

Appendix D: Summary Responses from Break-out Groups

Perspectives on the Sustainability of the West Coast Swordfish Fishery:

Is the current state of the swordfish fishery both socio-economically and environmentally sustainable?

Environmental Sustainability

Swordfish stock is healthy

- Distribution is variable in time and space
- Swordfish stocks are not overfished
- Overfishing is not occurring
- North Pacific swordfish stock is underutilized
- Total catch is projected to remain below maximum sustainable yield
- PFMC HMS FMP is a framework for effective management and monitoring of the stocks

Sea turtles are protected species in the United States

- Regulations are adequate to protect sea turtles in U.S. waters
- There are very conservative incidental take limits in U.S. fisheries
- Sea turtles are migratory and subject to adverse impacts beyond U.S. waters

Other species interactions are monitored

- For shark stocks that have been assessed, none were found to be overfished, and overfishing is not occurring
- The current harvest guideline is likely to ensure continued sustainability of shark stocks
- Concerns exist about the bycatch of blue sharks and mola mola (ocean sunfish, mostly released alive)

Ongoing monitoring and research needed to ensure sustainability

- Data collection is necessary for accurate assessments
- It is important to regularly assess stocks
- Tagging studies are critical for fine tuning fishing and management practices

Socio-economic Sustainability

Need more data and analysis to make good decisions for the fishery and the environment

- Misinformation creates misconceptions about the fishery
- Political and regulatory climate restricting fishing opportunity and markets
- Seafood boycotts threaten the fishery's sustainability
- Industry is fragmented by negative campaigns with diminished ability to carry a unified message and influence outcomes
- ESA and MMPA procedures improved, but fishermen feel more can be done
- Litigation is always a risk with incidental take of sea turtles in the United States

Uneven playing field with foreign swordfish fisheries

- Most swordfish consumed in the United States is imported from other countries
- U.S. swordfish fishery is more regulated than in other countries
- Foreign fleets have access to subsidies and training programs
- U.S. west coast permits may not be sufficiently matched to the scale of fishery issues (i.e., DGN permits are state, not federal)
- Management should ensure that regulations are fair and effective Pacific-wide, especially with regard to incidental take of sea turtles
- Decision-making should be made more efficient, not more complicated

Reduced vitality of west coast fishing communities

- Collapse of the northern DGN fishery
- Fewer fishermen and permits overall
- Suffering infrastructure, especially at the community level
- Loss of working waterfronts that support fisheries

Safety at sea risks exist

- Fishing farther offshore
- Contending with more challenging sea conditions
- Retrieving gear from deeper depths

No succession plan for the fishery

- Few new entrants
- No plan to encourage the next generation of fishermen to enter the fishery
- Fishing knowledge, skills, and permits may lapse if not transferred
- Current fishermen likely to relocate for opportunity to earn better wages

Despite challenges, maintaining a positive outlook

- Demand for swordfish and the health of the stock is strong
- Some believe the PFMC is receptive to considering changes in the existing management structure
- Industry is in need of marketing tools and approaches to communicate with and educate decision-makers, including legislators and staffers
- Industry is encouraged to develop pro-active programs to address sea turtle research and conservation issues and to inform management efforts for obtaining regulatory relief

Compounding regulatory burdens

- PLCA cited as particularly damaging to industry
- Fishing seasons reduced when swordfish move into closed areas
- Cumulative effects of bycatch avoidance measures made the fishery financially untenable

Increased costs to fish

- Lost access to productive fishing grounds (lower volumes of fish)
- Use of bycatch reduction devices and avoidance tactics
- Increased fuel costs
- Longer transit times to distant offshore sites

Reduced revenue from swordfish

- Competition with imports
- Low market prices for DGN compared to longline
- Inability to provide a consistent supply
- Reduced control of timing supply to markets

Supplemental income is necessary, but restricted

- Dependence on other local fisheries is necessary to make a living fishing now
- A diminished shark market with negative campaigns

U.S. swordfish supply not meeting U.S. demand

- Supplying domestic demand with imports transfers impacts on protected species overseas
- The harpoon fishery is high cost and cannot fill the gap between U.S. demand and supply
- Eastern U.S. buyers prefer longline caught fish over net caught

Importing swordfish lowers net national benefits

- Other nations have high per-unit-effort impacts on protected species
- U.S. west coast swordfish fishery operates with a lower per-unit-effort impact on protected species



Examining Gear and Operational Changes:

What gear and operational changes could increase the viability of the swordfish fishery and coastal communities while minimizing impacts to protect marine species and the marine environment?

