



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southwest Region
501 West Ocean Boulevard, Suite 4200
Long Beach, California 90802- 4213

OCT - 1 2004

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TO: **U.S. PURSE SEINE TUNA FLEET**
U.S. BIGEYE TUNA LONGLINE FLEET

SUBJECT: **IATTC FISHERY MANAGEMENT ACTIONS FOR 2004**

At an extraordinary meeting in October 2003, the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) adopted a resolution addressing yellowfin, bigeye, and skipjack tuna conservation in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean (ETP) for 2003 and 2004. The resolution required the Parties to prohibit tuna purse seine fishing in a portion of the IATTC convention area for the month of December 2003 and for a six-week period beginning August 1, 2004. The resolution also called upon members and non-members to take measures necessary to ensure that their total longline catches of bigeye tuna in the ETP during 2004 will not exceed those of 2001. The 2003 closure was implemented by separate action last year. A notice was sent to the fleets October 10, 2003, outlining the 2003 closure and on May 14, 2004, outlining the pending closures for 2004.

At the June 2004 IATTC meeting, the October 2003 resolution was revised. The June 2004 resolution is a Multi-Annual Program on the Conservation of Tuna in the ETP for 2004, 2005, and 2006. The revised resolution offers a choice of a six-week purse seine fishery closure either beginning August 1, 2004, or beginning November 20, 2004. In addition, the resolution also requires the closure of each country's longline fishery for bigeye tuna in the ETP if and when the 2004 catch reaches the estimated level of catch in 2001. A copy of the resolution can be found on the IATTC home page at www.IATTC.org. The Department of State (DOS) has approved the IATTC recommendation. This is to notify you of these conservation measures.

A proposed rule was published in the Federal Register on June 25, 2004. Comments were received during the proposed rule comment period with respect to the timing of the closure. Most comments received noted that a closure later in the fishing year gave better public notice, minimized the disruption of planned fishery operations, and was in keeping with the historic timing of closures for this purse seine fishery and the ability for the industry to prepare for and plan the closure. The United States has chosen the six-week period beginning November 20, 2004, for purse seine vessels fishing for yellowfin, bigeye, and skipjack tunas in the Convention Area. The Convention Area is defined as the area bounded by the coastline of the Americas, the 40° N parallel, the 150° W meridian, and the 40° S parallel.

Comments were also received regarding the selection of 2001 as the base year for setting an ETP bigeye longline fishery quota for U.S. vessels and the method used to compute the United States



catch of longlined bigeye in 2001. The U.S. 2001 ETP catch of longlined bigeye tuna has been recomputed at 150 metric tons.

In addition to this direct notice to the tuna fishing industry, the National Marine Fisheries Service will announce the conservation and management measures as a final rule in the Federal Register. The longline fishery closure will be announced separately if the 2004 bigeye tuna catch reaches the 2001 level. However, under procedures in the regulations authorizing implementation of IATTC recommendations that have been approved by the DOS, the purse seine closure described above is effective on the date specified, as you have received direct notice as the owners and operators of U.S. vessels.

I appreciate your cooperation in observing the six-week, time/area closure beginning November 20, 2004, for the purse seine fishery and the closure of the longline fishery for bigeye tuna if the 2004 catch reaches the estimated level of 2001.

Sincerely,



fr Rodney R. McInnis
Regional Administrator