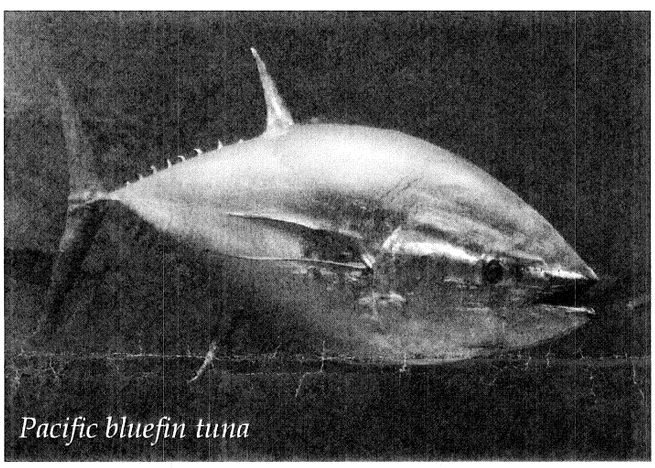
THE LINE.

A PUBLICATION OF THE PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Volume 3, No. 4 | December 2014 | www.pcouncil.org
866-806-7204 | pfmc.comments@noaa.gov

The Line is a summary of West Coast fisheries news published four or five times per year. This issue reports on decisions made at the November 2014 Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting. The Council recommends commercial & recreational fishery management measures for Federal waters off the coasts of Washington, Oregon & California. The Council has five public meetings a year. All Council recommendations are subject to approval by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). To sign up for other notices, go to http://tinyurl.com/3s5edce. The public comment deadline for the March 2015 Council meeting is February 12; email pfmc.comments@noaa.gov.

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES.

● **Domestic bluefin tuna.** For recreational fisheries off California, the Council put in place a two-fish Pacific bluefin tuna daily bag limit, and up to a six-fish possession limit for multi-day trips. Filleting of



Pacific bluefin tuna

tunas at sea would be permitted based on certain procedures (http://tinyurl.com/lmoxmol) in order to allow enforcement officers to differentiate bluefin tuna from other tuna species filleted at sea. ● **International bluefin tuna**. The Council made several recommendations to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regarding the Pacific bluefin tuna commercial catch limit of 600 metric tons (mt) for 2015-2016. Among these, the Council recommended a trip limit of 20 mt until 250 mt is caught, after which the trip limit would be reduced to two metric tons for the remainder of the year. If any landing exceeded the trip limit, the overage amount would be forfeited to the State of California. In addition, the Council called on NMFS to find non-punitive ways to discourage discarding fish at sea. NMFS was asked to prepare two white papers for the March 2015 meeting—one describing recreational fisheries for Pacific bluefin tuna in other countries; the second on increases in fishing capacity and shortcomings in catch reporting from China. ● **Drift gillnet caps**. The Council made several decisions about hard caps (limits on "take" of species listed under the Endangered Species Act) in the drift gillnet fishery, and other highly migratory species issues. Hard caps would apply to certain protected species, such as sperm whales and leatherback sea turtles. Currently, the Council is focusing on improving the performance of the drift gillnet fishery, while encouraging alternative gears that reduce bycatch. The Council's Highly Migratory Species Management Team, along with Council staff, are beginning to prepare a Drift Gillnet Management and Monitoring Plan that will be discussed at the March 2015 Council meeting. The objective is to implement bycatch reduction measures, such as hard caps, and increase human or electronic monitoring in the drift gillnet fishery to 100 percent coverage. In June 2015, the Council will begin considering a longline fishery targeting swordfish outside the exclusive economic zone, which is currently prohibited under Federal regulations. In November 2015, the Council will look at ways to transition state drift gillnet permits to a Federal permit system. ● **Salmon and halibut retention on vessels fishing for highly migratory species.** The Council informed NMFS that the Council believes current regulations that prohibit the retention of salmon and halibut on vessels fishing for highly migratory species are in error. The Council asked NMFS to fix this problem and report back in March.

SALMON.

A **schedule** for the 2015 preseason salmon management process has been set. Public hearings will be held in Westport, Washington and Coos Bay, Oregon on March 30, 2015, and in Fort Bragg, California on March 31. For more details, see http://tinyurl.com/pmqwbe4. ● **Lower Columbia River coho**. The Council adopted a new harvest control rule for ESA-listed Lower Columbia River natural coho that provides modest increases in fishery opportunity. This action was in response to new information on coho status and maintains a minimal level of risk to the conservation and recovery of this important salmon stock. The Council requests that NMFS evaluate the new control rule in time for its use in the 2015 salmon management process.