Gear Changes

Recognize that the fleets have already made extensive gear and operational changes

- Using pingers in DGN
- Using light bars on nets
- Dropping DGNs to greater depths
- Employing different fishing strategies based on experience with sea turtles
- Using circle hooks and mackerel bait on longlines

Consider switch to longline gear

- Consider the ability of deeper sets to reduce bycatch
- Test the viability of deep-set longline gear
- Look at options for using deep-set longline gear to catch swordfish during daylight hours
- Plan for the costs associated with converting from DGN

Test the viability of buoy fishing

- Consider as a means to expand fishing opportunities
- Anticipate lower catch volumes than with longline or DGN gear
- Must overcome monitoring challenges

Operational Changes

Improve science in biological opinions

- Provide quality assurance with an independent peer review
- Create a STAR-type panel review of ESA consultations
- Re-evaluate the impacts of the existing closed area on the fishery and overall bycatch resource dynamics
- Use the science about non-target species to improve ecosystem understanding

Revisit seasonality and geographic scope of DGN fishery

- Reassess the size and timing of the PLCA
- Consider research-supported dynamic area management
- Address safety-at-sea issues with access to low wind areas
- Increase revenue potential with access to areas with high swordfish catch rates
- Scale the time and cost involved to industry capacity

Consider an exempted fishing permit for DGN in the closed area

- Re-evaluate bycatch in the closed area
- Test different DGN configurations and locations
- Use pingers and lower drop lines
- Use oceanographic data for sea turtle avoidance

Revisit exempted fishing permits for longlines

- Use the gear tested and configured to reduce bycatch in the Hawaii longline fishery
- Allow longline gear inside the EEZ under an exempted fishing permit
- Plan experiments to prepare a longer-term operation plan and inroads for longline fishery development
- Consider time and area closures to separate commercial and recreational fisheries in time and space (i.e., recreational fishing occurs mainly in the summer while commercial fishing occurs mainly in the fall and winter)

Further sea turtle and fishery interaction research and tools

- Use tools, like TurtleWatch, to help the fishery avoid turtles
- Gather better information on sea turtle distributions in relation to environmental conditions
- Determine comparative catch and bycatch rates between longline and DGN gear within the west coast EEZ

Revamp the fisheries permit system

- Create long-term incentives for fishermen to enter and stay in the fishery
- Facilitate the recruitment of new fishermen and young people
- Consider hiring more staff to help lower the hurdles of getting new entrants into the fishery
- Caution against new fishermen's inexperience with bycatch avoidance practices
- Consider strategy of targeting fishermen who moved to Hawaii to fish as it may be economically feasible for them to move back to the U.S. west coast
- Reduce permit costs through federalization
- Provide resources needed for start-up

Explore trade regulations

- Hold imported fish to the same conservation standards as those harvested in the United States
- Use expertise and knowledge from shrimp fishery, which is required to use TEDs

Making the Transition

Make the exempted fishing permit proposals politically tractable

- Place greater limits on effort (sets and boats)
- Require 100% observer coverage and monitoring
- Establish a fixed bycatch cap
- Engage NGOs as partners to develop the proposals
- Coordinate comparable results across gear types (e.g., DGN, longline with daytime deep-sets, and buoy gear)
- Results of alternative gear testing should be evaluated and reported

Continue research

- Use exempted fishing permits to fill recognized data gaps
- Acquire a better understanding of spatial overlap between sea turtles and swordfish
- Determine sea turtle migratory patterns
- Consider research recommended at the SLUTH workshop

Proceed with caution

- Recognize that legislative backing for longline fishing off the U.S. west coast is needed to garner support from state representatives on the PFMC
- Industry cannot endure increased costs to fish
- Political battles could be time-consuming and have negative impacts on catch rates

Set priorities

- Focus on actions to avert the loss of the DGN fishery (i.e., highest risk)
- Reassess biological opinions on turtle take
- Address political resistance to restructuring or eliminating the closed area

Addressing Demand and Reducing Reliance on Imports:

What can be done to increase the demand for local and sustainable swordfish products and decrease U.S. reliance on foreign imports?

