



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
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FEB 13 2019

Mr. Archie Taotasi Soliai, Chair
Western Pacific Fishery Management Council
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400
Honolulu, HI 96813

Mr. Simon Kinneen, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99601-2252

Mr. Phil Anderson, Chair
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101
Portland, OR 97220-1384

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FEB 19 2019

Dear Chairs Soliai, Kinneen, and Anderson:

I am writing to inform you of the outcomes of the Fifteenth Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (Commission), held in Honolulu, Hawaii, December 10-14, 2018. This letter also shares National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) initial assessment of the regulatory actions that will be needed to implement the recent decisions of the Commission.

Conservation and Management Measure for Bigeye, Yellowfin, and Skipjack Tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (CMM 2018-01)

The Commission adopted conservation and management measure (CMM) 2018-01, which will replace CMM 2017-01.

Many of the provisions of CMM 2018-01 are identical to provisions in CMM 2017-01 that have been implemented by NMFS. However, CMM 2018-01 includes several new or changed provisions. New regulations may be needed to: establish fishing effort limits for the U.S. purse seine fleet; address changes to fish aggregating device management measures; and reduce the 2019 longline bigeye tuna catch limit if it is determined that there was an overage of the 2018 catch limit. NMFS intends to implement these provisions as needed pursuant to the rulemaking authority of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention Implementation Act (WCPFCIA).

Conservation and Management Measure for Pacific Bluefin Tuna (CMM 2018-02)



The Commission slightly modified the existing CMM for Pacific bluefin tuna, adopting CMM 2018-02 to replace CMM 2017-08. The modifications allow a member to carry-over an underage of Pacific bluefin tuna catch from the previous year to its limit for the current year (up to 5% of its annual initial catch limit). The main provisions of the CMM, including the fishing effort limits and catch limits, remain the same, and at this time NMFS does not anticipate any regulatory action to implement the modifications. Because Pacific bluefin tuna is overfished, we encourage the Councils to continue to consider any recommendations necessary to rebuild this stock.

Conservation and Management Measure to Mitigate the Impact of Fishing for Highly Migratory Fish Stocks on Seabirds (CMM 2018-03)

The Commission adopted a revised CMM on seabirds, CMM 2018-03, which will replace CMM 2017-06. The revised measure expands the northern boundary of the area of application of the seabird bycatch mitigation requirements in the southern hemisphere and allows the use of hook shielding devices as an additional mitigation option. U.S. regulations implement fully the requirements that apply in the northern hemisphere, but there are currently no regulations that implement the requirements that apply in the southern hemisphere. NMFS does not intend to implement the revisions to the southern area of application at this time. I suggest that the Councils consider the need for such requirements for the fisheries under its authority and take action as appropriate.

Conservation and Management of Sea Turtles (CMM 2018-04)

The Commission adopted a revised CMM for the conservation of sea turtles, CMM 2018-04, which will replace CMM 2008-03. The revisions expand the applicability of the measure to all shallow-set longline fisheries in the Convention Area. The requirements under CMM 2018-04 are already covered under existing U.S. regulations, so no regulatory action is anticipated. Given the current population trends for Pacific leatherback sea turtles, we encourage the Councils to consider whether additional measures are necessary to further mitigate impacts on sea turtles from longline fisheries in the Pacific Ocean.

WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels and Authorization to Fish (CMM 2018-06)

The Commission adopted a revised CMM for the WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels, replacing CMM 2017-05. The new measure extends to smaller vessels the requirement for fishing vessel owners to obtain IMO numbers. NMFS intends to implement this requirement through regulatory action pursuant to the WCPFCIA.

Other decisions

The Commission adopted amendments to a number of other conservation and management measures, none of which are expected to require regulatory action by the United States. These include a revised CMM for a Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMM 2018-07) and minor changes to the CMM for the Regional Observer Programme (ROP) (CMM 2018-05), as well as

modifications to the Agreed Minimum Standards and Guidelines for the ROP as they relate to the conduct of observers.

In addition to adopting the measures described above, the Commission made a number of decisions that dealt with planning, procedural, and other matters that do not necessitate any regulatory changes. These include: adoption of an interim target reference point for South Pacific albacore; an updated workplan for the development of harvest strategies; guidelines on best handling practices for the safe release of sharks; electronic reporting standards for high seas transshipment declarations and notices; and amendments to the Commission Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Standards, Specifications and Procedures to extend the manual reporting requirements and change the process for making changes to the VMS unit type-approval list.

We look forward to working with the Councils as we implement the Commission's decisions.

Sincerely,



Michael D. Tosatto
Regional Administrator

cc: Barry Thom, Regional Administrator, West Coast Region
James W. Balsiger, Regional Administrator, Alaska Region
Michael Seki, Director, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
Kristen C. Koch, Director, Southwest Fisheries Science Center