
**COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF
HIGHLY MIGRATORY FISH STOCKS IN THE WESTERN AND CENTRAL
PACIFIC OCEAN**

**FIRST MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL AND COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE
[5-9 December 2005]
and
SECOND ANNUAL SESSION
[12-16 December 2005]**

30th November 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Introduction

1. The four principal U.S. fisheries for HMS in the WCPF Convention Area (WCPF-CA) are: the purse seine fishery that targets skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*) and yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*); the longline fishery for large tunas and swordfish; the distant-water troll fishery targeting albacore (*T. alalunga*); and the small-scale troll/handline fishery targeting various tunas, marlins, and other pelagic species. There is also a small pole-and-line fleet that targets skipjack tuna.

Fleet Structure

2. The Scientific Committee document, *Summary of U.S. Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species in the Western-Central Pacific, 2000-2004* (SC1_FR_WP_17) provides a detailed report of the active fleet structure of U.S. fisheries in the Convention Area. The U.S. HMS fleet in 2004 (active, WCPF-CA) comprised 21 purse-seine, 165 longline, 11 distant-water troll, 2 pole and line, and 2037 small-scale troll and handline vessels. Table 1 details fleet composition for the period 2000-2004.

Table 1. U.S. HMS fleet size (number of active vessels) in the WCPF-CA by fishery, 2000-2004 (from SC1_FR_WP_17)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Vessel type					
Purse seine	33	32	29	26	21
Longline	170	197	184	180	165
Distant water troll	36	33	12	14	11
Troll and handline*	2,243	2,209	2,096	2,114	2,037
Pole-and-line	7	6	6	6	2

*small scale and artisanal troll-handline fishery that operates within the EEZs of Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, and the CNMI.

Annual Catches in the WCPF Convention Area, 2000-2004

3. The Scientific Committee document SC1_FR_WP_17, *Summary of U.S. Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species in the Western-Central Pacific, 2000-2004*, provides a detailed report of the catch and bycatch of U.S. HMS fisheries in the Convention Area, inclusive of catch and bycatch made within the U.S. EEZ. Provisionally, these fisheries produced a total catch of 84,401 t in 2004, a decrease of 21% from the previous year's catch and the smallest catch observed in the five-year period. The catches of the purse seine fishery, longline fishery, distant-water troll fishery and pole-and-line fishery decreased in 2004 relative to 2003. The purse seine fishery was the largest U.S. fishery in terms of catch, accounting for 80% of the total catch, and 91% of the overall HMS catch decline in 2004 relative to 2003. The longline fishery accounted for 16% of the total catch and 7% of the decline in 2004. Tables 2 and 3 detail annual catches by gear type and species respectively, for the period 2000-2004.

Table 2. Catches (metric tons) by U.S. HMS vessels in the WCPF-CA by fishery, 2000-2004.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Gear type					
Purse seine	125,215	115,858	120,615	87,456	67,419
Longline	13,915	12,705	16,264	14,743	13,099
Distant water troll	2,433	2,107	1,337	1,574	960
Troll and handline	2,757	2,904	2,712	2,170	2,923
Pole-and-line	321	449	306	459	*
Total catch	144,641	134,023	141,234	106,402	84,401

Values for 2004 are preliminary.

** Only 2 vessels fishing therefore data is protected by U.S. confidentiality laws.*

Table 3. Species composition of catches (metric tons) by U.S. HMS vessels in the WCPF-CA, 2000-2004.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Species					
Skipjack tuna	82,218	86,793	89,570	63,940	48,502
Yellowfin tuna	32,355	26,261	28,893	22,143	16,830
Bigeye tuna	16,899	8,916	10,070	8,567	9,960
Albacore	4,120	6,854	8,048	6,114	3,964
Marlins	964	1,276	958	1,421	1,151
Swordfish	4,823	1,971	1,530	1,965	1,126
Sharks	1,506	157	179	163	214
Other pelagic species	1,756	1,795	1,986	2,089	2,654
Total catch	144,641	134,023	141,234	106,402	84,401

Values for 2004 are preliminary.

