

10616 ALMOND AVENUE
OAK VIEW, CALIFORNIA 93022

OFFICE
OF
HENRY M. (CHIP) BISSELL IV

TELEPHONE: (805) 649-0721
FACSIMILE: (805) 649-0723
LEGALDIVER@SBCGLOBAL.NET

October 15, 2010

VIA FIRST CLASS MAIL

Attn: Natalie Webster
AMERICAN ALBACORE FISHING ASSOCIATION
4252 Bonita Road, #154
Bonita, CA 91902

Re.: Meeting of the General Advisory Committee – September 2010

Dear Natalie and all AAFA members:

On AAFA's behalf, I recently attended the 16th meeting of the General Advisory Committee (GAC) to the U.S. Section to the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). As has become more and more common at these GAC meetings, there was a considerable amount of concern over the actual role of the GAC.

The GAC is quite unlike the Pacific Fisheries Management Council. While it was established to provide advice for the U.S. Section to the IATTC, it has since been decided that the GAC's role is *not* to reach any formal conclusions or make collective recommendations to the U.S. Section. Instead, the GAC has evolved into a meeting where representatives may express their views and the U.S. Section members then decide what action they wish to take at the IATTC meetings.

As the meeting progressed, the Committee received a presentation on the concept of "Yield Curves." These curves plotted Spawning Stock Biomass on one axis and fishery mortality (F) on the other. The point was made that, when a fishery's harvest level exceeds the Maximum Sustained Yield (MSY), establishing even a slight reduction in the fishery mortality can result in significant increases in the fishery's Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB).

It was generally agreed that this concept presents the wisdom of applying a precautionary approach to fishery management. I noted that this concept looks good in theory, but the GAC and more importantly, our U.S. representatives, need to ensure that if it becomes necessary to reduce albacore fishing effort the burden of such reduction needs to be shared appropriately among the international fisheries.

Yellowfin, Bigeye & Skipjack

With regard to yellowfin, bigeye, and skipjack, the three stocks overlap to such an extent that the IATTC regards them as one single fishery consisting of the three tropical

AMERICAN ALBACORE FISHING ASSOCIATION

Re.: Meeting of the General Advisory Committee – September 2010

(Continued)

tunas. Conservation measures for yellowfin and bigeye are indicating that they are beginning to have a positive effect.

Those conservation measures include a 30-day closure period for purse seine vessels (having more than 182 metric tons carrying capacity) in an area west of the Galapagos, often referred to as “the box.”

The conservation measures also require purse seine vessels to retain on board, and then land, all bigeye, yellowfin, and skipjack tuna caught. Only fish considered unfit for human consumption, for reasons other than size, may be discarded. It is important to note that these conservation measures do not apply to pole-and-line, troll, sportfishing, or the smaller purse seiners.

Bluefin

Regarding bluefin tuna, there is growing concern recently over a significant increase in catch of small (year zero age class) bluefin by Korea’s coastal purse seine fleet. It has been recommended that IATTC member vessels control their bluefin fishing mortality to ensure that their annual catch does not exceed their average annual catch during 1994-2007.

Albacore

With respect to North Pacific albacore, AAFA has repeatedly encouraged the U.S. to push for a time frame of 1996-2005 to be used to characterize effort over time. This 10-year time frame was established by the Southwest Fisheries Science Center with the input of our U.S. albacore fishery. The Pacific Fishery Management Council has approved this characterization of the fishery and had recommended it be advanced by the U.S. in international discussions. Such efforts were unsuccessful and instead, it appears that the IATTC has chosen a different time frame, 2002-2004. This isn’t the worst outcome for U.S. fishermen, but it appears to benefit the Japanese fishery more than it does the U.S.

I informed the GAC that there appeared to be a significant disconnect between what was being communicated to the PFMC and what was coming from the U.S. Section. The U.S. Section representatives were discussing the need to convene meetings with other IATTC members and move forward in taking steps toward management actions for albacore.

In marked contrast, the Chairman of the HMS Advisory Subpanel had, just days before, provided the PFMC with a report that stated:

“The HMS-AS does not foresee any albacore management issues addressed this year at the IATTC session...”

