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Recommendations to the 16th Session of WCPFC

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Submitted by
IGFA



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Recommendations to the 16th Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

The International Game Fish Association (IGFA) is a non-profit organization that represents recreational anglers throughout the world. IGFA was established in 1939, has active members in over 100 countries and provides rules for ethical angling practices. Many of the IGFA's members target the highly migratory species managed by WCPFC, especially marlin, sailfish and spearfish (i.e., billfish) which are primarily caught and released.

IGFA has great concern about how highly migratory species are being managed on a global level for recreational anglers. The lack of data and accurate reporting on billfish catch is of particular concern. As an organization that is committed to the conservation of game fishes, IGFA has deployed over 400 pop-up satellite archival tags in marlin around the world in the past eight years, many of which have been in the area under this organization's purview. The information gained from this exercise is available to your scientific committee.

Billfish

North Pacific Striped Marlin

The IGFA's primary concern for the 16th Regular Session of the Commission continues to be the status of striped marlin. According to the last stock assessment (2019), the WCNPO stock has experienced a long-term decline in population biomass and the stock is currently overfished and experiencing overfishing. The 2017 spawning stock biomass is estimated at just 981 t and the biomass of age 1 and older fish is 6,000 t. Taken collectively, the current spawning stock biomass is 76% below that necessary to achieve MSY and fishing mortality is 7% higher than that would achieve MSY. As such, the stock continues to be both overfished and experiencing overfishing and no reference points have been established by the WCPFC. Additionally, there is concern regarding the low short-term recruitment that the stock experienced between 2012-2016.

Because of the severely depleted nature of the stock and uncertainty regarding if it will continue experiencing low recruitment, the IGFA recommends that the WCPFC reduce total catch to no more than 1,359 t in order to achieve a 60% probability of attaining a spawning stock biomass of 3,610 t by 2022.

Southwest Pacific Striped Marlin

The most current information for southwest Pacific striped marlin indicates that the stock is overfished and very close to experiencing overfishing. This stock's spawning biomass has been depleted to less than 20% of its unfished condition, even though recent catches are roughly half of the MSY for the stock.

The IGFA recommends that the WCPFC heed the recommendations of SC15 and enact measures reduce the overall catch of the stock, including the expansion of the geographical scope of CMM-2006-04 to cover the distribution range of the stock.

General Recommendations

Although primarily a commercial bycatch species, billfish are highly sought-after recreational species that are primarily caught and released. Recreational fisheries for billfish also yield significant economic benefits at the regional level. As such, the IGFA recommends that all countries be required to report dead discards and use circle hooks in their longline fisheries to reduce fishing mortality and improve the survival of released fish.

The International Game Fish Association is a nonprofit organization committed to the conservation of game fish and the promotion of responsible, ethical angling practices through science, education, rule making, record keeping and recognition of outstanding accomplishments in the field of angling.