Annual Catches within the U.S. EEZ in the WCPF Convention Area, 2000-2004

4. Of the U.S. HMS fisheries within the Convention Area: the troll/handline and pole and line fisheries operate within the U.S. EEZ; the distant-water albacore troll fleet fishes on the high seas; both the Hawaii and American Samoa-based longline fleets fish inside and outside the U.S. EEZ; and the purse seine fishery operates within the U.S. EEZ, within the EEZs of various Pacific Island countries and on the high seas. Table 4 provides approximate percentages of total U.S. WCPF-CA annual catches of primary species taken within the U.S. EEZ.

Table 4. Approximate percentage of WCPF-CA catches by U.S. HMS vessels taken inside the U.S. EEZ¹

Species	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Skipjack tuna	2%	8%	5%	7%	5%
Yellowfin tuna	10%	12%	19%	11%	22%
Bigeye tuna	13%	22%	38%	31%	30%
Albacore	36%	47%	71%	62%	63%
Swordfish	16%	5%	6%	6%	10%

Developments and Trends

5. The U.S. purse seine fishery patterns in 2005 are expected to be similar to those in 2004, with the fleet continuing to fish in areas relatively far to the east if El Niño conditions persist in the WCPO. The fleet has been declining in size for several years. Currently there are 14 vessels active in the fishery.

6. In the Hawaii-based component of the longline fleet, there were 117 active vessels in the first quarter of 2005, making 415 trips, of which 372 targeted tunas and 43 targeted swordfish. Hawaii-based longline vessels completed 4,463 sets (fishing-days) and deployed 8.5 million hooks in the first quarter of 2005. Forty five percent of the hooks were set outside of the U.S. EEZ. Most of the Hawaii-based longline vessels targeted bigeye tuna during the first quarter. Based on preliminary data, the new fishing methods required to be used by Hawaii-based longline vessels in the swordfish-directed component of the fishery (i.e. large circle hooks and mackerel-type bait) thus far appear to be effective in reducing sea turtle interactions without adversely affecting catch rates of swordfish. In the American Samoa-based component of the longline fleet, participation, effort and catch have declined in recent years due to economic conditions; it is not known whether conditions will improve such that fishing activity increases. Twenty three longline vessels made 83 trips in the first quarter of 2005. These vessels made 488 sets and deployed 1.1 million hooks. Albacore was the dominant component of the catch, followed by wahoo, skipjack tuna, and yellowfin tuna. The American Samoa-based component of the longline fleet is expected to continue targeting albacore in 2005.

¹ A number of factors related to the need to expand available logbook data results in less rigorous estimates of catches within the EEZ than is possible for total catches.

7. In the distant-water albacore troll fleet, the numbers of vessels active in recent years in both the North and South Pacific within the Convention Area have been declining. Fuel prices, fish availability in areas closer to port, and weather patterns all influence participation decisions for distant-water troll vessels.

Conservation and Management Measures

8. On November 17, 2005, the U.S. Senate provided its advice and consent to ratification of the WCPF Convention. Domestic legislation is necessary to implement the WCPF Convention and its development is actively underway. Following the enactment of such legislation by the Congress and final approval by the President, the United States will be in the position to deposit its instrument of ratification and become a full Member of the Commission. Until that time, the United States has advised the Commission that it intends, consistent with its policies and to the extent possible under its domestic law, to cooperate fully in the implementation of conservation and management measures adopted by the Commission and to follow the procedures listed in paragraph 2(b) and paragraph 3 of the decision relating to Cooperating Non-Members adopted by the Commission at its first session in December 2004.

9. In fulfillment of the requirements under Article 24.5 of the Convention, an initial U.S. record of fishing vessels entitled to fly the U.S. flag and authorized to fish in the Convention Area beyond the area of U.S. jurisdiction has been transmitted to the Commission. The record includes 468 U.S. fishing vessels authorized to be used for fishing for commercial purposes on the high seas in the Convention Area as of 12 October 2005, and is limited to those vessels that fish for highly migratory fish stocks. A number of the information fields required under the Convention are not required under U.S. law to be provided by vessel owners to the U.S. government. The U.S. Government is working to resolve this situation and anticipates that changes will be made to the legal requirements. Once that information is available, the United States will provide to the Commission a revised record that includes additional information fields and possibly additional vessels.

