



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Pacific Islands Regional Office  
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DEC - 5 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 Western and Central North Pacific (WCNP) stock of striped marlin (*Kajikia audax*) is subject to overfishing and is overfished. Striped marlin is a management unit species in both the Fishery Ecosystem Plan for Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region (WP Pelagics FEP) developed by the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (WP Council) and the Fishery Management Plan for U.S. West Coast Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species developed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Pacific Council).

Genetic and tagging studies suggest four Pacific stocks: southwest Pacific, eastern Pacific, and two North Pacific stocks. The North Pacific stocks are a WCNP stock and an Eastern North Pacific (ENP) stock, and the fisheries managed by the Councils harvest from both stocks. Both the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) manage striped marlin in the Pacific. Japan, Taiwan, Korea, China, and the USA harvest the majority of WCNP striped marlin by longlining, drift netting, and harpooning. Hawaii longline fisheries account for approximately 14% of total striped marlin landings (largely from the WCNP stock) and almost all U.S. domestic landings from 2006 through 2010, as reported in the latest assessment.

The WP Pelagics FEP defines *overfishing* as occurring when the fishing mortality rate (F) exceeds the maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT), i.e., the fishing mortality rate that produces MSY ( $F_{MSY}$ ) for one year or more. The WP Pelagics FEP defines *overfished* when its total biomass (B) declines below the minimum stock size threshold (MSST), i.e., the level necessary to produce MSY on a continuing basis ( $B_{MSY}$ ). The MSST for WCNP striped marlin is  $0.6 * B_{MSY}$ , based on the stock's estimated natural mortality rate.

In July 2012, the Billfish Working Group of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) completed a stock assessment for the WCNP striped marlin stock (separately from the ENP stock). The Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) issued the stock assessment as an internal report in January 2013, and the Center for Independent Experts reviewed the assessment in 2013. The assessment used the Stock Synthesis 3 model with data through 2010 and incorporated re-estimates of growth and natural mortality, and fit to standardized relative abundance indices and size composition. Results support a conclusion that the stock is subject to overfishing because fishing mortality is greater than  $F_{MSY}$  ( $F_{2007-2009}/F_{MSY}=1.25$ ). Results support a conclusion that the stock is overfished because SB is less than MSST ( $SB_{2010}/MSST = 0.58$ ). Estimated reference points



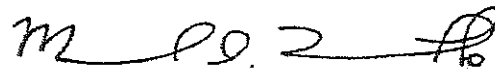
from the most recent assessment are  $F_{2007-2009}=0.76$ ,  $F_{MSY}=0.61$ ,  $SB_{2010}=938$  mt, and  $SB_{MSY}=2,713$  mt. Therefore,  $MSST=1,628$  mt. Although the overfishing criteria used in the assessment are consistent with the status determination criteria (SDC) in the WP Pelagics FEP, the assessment used SB instead of B to evaluate the overfished status. In reviewing the assessment, the PIFSC concluded that the overfished status is likely the same, regardless of whether B or SB is used, given the depletion level of WCNP striped marlin. The WP Pelagics FEP specifies B for the overfished status determination criterion, but PIFSC strongly recommends using SB. The WP Council may amend the WP Pelagics FEP so that, whenever they deem a stock assessment the best scientific information available, it will be suitable for management purposes. The PIFSC and the Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) consider this assessment to be the best scientific information available on the WCNP striped marlin stock.

International management measures include the implementation of Conservation and Management Measure 2010-01 by the WCPFC, which required participating member countries to reduce total catch by January 1, 2013, to 80% of the maximum levels taken between 2000 and 2003. The U.S. catch is below levels agreed to by the WCPFC. At its 157th meeting from June 25-28, 2013, the WP Council recommended a total catch limit at 3,600 mt and an annual 500-mt catch limit for WCPFC members catching less than 500 mt annually. PIRO and the West Coast Regional Office will work with the WP Council, the Pacific Council, and the State Department to determine if more effective management measures should be proposed to the WCPFC for 2014 and beyond.

Section 304(i) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act applies because (1) the overfishing and overfished condition of WCNP striped marlin is due largely to excessive international fishing pressure, and (2) the IATTC and WCPFC have inadequate measures in place to correct the problem. The WP Council is obliged to take international and domestic management action under sections 304(i) and 304(i)(2) to address international and domestic impacts, respectively. The Council must develop domestic regulations to address the relative impact of the domestic fishing fleet on the stock, and develop recommendations to the Secretary of State and Congress for international actions to end overfishing and rebuild WCNP striped marlin. I encourage 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,



Michael Tosatto  
Regional Administrator

cc: NMFS West Coast Region – W. Stelle  
WPFMC – K. Simonds