



**NORTHERN COMMITTEE
NINTH REGULAR SESSION**

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**STRENGTHENING THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF
PACIFIC BLUEFIN TUNA
- Concept Offered by the United States -**

WCPFC-NC9-2013 /DP-08

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Pacific Islands Regional Office
1601 Kapiolani Blvd., Suite 1110
Honolulu, Hawaii 96814-4700
(808) 944-2200 • Fax (808) 973-2941

AUG 02 2013

Masanori Miyahara, Northern Committee Chairman
c/o Professor Glenn Hurry, Executive Director
Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
P.O. Box 2356
Kolonia
Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia

Dear Chairman Miyahara:

The United States believes that the most critical issue facing the Northern Committee at its regular session this year is the poor status of Pacific bluefin tuna. The recent meeting of the ISC reiterated the poor stock status found in its new baseline assessment from last December (2012) as well as additional concerning signals. It is an imperative that the Committee take action to strengthen management of the stock to ensure its recovery to a more productive state, for the benefit of all the nations that make use of this valuable resource.

The enclosed document offers the Committee some ideas that would immediately enhance the existing CMM and guide management of the stock in the longer term.

We look forward to working with you and the Northern Committee on this and other important issues in September.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. D. Tosatto".

Michael D. Tosatto
Regional Administrator

Enclosure

Strengthening the Conservation and Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna

Concepts Offered by the United States of America for the Ninth Regular Session of the WCPFC Northern Committee

The ISC has estimated the spawning stock biomass (SSB) of Pacific bluefin tuna (2010) to be 3.6% of unfished SSB, and the fishing mortality rate (2007-2009) to be greater than all the candidate limits and targets considered by the ISC.¹ Furthermore, the unusually low catches in Japan's troll fishery in 2012 and the continued decline in Japan's longline CPUE in 2012 prompted the ISC to conclude in July 2013 that "the potential risk of decline of the spawning stock may be higher than previously thought"²

Given the poor status of the Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) stock and these recent indicators, the United States believes the Northern Committee (NC) should take action at this meeting on three fronts. First, the NC should recommend amendments to the existing CMM that will deliver a greater reduction in the fishing mortality rate starting in 2014. Second, the NC should establish a rebuilding target and schedule to guide management of the stock in the medium term. Finally, although the importance of limit reference points has been eclipsed by the immediate need to rebuild the stock, the NC should adopt limit reference points and associated harvest control rules to guide management of the stock in the long term.

The NC should also take note of the recently adopted IATTC resolution on Pacific bluefin tuna (Resolution C-13-02) including that it is effective only through 2014. Resolution C-13-02 includes language indicating that the IATTC's management measures for 2015 and subsequent years will be based upon analysis of the effectiveness of the measures taken by both the WCPFC and the IATTC.

1. Strengthen CMM 2012-06:

Given the projections conducted by the ISC of future SSB under various harvest and recruitment scenarios, the existing WCPFC CMM, in combination with the IATTC Resolution, is unlikely to restore the stock to a level at which it can produce maximum sustainable yield, as required under the WCPF Convention, in a timely manner.

The ISC has conducted projections under four harvest scenarios and three recruitment scenarios. Under some of those scenarios, particularly those intended to mimic implementation of the WCFPC and IATTC measures (called "F0204+cap" by the ISC), the stock is projected to rebuild to various degrees. However, those harvest scenarios are overly optimistic in several respects, the most important being that they assume the fishing mortality rate in the EPO will not exceed the 2002-2004 level. The IATTC Resolution constrains only catches, not fishing effort. If the EPO catch limits are taken in years of low recruitment, the fishing mortality rate could greatly exceed

¹ See <http://isc.ac.affrc.go.jp/pdf/2012Intercession/FINAL%20-%20Dec%202012%20ISC%20Intercessional%20Plenary%20Meeting%20Report.pdf>

² ISC draft Plenary report, 21 July 2013.

the 2002-2004 level. In short, both the WCPFC and IATTC measures need to be strengthened to ensure that the stock rebuilds.

