



AMERICAN ALBACORE FISHING ASSOCIATION

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March 16, 2012

VIA EMAIL

AMERICAN ALBACORE FISHING ASSOCIATION

4364 Bonita Road, #311

Bonita, CA 91902

Re: PFMC Meetings (February 29 – March 2, 2012)

Dear American Albacore Fishermen:

The Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC) met recently in Sacramento. On the Council's agenda were opportunities to adopt recommendations regarding: (1) action toward developing a framework for management of North Pacific albacore at the international level; (2) advice regarding the WCPFC and the IATTC, and (3) the U.S. – Canada Albacore Treaty.

In the days leading up to the Council meeting, the HMS Advisory Subpanel and HMS Management Team met both separately and jointly to discuss these issues and prepare their reports for the Council. At the HMS Advisory Subpanel meeting, the first order of business was for the Subpanel members to nominate and elect the HMS-AS Chair and Vice-Chair for the coming year. There were no new nominees and the existing officers, Doug Fricke and Wayne Heikkila, will continue for another term as Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively.

Management Framework for North Pacific Albacore

The HMS Management Team had prepared a report for the Council and the HMS-AS, outlining the tasks to be achieved. There was discussion of activities at the international level toward developing a management framework for North Pacific albacore and the report described the management objectives set forth by the IATTC and the WCPFC. Also included was a discussion of potential biological reference points (BRPs) based on fishing mortality (F).

The U.S. has urged the adoption of reference points related to Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) rather than reference points based on model simulations of the albacore stock. Canada has submitted a proposal to the Northern Committee that greatly resembles the MSY and Optimum Yield (OY) control rules set forth in the U.S. Fishery Management Plan.

The Advisory Subpanel expressed its support for the concept of establishing a framework plan for management of North Pacific albacore but was concerned that the U.S. might get ahead of the international process. There was also concern that any discussion toward developing a U.S. plan could be leaked to other nations participating in international negotiations and this could harm the negotiating strength of the U.S.

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Advice Re. The Western And Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)

The WCPFC meeting originally scheduled for last December was delayed until the end of March 2012. The Advisory Subpanel recommended the U.S. support the adoption of BRPs for all managed HMS stocks, including North Pacific albacore. It also urged the U.S. to encourage cooperation between the IATTC and the WCPFC to adopt management and conservation measures that are mutually compatible. The Advisory Subpanel provided similar advice to the Council with respect to positions for the U.S. Delegation to the annual IATTC meeting to be held in June of this year.

U.S. – Canada Albacore Treaty

There was considerable discussion of the U.S.-Canada Albacore Treaty and the expiration of the treaty's fishing regime at the end of 2011. The Council's Briefing Book contained dozens of letters from U.S. fishermen and small businesses. All of these letters expressed opposition to the treaty or its fishing regime. With the expiration of the old fishing regime, Canadian vessels may not fish in U.S. waters and U.S. vessels may not fish in Canadian waters. Despite the lack of access to Canadian waters, the Briefing Book did not contain any letters from U.S. fishermen in support of the treaty's fishing regime.

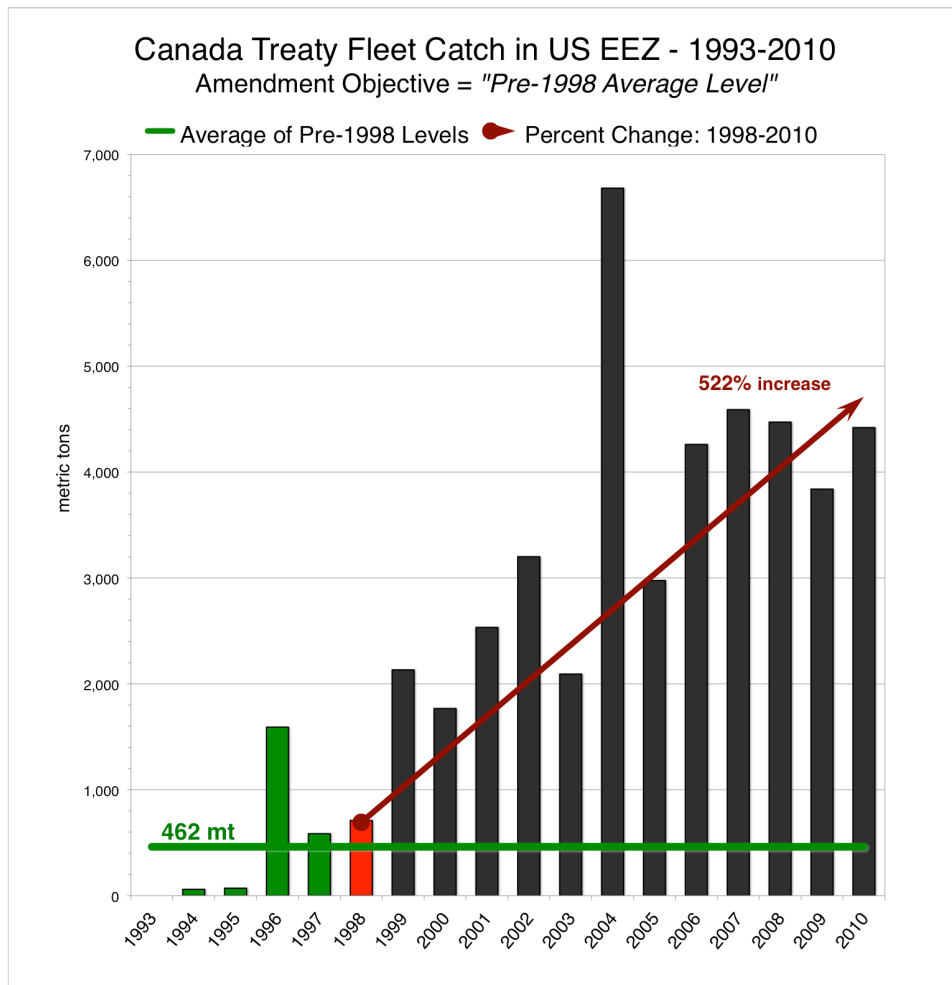
The HMS-AS discussed the imbalance of the treaty and the increased level of fishing effort by Canada's fleet in the U.S. EEZ. There was general agreement among U.S. fishermen that the treaty has contributed to declines in both the number of U.S. vessels participating in the albacore fishery and the harvest by the U.S. fleet.