HALIBUT.

The Council recommended changes to the non-tribal allocations in the 2015 Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A in response to new information showing more Pacific halibut and greater fishery participation in northern California than when the plan was originally adopted. The California recreational allocation will be increased from one to four percent, and there will be a one percent

reduction for the Washington recreational (35.6 percent), Oregon recreational (29.7 percent), and commercial (30.7 percent) sectors. The Oregon section of the Columbia River Subarea will be managed as one season, and the Southern Oregon subarea allocation was increased. California noted that they are committed to managing the California recreational fishery during 2015 to stay within the Catch Sharing Plan allocation. More detailed information can be found at http://tinyurl.com/laqt24a.

The Coast Guard at work (USCG)

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES.

Before November 2014, the sardine harvest guideline control rule used sea surface temperatures measured at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography pier to determine the harvest fraction parameter. However, in 2013 a panel of experts recommended that the Council use the CalCOFI (California Cooperative Oceanic Fisheries Investigations) temperature index instead, considering it more accurate. The Council adopted this recommendation, as well as an accompanying harvest fraction parameter range of 5-20 percent, to be used for calculating annual harvest specifications.

GROUNDFISH.

● **Widow Rockfish Reallocation.** Because widow rockfish are no longer overfished, the Council is considering reallocating the shoreside quota shares for widow rockfish among initial quota share recipients. A range of alternatives has been adopted for analysis and final action is scheduled for the April Council meeting (see http:// tinyurl.com/ mp9xqtn). ● **Divestiture and forfeited quota shares.** Individuals with quota shores in excess of control limits are required to divest their excess by November 30, 2015. The Council is considering delaying that deadline and modifying the rules for quota share forfeiture for those who do not comply with this provision. ● **Blackgill Rockfish Reallocation.** The Council is considering a restructuring of the Slope Rockfish complex south of 40°10'N. latitude by removing blackgill rockfish from the southern Slope Rockfish complex and reallocating both blackgill rockfish and the remaining species in the complex to trawl and non-trawl sectors. The Council plans to adopt a preliminary preferred alternative in April 2015 and to make a final decision in June 2015. ● **Other Groundfish management activities**. The Council revised the 2015 and 2016 overfishing limits, acceptable biological catches, and annual catch limits for English sole, yellowtail rockfish north of 40°10' N. latitude, sharpchin rockfish, and rex sole, as well as the harvest specifications for the Slope Rockfish complexes and the Other Flatfish complex. ● **Open access registration.** There will not be a registry of open access groundfish fishermen, as originally planned under Amendment 22. The Council believes the costs of creating a registry outweigh the benefits. ● **Inseason adjustments.** Due to higher-than-expected catches of black rockfish and California scorpionfish in the California recreational fishery in 2014, a five-fish black rockfish sub-bag limit within the ten-fish rockfish, cabezon and greenling bag limit will be put in place in 2015-2016. Additionally, retention of California scorpionfish in the California recreational fisheries will be prohibited from September through December 2015-2016.

OTHER NEWS.

● **Newport helicopter.** The U.S. Coast Guard was proposing to close its air facility in Newport, Oregon, which would have eliminated the rescue helicopter operating out of that station. The Council sent a letter to the Coast Guard Commandant asking for a reconsideration of this decision, and also sent a letter to Senator Jeff Merkley in response to his request for the Council's perspective on the issue. In the end, the helicopter will be retained at least until 2016 thanks to Congressional action and the committed efforts of the Newport Fishermen's Wives. ● **Appointments.** *Kevin Piner* was appointed fill the vacant Southwest Fisheries Science Center seat on the Scientific and Statistical Committee; *John Field* to the vacant at-large seat on the Scientific and Statistical Committee; *Brett Kormos* to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife seat on the Salmon Technical Team; *Elizabeth Hellmers* to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife seat on the Highly Migratory Species Management Team; *Peter Hassemer* to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game seat on the Habitat Committee. ● **Budget.** The Council adopted a provisional operating budget of $4,741,136 for calendar year 2015 and directed staff to pursue special project funding for electronic monitoring and technology, groundfish essential fish habitat Amendment 25, and Fishery Ecosystem Plan initiatives, in priority order. Without special project funding, these issues will be suspended after their currently funded 2015 activities.

NEXT MEETING.

The next meeting of the Pacific Fishery Management Council is scheduled for March 2015 in Vancouver, Washington. Tentative agendas for both the March and April meetings can be found on the Council website. A more detailed March meeting agenda will be available in February 2015.

Published by the Pacifi c Fishery Management Council pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration contract number NA10NMF4410014.