

Migratory Species Committee Report

January 30, 2017

Pamella Dana – Chair

The agenda was adopted as written. However, approval of minutes was skipped because none of the committee members from the last time the committee met (August 12, 2009) are still on the Council.

Randy Blankinship, Atlantic HMS Management Division Southeast Branch Chief, gave a presentation titled, Introduction to Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Management, which highlighted similarities and differences with Council management. The HMS Management Division was created in 1992. It participates in the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), and implements ICCAT recommendations as necessary and appropriate through regulations under Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA). Current issues include Bluefin Tuna (Amendment 7), dusky sharks (Amendment 5b), swordfish revitalization, bycatch of sea turtles, billfish, and marine mammals, and the Deepwater Horizon Oceanic Fish Restoration Program.

Craig Brown, Atlantic HMS Branch Chief, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, gave a presentation titled, Overview of ICCAT Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Stock Assessment Process. ICCAT is responsible for the management of tunas and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas. ICCAT's Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS), is responsible for providing scientific advice to the Commission, including carrying out stock assessments and providing management advice. In 2017, stock assessments are planned for shortfin mako shark, Atlantic swordfish, and bluefin tuna.

Dr. Brown provided several examples of HMS research being conducted in the Gulf of Mexico by the SEFSC. These included a cooperative tagging program for several HMS species, a recreational billfish survey, and bluefin tuna larval surveys. Dr. Brown also described a “close-kin analysis”, where genetic mark-recapture is used to estimate the number of western Atlantic bluefin tuna spawners. Other ongoing bluefin tuna research includes joint US-Japan-Canada-Mexico longline CPUE indices, a young of the year (YOY) sampling/survey in the Florida Straits, and electronic tagging of bluefin and yellowfin tuna.

In questions following the two presentations, a Council member asked what data sources were used for recreational landings, particularly for yellowfin tuna. The presenters responded that the data sources included the large pelagic survey, MRIP, headboat survey, Texas Parks and Wildlife survey, and tournaments. The Council member suggested using the LA Creel data. The presenters responded that they were open to using additional sources of data if they could determine how to incorporate the data into their analysis. Another Council member asked how the boundaries for the new pelagic longline restricted areas were determined. The presenters responded that the areas and closure ties were based on the timing of bluefin tuna interactions reported in pelagic longline observer data. A Council member asked what types of outreach were used to inform fishermen about regulation changes. The presenters responded that they sent

letters to the HMS permit holders, published changes in the HMS e-mail, and communicated via VMS monitoring.

Pamella Dana summarized her participation in the ICCAT meeting held in Portugal November 14-21, 2016. There were 54 nations represented at the meeting. Decisions were made by consensus. All nations had to agree to a proposal for it to be accepted. Among the proposals that passed were the first ever conservation and management measures for sailfish and North Atlantic blue shark. This included measures for live release and use of circle hooks. In addition, quota measures were extended for several stocks including north and south Atlantic swordfish. A proposal that sharks be landed with their fins attached was supported by a majority of the nations, but not by all, so it did not pass. The U.S. delegation raised a concern about bycatch of juvenile yellowfin tuna by vessels fishing for bigeye tuna using fish aggregating devices (FADs). A FAD working group was formed to examine this issue. A summary report describing all of the actions taken at the meeting was included in the Council's briefing book materials.

Madam Chair, this concludes my report.