10. The United States currently prohibits U.S. flagged vessels from engaging in commercial harvesting operations on the high seas without a valid permit issued under the provisions of the High Seas Fishing Compliance Act (Title 16 of the U.S. code, Sections 5501 *et seq.*). U.S. flagged purse seine vessels that desire to fish in areas under the jurisdiction of the parties to the South Pacific Tuna Treaty² (SPTT) must obtain a license issued by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA).

11. The Hawaii longline fleet continues to operate under a limited access program established in 1994 that caps the number of vessels at 164 and limits vessel length to 101ft (30.8m). Beginning December 1, 2005, boats fishing for HMS using longline gear in the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa, or that land or transship fish caught with

² The formal treaty name is the “Treaty on Fisheries between the Governments of Certain Pacific Island States and the Government of the United States of America.”

longline gear in the U.S. EEZ around American Samoa, must have an American Samoa longline permit, which like the permits for the Hawaii longline fleet, will be limited in number. Limits on the number available will be established for each of four vessel size categories. The new set of fishing regulations includes requirements to accept vessel observers, to carry and use transmitters as part of a vessel monitoring system, and to handle and release sea turtles in a specified manner.

12. Hawaii-based swordfish vessels are required to use large (18/0 or larger) circle hooks baited with mackerel or mackerel-type bait only. The fleet is subject to a competitive annual limit on the number of shallow sets that can be made (2,120) and annual limits on the number of interactions with leatherback and loggerhead sea turtles (16 and 17 respectively). In addition, all swordfish boats are required to carry an observer on every trip.

13. The observer coverage on U.S. HMS fishing vessels (predominantly longline and purse seiners) operating on the high seas within the Commission's area of competence, or in Pacific Island country EEZs, is typically between 20% and 100%³. U.S. vessels targeting albacore via trolling in both the North and South Pacific currently take observers on a voluntary basis. The longline fleet based in American Samoa is expected to have observer coverage rates similar to that of the Hawaii based longline fleet by the end of 2006. For all longline fleets, U.S. observers and data collectors are deployed under domestic regulations, while for purse seine vessels observers are deployed under the SPTT. The SPTT observers are Pacific Island country nationals and are trained and deployed by the Forum Fisheries Agency.

14. VMS units are currently carried and used on almost all U.S. HMS vessels operating on the high seas within the Convention Area, including Pacific Island countries' EEZs. There is 100% VMS coverage in the purse seine fishery and the Hawaii-based longline fleet. The American Samoa based longline fleet is expected to have 100% coverage for those vessels more than 50ft in length by the end of 2006. Most of the distant-water albacore troll vessels that fish on the high seas currently have VMS units aboard.

Enforcement

15. The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Fisheries Office for Law Enforcement) and the U.S. Coast Guard are charged with enforcing U.S. fishery laws and regulations, including those related to the WCPFC. Joint Enforcement Agreements have been established with the U.S. Territories (Guam and American Samoa) and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and strong cooperative relationships exist with other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. In addition, monitoring of the South Pacific Tuna Treaty over time has fostered development of close partnerships in the international realm, which have assisted the United States in the detection and prosecution of violators. An effective communications

²The coverage rate percentages are measured in trips taken.

network has evolved, which provides an important resource for monitoring, control and surveillance.

16. To date, the United States has neither initiated nor conducted any investigations or enforcement actions relative to violations of the Convention.

Port State Measures

17. No port state measures directly related to the WCPFC are applicable at this time. Nonetheless, the United States has a strong tradition of ensuring that vessels landing in U.S. ports comply with all relevant environmental and health and safety standards. Major U.S. ports in the Convention area include: Agana, Guam; Pago Pago, American Samoa; and Honolulu, Hawaii. Although two of these ports fall outside of U.S. Customs Territory, all are subject to quarantine and immigration standards consistent with other U.S. ports. The United States also enforces a ban on the practice of shark finning for all fishing vessels entering a U.S. port. Vessels are subject to inspection to ensure compliance with the provisions of that law (fins are allowed if shark carcasses are retained on board).