Increase Demand for U.S. Harvested Swordfish

Increase outreach and education on sustainable seafood

- Improve NMFS capacity to communicate how well U.S. fisheries are managed
- Reach out to all sectors of the seafood supply chain (e.g., fishermen, processors, wholesalers, restaurants, public)
- Target large retailers on the facts about swordfish and U.S. fisheries management
- Explain what “sustainability” means
- Clarify the requirements for “sustainable certification”
- Improve recognition of FishWatch as an information resource
- Use outreach devices (e.g., televisions) at retail locations to educate consumers

Create a positive marketing campaign for west coast swordfish

- Increase public awareness about the status of swordfish (i.e., not overfished; overfishing not occurring)
- Demonstrate the merits of local fisheries
- Highlight the value and benefits of buying U.S. west coast swordfish, including product quality, port and community viability, and support for clean fishing gear and technologies
- Identify the right spokespeople
- Address negative connotations and misconceptions about mercury
- Target NGOs for their power to influence consumer demand
- Target seafood buyers as the gatekeepers to markets

Tell the story of U.S. west coast swordfish

- Feature U.S. fishermen in marketing campaigns
- Focus on success stories
- Connect consumers to the fishermen through festivals, fishermen or farmer’s markets, or approaches like Fish Trax
- Point out the seasonal nature of the fishery

Decrease Reliance on Imports

Level the playing field between foreign and domestic suppliers

- Encourage the FAO Code of Conduct to foreign fishing operations
- Enforce compatibility of foreign conservation measures with MMPA requirements 101(a)(2)
- Impose tariffs on imported seafood that does not meet the U.S. conservation standards for harvest
- Provide subsidies to domestic fishermen

Increase U.S. swordfish supply to markets

- Provide the domestic fleet greater access to fish
- Reduce costs to fish with relaxation of some regulatory measures
- Create an industry self-tax to support sea turtle conservation on beaches
- Dedicate the funds collected on import tariffs to support sustainable U.S. fisheries
- Revitalize the fishery with incremental approaches so as not to exceed conservation limits

Seek pathways for market differentiation

- Present a unified image highlighting good national practices among U.S. fisheries
- Articulate “transfer effect” to consumers in a marketing format that garners support for U.S. swordfish and fisheries
- Couple with pro-active turtle research and conservation measures to boost consumer confidence

Press NOAA to label U.S. fishery products

- Defend U.S. fishery products as sustainable
- Provide an alternative to third party labels and certifications
- Create an accountability mechanism for compliance with the MSA 10 National Standards

Consider product labels for U.S. North Pacific swordfish

- Develop a turtle-safe brand or label for California or U.S. west coast swordfish products
- Support NOAA FishWatch as a reliable data source for sustainability labels

Strategies

Re-initiate a fishing industry association

- Unify public relations efforts
- Augment industry profiles

Build partnerships between NMFS, industry, NGOs, restaurateurs, and others

- Ensure all seafood recommendations have a strong scientific basis
- Partnerships may reduce costs to develop strategic communications
- Solicit NGO help in funding experiments (e.g., WWF International Smart Gear competition)

Partner with California Sustainable Seafood Initiative

- Revitalize the California Seafood Council
- Support the California Sustainable Seafood Initiative pre-assessment of California swordfish fisheries
- Recognize funding opportunities through California Sustainable Seafood Initiative for seafood certification

Set priorities

- Focus on swordfish first
- Expand marketing campaign to other California or west coast-based fisheries



For report information and copies please contact:

Sustainable Fisheries Division
Southwest Regional Office
National Marine Fisheries Service
501 West Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200
Long Beach, CA 90802

(562) 980-4030

This report and more information on the workshop are available online at:

NMFS SWRO Sustainable Fisheries Division Website

or at:

<http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfws/index.html>

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