A presentation was given by a consulting group hired by NMFS to collect financial information from albacore fishermen in order to examine their costs and earnings related to their fishing operations. If additional funds can be secured, fishermen could be asked to provide this data on a regular basis in order to assist NMFS in reviewing the impacts of new regulations and management measures. It was mentioned that such analysis is useful in developing limited access programs.

I joined a number of other attendees in questioning why U.S. fishermen should be asked to disclose their financial records. There is growing concern that such confidential financial data could be used to develop an albacore "pricing model" that would put government in charge of what fishermen make for a living. This research seems overly intrusive and not justified.

In a discussion that followed the presentation, I repeated concerns over the auditing of fisherman's income and expenses, and expressed disappointment that fishermen were not asked to participate in the design of a study that was so invasive and burdensome for fishermen. It is hoped that these discussions were productive and that the proposal will be reconsidered or at least significantly redesigned with the participation of U.S. fishermen.

As the HMS-AS continued discussions on the albacore treaty with Canada, there was discussion of the treaty's ineffectiveness at reducing Canada's fishing effort in the U.S. EEZ. Since 1998 U.S. fishermen have complained about crowding on the fishing grounds and Canada's increasing effort. After years of discussions, the treaty was revised and an amendment went into effect in 2004. The amendment was designed with the goal of reducing the level of Canadian fishing effort in the U.S. EEZ to pre-1998 levels. The U.S. Department of State made such representations to Congress. Clearly, this goal had not been achieved. Since the amendment failed at achieving the desired reductions, the U.S. has made repeated efforts to renegotiate the treaty, without success. Canada's fishing effort in U.S. waters has increased over 500% beyond the "pre-1998 average level" approved by Congress.



In its report to the Council, the Advisory Subpanel recommended that the Council support a suspension of the “fishing regime” under the treaty through 2012. The HMSAS reported that the composition of the Canadian fleet has changed dramatically. This has resulted in increased vessel effort, catch per vessel, crowding on the grounds, leasing of permits and other activities that favor the Canadian fleet.

There was also a request for NMFS to conduct a study of the changes in Canadian catch from the U.S. EEZ that have taken place since the mid-1990s. It is recognized that a much higher portion of the Canadian catch is delivered to ports in Canada rather than in the U.S.

NMFS has already approved spending for two scientists to study the economic contributions by Canadian vessels landing albacore to U.S. ports. The study will measure the effects on output, income, and employment relating to landings by Canadian vessels. NMFS is coordinating with Canada’s Department of Fisheries & Oceans on efforts to gather data from Canadian fishermen with estimated expenditures in U.S. ports. These estimates will be used to help determine whether the treaty is beneficial to the U.S.

This study has drawn criticism for many reasons. The annual variation in U.S. landings U.S. is greater than the contribution made by Canadian vessels. More importantly, this study places Canadian vessels as equally important as U.S. vessels. The Fishery Management Councils were

created to protect U.S. fisheries from foreign fishing fleets. It is not a question of whether it makes economic sense to outsource this albacore fishery to Canadian fishermen.

