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VIA FIRST CLASS MAIL

Attn: Natalie Webster
AMERICAN ALBACORE FISHING ASSOCIATION
4364 Bonita Road, #311
Bonita, CA 91902

Re.: Meetings of the HMS Management Team – January 19-20, 2011

Dear AAFA:

I recently attended 2 days of meetings of the Highly Migratory Species - Management Team (HMS-MT). The meetings were held at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Offices in Carlsbad, California. These were work sessions for the Management Team, but the meetings were open for attendance by the public.

On the agenda was the topic of "*Characterization of fisheries catching North Pacific albacore tuna in preparation for developing potential management responses to a new stock assessment due to be completed in 2011.*"

Characterization of Commercial HMS North Pacific albacore (NPA) fishery

The Management Team was holding these meetings in response to tasks assigned by the Council at its April 2010 meetings. In light of the expected release of a new albacore stock assessment later this year, the Council is preparing to develop a range of potential management responses. It has requested the Management Team undertake a number of tasks, including:

1. Review of management recommendations in 2010 albacore White Paper;
2. Forecast of socioeconomic conditions in the west coast NPA (N.Pac.Alb.) fishery;
3. Statistical description of west coast NPA fishery;
4. Characterization of non-U.S. NPA fisheries;
5. Socio-economic impacts on vessels that fish multiple gear types or species;
6. Revisit subject of albacore effort characterization;
7. Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported (IUU) fishing impacts on NPA.

The Management Team will be meeting again at the April 2011 Council meetings to hold further discussions on these tasks in preparation for its report to the Council.

Review of management recommendations in 2010 albacore White Paper

Not all of these topics were thoroughly addressed at these meetings. In particular, the management recommendations contained in the 2010 albacore White Paper were not reviewed or discussed. I brought this to the attention of the group. It was decided that before any management recommendations can be considered, it is necessary to examine the socioeconomic conditions forecast for the west coast North Pacific albacore (NPA) fishery.

Forecast of socioeconomic conditions in the west coast NPA fishery

On the subject of “forecasting socioeconomic conditions,” it was announced that NMFS is funding WFOA/AFRF to manage a consulting firm, Lisa Weiss Consulting, to prepare a socioeconomic forecast of the fishery 10 years in the future.

Henry Pontarelli is a Lisa Weiss consultant assigned to work on this project. The project seeks to identify “non-biological influences” on the albacore fishery and how those influences affect earnings, landings, and other aspects of the fishery. He expressed interest in identifying the socioeconomic forces that have required fishermen to diversify and change in order to succeed.

The project proposes to provide the Council with a better understanding of the economic and socioeconomic factors that influence the albacore fishery. This may include a model that may be used to make projections about the future of the commercial fishery.

The Management Team members acknowledge that the Lisa Weiss Consulting group is working on this project. However, the Management Team will review the final product and may provide its comments to the Council. The Lisa Weiss Consulting group expects to have the project results ready in June of 2011. The Council will take up albacore management measures in April of 2011.

Members of the Management Team commented on the difficulty of making stock assessment projections for long periods (10 years) in the future, and they questioned the value of attempting equivalent economic projections. I commented on the tremendous variability of this fishery and observed that, to be effective, such a study would need to consider all of the other fisheries and political and economic variables that influence this fishery.

It was explained that the socioeconomic study would look at the U.S. fishery in the context of international fisheries. Management Team members explained that stock assessment projections are based on assumptions of constant effort and that the models are not able to include socioeconomic effects.

The Management Team made it clear that it should review and evaluate the report before it is presented to the Council. Efforts will be made to do this.

Henry Pontarelli described the scope of work for the project. It will address only the U.S. west coast commercial albacore surface fishery. Other commercial fisheries, e.g. long

line, purse seine, and commercial passenger fishing vessels (CPFV), as well as the recreational fishery, will not be included.

Statistical description of west coast NPA fishery

There was discussion of the current state of the electronic logbook program. A presentation was made by John Childers. The e-logbook program continues. They hope to develop and implement a new program for next season. The new version has a more straightforward and simpler interface.

A representative from WFOA/AFRF expressed interest in a national program for electronic logbooks. They believe that getting timely information from these albacore vessels is increasingly important. They expressed interest in having the national electronic logbook program applied to the entire fleet in time for the 2012 season.