The general approach in the WCPFC measure – limiting both fishing effort and juvenile catches – is a good one. Limiting fishing effort will constrain the fishing mortality rate regardless of recruitment success, and as highlighted by the ISC, “[implementation of catch limits is particularly effective in increasing future SSB when strong recruitment occurs].”

The NC should consider the following changes to the existing CMM:

1. Require that the fishing effort limits be implemented in terms of fishing days, sets, or hooks set (i.e., not in the too-blunt terms of vessels or trips).
2. Specify/describe each of the fisheries in which the fishing effort and juvenile catch limits are to be applied.
3. Add a requirement for CCMs to report each year on what the specific applicable fishing effort and juvenile catch limits are in each of their fisheries (i.e., in numerical terms).
4. Reduce the limits on fishing effort from the 2002-2004 average levels, such as to 75% of the 2002-2004 average levels.
5. Reduce the limits on juvenile catches from the 2002-2004 average levels, such as to 75% of the 2002-2004 average levels.
6. Remove or phase-out the exemption for artisanal fisheries and remove the special provisions for Korea.
7. Include a statement urging the IATTC to limit fishing effort in addition to catches.

2. Establish rebuilding target and schedule:

Given the heavily depleted status of PBF, the NC should recommend a rebuilding target for the spawning stock biomass and a timeline for reaching the target. The IATTC, in Resolution C-13-02, has requested that the WCPFC take the lead in doing so, which is appropriate given that the majority of fishing mortality occurs in the WCPO. The United States recommends the following target and schedule:

- The SSB rebuilding target is 20% of unfished SSB ($20\%SSB_{\text{recent},F=0}$);
- To be reached within ten years.

A rebuilding target and schedule should be agreed on at NC9 so that the ISC can be requested to evaluate the expected performance of a range of management scenarios with respect to the rebuilding target and schedule. That request should be made by NC9 so that the ISC can respond at its earliest opportunity, and to enable the IATTC to make use of the results, the ISC should be requested to provide the results in advance of the 2014 IATTC meeting, if possible.

There are a number of management scenarios that the ISC can evaluate, which it should do under an appropriate range of future recruitment assumptions, including:

1. *Status quo*: 2002-04 fishing effort in all WCPO PBF-directed fisheries; 2002-04 catches in all WCPO fisheries taking juveniles; and 5,500 mt/yr in EPO fisheries.

2. *Cross-Pacific reductions from status quo*: 50% of 2002-04 fishing effort in all WCPO PBF-directed fisheries; 50% of effort in 2002-04 catches in all WCPO fisheries taking juveniles; and 2,750 mt/yr in EPO fisheries (and intermediate reductions, as appropriate).
3. *Cross-Pacific reductions from status quo plus effort limits in EPO*: 50% of 2002-04 fishing effort in all WCPO and EPO PBF-directed fisheries; 50% of 2002-04 catches in all WCPO fisheries taking juveniles; and 2,750 mt/yr in EPO fisheries (and intermediate reductions, as appropriate).

3. Adopt limit reference points:

The importance of adopting limit reference points designed to keep the stock size and the fishing mortality rate in “safe zones” has been eclipsed by the need to rebuild the stock. Consequently, the NC should devote itself to adopting limit reference points only after it has adopted a rebuilding target and schedule.

As we have explained in previous meetings, $F_{SPR-20\%}$ would be an appropriate limit reference point for the stock, and it is consistent with the hierarchical framework for specifying reference points that has been adopted by the Commission. Adopting a B-limit is less important than an F-limit, but discussing candidate B-limits has merits.

Although adopting an F-limit would be an important step, it is important to recognize that as long as the stock is rebuilding, the fishing mortality rate should be kept substantially lower than the F-limit. Once the stock is at the rebuilding target, the management objective would shift to avoiding the F-limit (and B-limit, if adopted) with a high probability.