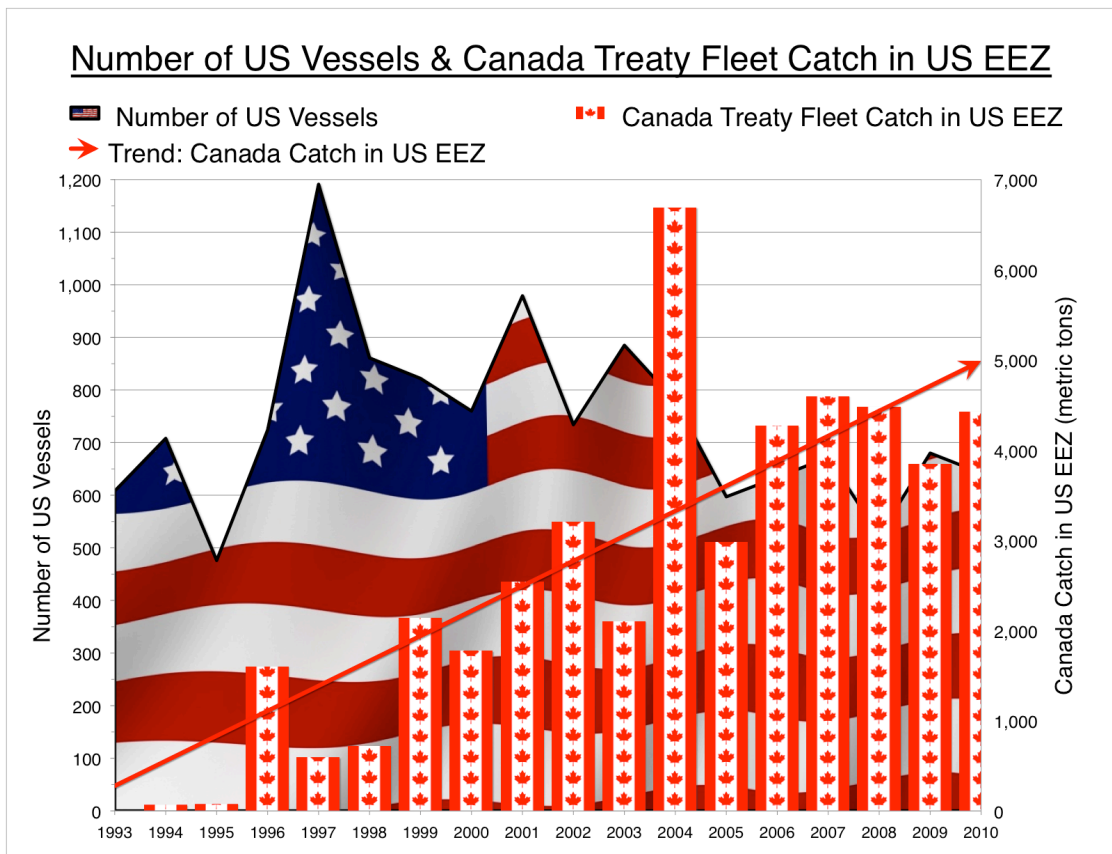
There is also concern that proper assessment and evaluation of the impacts of this treaty will require a significant amount of time and should not be rushed. The Advisory Subpanel shared the belief that the improved health of the U.S. fishery and economy should guide any future discussions regarding the treaty.

Council Action on the U.S.-Canada Albacore Treaty

The Council received the HMS-AS report recommending the continued suspension of the treaty's fishing regime through 2012. The report cited many reasons for its recommendation.

The Council discussed the great number of letters submitted by fishermen and businesses, and the broad opposition to the negative impacts resulting from the continued fishing regime under the terms of the treaty.

I addressed the Council and gave a presentation with slides that showed clearly the imbalance of the treaty and the harm to the U.S. fishery. How the increased effort by Canadian vessels resulted in overcrowding on the fishing grounds. I reviewed the history of the treaty and the inability of the treaty negotiation process to reduce Canadian fishing effort to the required pre-1998 levels. This presentation was the result of extensive review of U.S. and Canadian fishery data, including numbers of vessels, catch and location of catch, as well as landings and location of landings. In the end, it is clear that the current terms of the treaty are not acceptable.



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The Council considered all of this information and, with a unanimous vote, took action to recommend continuation of the U.S.-Canada treaty but called for suspension of the fishing regime through at least 2012. The Council indicated that such time was needed to gather information about the treaty impacts.

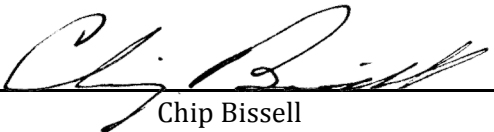
Following the Council meeting, the Council sent a letter to NOAA Fisheries clearly stating that reciprocal fishing access under the treaty should remain suspended for 2012, or longer, in order to allow stakeholders and fishery managers to address the long-term issues under the treaty.

The U.S. and Canada Delegations to the treaty are scheduled to meet in Portland, Oregon in April for the annual Data Exchange required by the treaty. AAFA representatives will be attending.

Conclusion

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

Sincerely,



Chip Bissell
Representative & Advisor
American Albacore Fishing Association