Fishery managers believe electronic logbooks can be very cost effective through conserving limited management and scientific resources. Electronic logbooks are capable of gathering a wide variety of data on a fishery. However, there is a perception that collection of economic data is not welcomed by fishermen.

I expressed concern over the potential expense of electronic logbooks and that this could prove an additional burden for fishermen. Particularly if the equipment cost becomes a burden to entry. I recommended that other sources of funding should be explored.

Issues regarding information from the HMS permit database

Management Team members explained that they were able to link HMS permit information to landings data (PacFIN). Since 2006, approximately 2,600 vessels have received a Pacific HMS permit. Since each permit has its own effective date and expiration date, it is not practical to calculate a yearly number of permits.

As of August 1, 2009, there were 1,759 vessels with valid permits. Of these vessels, only about 40% made at least one landing of albacore in 2009. This percentage is not uncommon for many fisheries. This 40% consisted of approximately 560 commercial vessels and approximately 150 charter vessels.

There was discussion of the permit database and the concern over its high numbers and the potential for misrepresenting capacity. The general view was that the HMS permit database would not be suitable for managing the albacore fishery. Because an HMS permit is required to land any HMS, even incidental take, and there are no restrictions on obtaining a permit.

It was explained that, since there is no specific permit for albacore, the agency cannot unilaterally revoke one of these permits because it appears to be a latent albacore permit.

Actual landings data is a more reliable indicator of activity in the fishery. However, landings data can be tied to particular permits only back to about 2004. Even then, only

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about two-thirds of landed fish were tied to a permit. Over time, this rate has improved significantly.

Characterization of non-U.S. NPA fisheries

The Management Team reported that they will be looking into what information is available on fishing effort for non-U.S. fisheries. The International Scientific Committee (ISC) is viewed as the best source for estimates of catch and effort for NPA. However, the ISC data does not possess the level of detail that exists for the U.S. fleet. As a result, it will not be possible to perform full economic studies on these fisheries.

There was interest expressed in better understanding the operations of the Japanese pole-and-line fishery. This fishery is significantly different from the U.S. fishery and therefore they cannot be compared with respect to effort.

The Management Team will be working on putting together information regarding other albacore fisheries, the gear types used, and landings data.

Interest was expressed in the availability of data regarding employment, jobs, etc. that are generated by the U.S. fishery.

Socio-economic impacts on vessels that fish multiple gears or species

The Management Team agreed to build on Dr. Kit Dahl's previous analysis of fleet composition and participation. This information would be shared with the consultants preparing the socioeconomic report.

Revisit subject of albacore effort characterization

Similarly, Dr. Suzy Kohin of the Management Team would work on updating the effort characterization materials for the surface hook-and-line albacore fishery.

Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported (IUU) fishing impacts on NPA.

Despite a search of available literature and discussion with Dr. Gary Sakagawa on the subject of IUU fishing, there is still much that is unknown. While the Management Team can provide the Council with a general statement of the IUU problem, it would be difficult to characterize IUU fishing in the albacore fishery.

Fishery representatives, along with some state representatives, raised the issue of published reports on IUU fishing, U.S. fishery encounters with net-marked fish (with photos), and emphasized the need to inform the Council as to what is and isn't known about IUU fishing.

Update on Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) albacore project

The Management Team received a presentation on the current status of this project. The goal of MRIP is to establish an index of abundance for the CPFV albacore fleet. Landings data indicate that approximately 7% of the total U.S. west coast albacore catch is attributed to the U.S. CPFV fleet.

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There are approximately 300 CPFV vessels that fish albacore approximately 3,000 days annually. Of the U.S. recreational catch of albacore, about 50% is caught in Mexico. Of the CPFV recreational catch in U.S. waters, about half is caught in California waters.


By sampling through the CPFV fleet, the project aims to sample a different portion of the albacore population, those that are found inshore and south of the border with Mexico. The MRIP project has been favorably received and a proposal to conduct the next phase of sampling will be submitted.

Conclusion

The Council will be revisiting these topics at its meetings in April.

If you have any questions or would like to have further discussions on these matters, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

Yours truly,



Chip Bissell