other countries will seek to increase quotas in the WCPO and this could have significant impacts on the EPO and the ability for U.S. fleets to rebalance quota consistent with historic levels. Significant work is needed to define the long-term management (harvest strategy) for PBF, and this must continue to be the top priority for the U.S. delegation as we approach the second rebuilding target. We continue to support the ongoing efforts to implement the MSE as quickly as possible. West Coast stakeholders appreciate and look forward to NOAA's upcoming workshop on PBF management where these issues can be discussed in detail.

The HMSAS recommends that the Council communicate the following priorities to NMFS as they develop the U.S. position on PBF in the months ahead:

- **Maintain a precautionary approach on PBF and focus on adopting the long-term harvest strategy elements (management objectives/ performance indicators, reference points, HCRs, MSE) in 2023. In addition, further discussions are needed to rebalance quota allocation between the EPO and the WCPO, as well as an equitable allocation in the EPO. Progress on these elements is needed and should be a precondition to any discussions of changes to current management measures and/or new interim harvest control rules.**
- **Oppose efforts by other countries to seek new exemptions to current measures, particularly exemptions in the WCPFC that create an unlevel playing field on discards or bycatch of PBF.**
- **Encourage bilateral discussions with other countries so that they come prepared to agree to elements of the long-term harvest strategy and MSE at the upcoming Joint Working Group meeting in July.**

Swordfish

The HMSAS notes with appreciation that the U.S. delegation secured passage of a new conservation measure for swordfish at WCPFC19. However, this measure was limited in its scope to only north of 20 degrees. This stock must be managed throughout its range and the HMSAS notes the concerning comments of other countries that resisted a comprehensive measure. **The HMSAS requests that the Council communicate the following position to NMFS as proposals are being developed and considered in 2023:**

- **The Council urges the U.S. delegation to formulate and advance a proposal for WCPFC20 that will ensure stock-wide and consistent management of swordfish from the equator to 20 degrees north, in line with WCPFC CMM 2022-02.**

United Nations Treaty on Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)

The HMSAS noted the recent adoption of the U.N. BBNJ treaty that may have implications for international fisheries management of highly migratory species. **The HMSAS asks the Council**

to request a briefing at the June Council meeting, including a briefing with the HMSAS, on the BBNJ treaty by the U.S. State Department and/or NOAA Fisheries regarding this treaty and implications on international fisheries issues.

PFMC

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