



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Pacific Islands Regional Office
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APR 08 2013

Mr. Arnold I. Palacios
Chair
Western Pacific Fishery Management Council
1164 Bishop St. 1400
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Mr. Palacios:

This letter is to inform you that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has determined that Pacific bluefin tuna (*Thunnus orientalis*) continues to be subject to overfishing, and is now overfished. Pacific bluefin is a management unit species in the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan for Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region (FEP). This species is also covered by the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Fishery Management Plan for U.S. West Coast Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species; NMFS is also informing the Pacific Council about the status change.

In December 2012, the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) completed their assessment of the status of Pacific bluefin tuna using data through 2011, and concluded that the stock is still experiencing overfishing and is now overfished. The ISC assessment estimated the current spawning stock biomass of 22,606 metric tons (mt) to be about 3.6 percent of the unfished spawning stock biomass (SSB) of 633,468 mt. Current SSB is far below that associated with maximum sustainable yield (124,498 mt) and is near historic low levels. The NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center affirmed that the stock assessment was the best available science. Although the criteria for making status determinations are identified in the FEP, specific values for maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT) and the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) reference points have not been identified for Pacific bluefin tuna. Therefore, the assessment cannot directly evaluate the stock's status based on the FEP criteria.

Pacific bluefin tuna is considered to be a single North Pacific-wide stock. Its conservation and management are the responsibility of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). The United States is a member of both regional fishery management organizations. Although both organizations have internationally agreed-upon management measures in place for Pacific bluefin tuna that expire at the end of 2013, these measures may be insufficient to end overfishing. Consequently, NMFS has determined that Section 304(i) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) applies because (i) the overfished and overfishing condition of Pacific bluefin tuna is due to excessive international fishing pressure and (ii) the IATTC and WCPFC have inadequate measures in place to correct the problem.



Under Magnuson-Stevens Act section 304(i)(2), the Council is required to develop domestic regulations to address the relative impact of domestic fisheries on Pacific bluefin tuna. Section 304(i)(2) also requires the Council to develop recommendations to the Secretary of State and to Congress for international actions to end overfishing and rebuild Pacific bluefin tuna. The Council should develop recommendations in consultation with the Secretary that take into consideration relevant provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, as well as National Standard 1 Guidelines that address international overfishing (see 50 CFR 600.310(k)(2)). NMFS encourages the Council to work cooperatively with the Pacific Council to develop management recommendations for this purpose.

My staff is ready to work with the Council on these efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'm. d. B.', is positioned above the printed name.

Michael Tosatto
Regional Administrator

cc: NMFS Southwest Region – R. McInnis
WPFMC – K. Simonds