*Wayne Heikkila, HMS-AS Vice Chair,
Comm. Troll Rep. & Exec. Dir., WFOA*

I had questioned the HMS-AS when this view was expressed and sought to have the Subpanel discuss albacore issues in a manner that would provide the Council with recommendations that the U.S. Section might find beneficial. It was regrettable that the Subpanel chose not to have any discussion of albacore issues, particularly when the HMS Management Team reported a need for the U.S. to move forward in international discussions.

AMERICAN ALBACORE FISHING ASSOCIATION

Re.: Meeting of the General Advisory Committee – September 2010

(Continued)

There has been some international support for convening a working group to develop a definition of “*current levels*” of effort, as stated in the IATTC albacore resolution. The upcoming IATTC meetings in Guatemala are expected to provide the U.S. representatives with the opportunity to hold these first meetings.

I have had communications with NMFS and the State Department regarding AAFA’s strong interest in participating in any meetings of this working group. At the GAC meeting, I expressed frustration that the State Department has provided few if any details regarding this important meeting. I asked the State Department and other government officials to consider that it is very costly and inconvenient for fishermen to travel to Guatemala for a week, just waiting for a meeting to be announced. Providing us with adequate details of the working group meeting and sufficient advance notice would be appreciated.

During the meeting it was stressed that the albacore catches by longline fleets of Taiwan and other countries need to be determined and considered. It is essential that any management measures take them into account as well.

South Pacific Tuna Treaty

There was brief discussion of the South Pacific Tuna Treaty (SPTT). Unlike the U.S. – Canada albacore treaty, the SPTT allows U.S. vessels to fish tuna stocks in the waters of select South Pacific nations. In exchange for that access, the U.S. provides those nations with monetary compensation.

The SPTT is very important to the large purse seine tuna fleet that operates in the Central and Western Pacific. If the treaty were not renewed, significant issues involving fisheries access rights and fisheries jurisdiction could complicate the purse seine fishery.

The SPTT entered into force in 1988. The treaty was extended in 1993 and then again in March 2002. The treaty is set to expire in June 2013, and a variety of international pressures are developing and may complicate its renewal. The U.S. is currently in process of renegotiating the treaty.

U.S. – Canada Albacore Treaty

NMFS provided a brief update on the U.S. – Canada Albacore Treaty. The treaty’s fishing regime started in 2009, and is now in the second year of its three-year provision. Renegotiations are expected to take place next year.

As a side note, it was also announced that 59 U.S. albacore vessels had called in to fish in Canadian waters. It was unknown whether that number represented vessels that had simply signed up to be able to fish in Canadian waters; vessels that were currently fishing there; or vessels that had “hailed in” but might no longer be in Canadian waters. The significance of this number was not entirely clear.

There was mention of “industry displeasure” with the treaty. I briefly stated that AAFA had presented some of its concerns to our representatives at the State Department and we were awaiting a responsive reply. I indicated that U.S. fishermen would be preparing to express their concerns in advance of the upcoming treaty renegotiations and hoped that NMFS and the State Department would work to address our concerns.

Assorted Issues

Overall, albacore issues received a relatively small amount of time and attention in comparison to the other tuna species. However, there were a few other issues presented that may be of interest to our albacore fleet.

Vessel Marking Requirements

If a vessel is fishing west of 150W, in WCPFC jurisdiction, there is a contradiction or conflict in vessel marking requirements. NMFS is aware of this problem and is working on a proposal to address it. I brought up the VMS issue and stressed the significant burden it placed on our fishery. They are also looking into possible ways to resolve this.

Trade Measures

The IATTC is considering the possibility of adopting trade restrictions on those countries that do not comply with international fishery management measures. A number of proposals from IATTC Members have been submitted for discussion.

Port State Measures

Port State Measures (PSM) are seen as one way to combat IUU fishing. The idea of increased port state control has become more favorable in recent years. PSM are usually seen as requirements imposed by port states. Foreign fishing vessels must satisfy those requirements in order to use the port.

Essentially, PSM combats IUU fishing by holding port states responsible for IUU fishing and punishable for IUU activities. Similar proposals are gaining acceptance in other international management organizations.

Typically, PSM require notification prior to port entry or use of designated ports, restrictions on landing or transshipment of fish, restrictions on supplies and services, and documentation requirements. Trade-related measures and sanctions are often incorporated into PSM.

If you have any questions or would like to have further discussions on these matters, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Chip Bissell