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U.S.A. Commercial Pacific Bluefin Tuna Fisheries in the Eastern Pacific Ocean

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

U.S.A. Commercial Pacific Bluefin Tuna Fisheries in the Eastern Pacific Ocean

Description of U.S. Commercial Fisheries for Pacific Bluefin Tuna

Two fishery sectors target Pacific bluefin tuna (PBF) in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO): (1) small coastal purse seine¹ and (2) hook-and-line. Both fish within the U.S. exclusive economic zone. PBF is also caught incidentally in longline, drift gillnet, and troll fisheries. Historically, the only gear that is likely to catch greater than 1 metric ton (mt) of PBF in a single trip is purse seine gear. The large majority of PBF is caught off of and landed in the state of California, with small quantities landed in the states of Oregon and Washington.

Requirements to Harvest PBF

All U.S. vessels that harvest PBF in the EPO and land on the U.S. West Coast are required to have a U.S. West Coast Highly Migratory Species Permit. Purse seine vessels must also be listed on the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)'s Active Purse Seine Regional Vessel Register (RVR). At this time, there are 13 small U.S. purse seine vessels listed on the purse seine RVR.

Management of Commercial PBF Catch Limit

Because the United States exceeded its catch limit under IATTC Resolution C-14-06 in 2017 and the remaining catch limit applicable to 2018 was only 114 mt, the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) imposed a 2-mt trip limit applicable to commercial fishing vessels. The 2 mt trip limit was intended to allow harvest of PBF in small quantities, whether caught incidentally or targeted, consequently preventing regulatory discards. As a result of the small trip limit, the United States had an under-harvest in 2018.

IATTC Resolution C-18-01 established a 600 mt biennial limit for the United States in 2019-2020, pending addition or subtraction of under-harvest or over-harvest, respectively, from the previous catch limit. The United States added 30 mt to its biennial catch limit for 2019-2020 as a result of under-harvest in 2017-2018. For both 2019 and 2020, NMFS is imposing restrictive trip limits: 15 mt trip limit until catch is within 50 mt of the annual limit, at which time a 2 mt trip limit will be in effect. For 2019, the annual limit is 425 mt; therefore, a 15 mt trip limit is in effect until catch is expected to reach 375 mt. This management framework of reducing the trip limit when catch is within 50 mt of the annual limit is intended to avoid a complete fishery closure, which could result in regulatory discards.

NMFS requires purse seine vessel operators provide a pre-trip notification within 24 hours of departing on a trip that may result in catching greater than 2 mt of PBF. In other words, it is illegal to catch greater than 2 mt of PBF without having submitted a pre-trip notification. Additionally, buyers of PBF in California must report the sale of PBF in an electronic database within 24 hours of the landing.

¹ Note this fleet is different from the large purse seine fleet fishing for tropical tuna in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.