



Monterey Bay Aquarium

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June 10, 2019

Mr. David Hanson
Chair, Legislative Committee
Pacific Fishery Management Council

RE: Letter of support for equitable Highly Migratory Species research funding and Management Strategy Evaluation for Pacific bluefin tuna

Dear Mr. Hanson,

I am writing to request a letter of support from the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PMFC) to the U.S. House and Senate Committees on Appropriations to recognize the importance of equitable funding for Highly Migratory Species (HMS) research in the Pacific and increased scientific capacity for Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) to advance recovery and U.S. stakeholder engagement on Pacific bluefin tuna. This request dovetails with PFMC Agenda Item J.2 regarding the upcoming international negotiations at the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee. A letter from the PMFC would reinforce the importance of equitable resources for HMS research, as well as the need for a transparent, science-based and stakeholder-driven MSE process to advance recovery and U.S. interests on Pacific bluefin tuna.

Pacific bluefin tuna are critical to California's economy and key top predator in the ocean, but the population has been depleted to 3.3% of historic size – the lowest of all commercially harvested tunas globally. The U.S. has been a leader in advocating to recover the species to sustainable levels through the IATTC and WCPFC, and in 2017 the U.S. secured an international agreement to recover the population to sustainable levels by 2034 – a major achievement. However, this hard-won recovery plan is at risk if countries do not follow a precautionary, science-based approach, and risks significant impacts on U.S. stakeholders.

Management Strategy Evaluation is a process that brings scientists, managers and stakeholders together to identify approaches that can achieve a range of objectives. MSE has been identified globally as an optimal “next-generation” fishery management process to build consensus, transparency and support for science-based management, and it has been implemented in several international highly migratory species, particularly tunas. Importantly, the MSE process will improve the ability to meet the needs of U.S. stakeholders and ensure population recovery. Increased MSE scientific



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capacity within NOAA would enhance U.S. stakeholder engagement in the international management process, advance scientific best practices, increase transparency and position the U.S. to lead MSE for other valuable tunas and highly migratory species.

In the last two years, Congress emphasized Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico highly migratory species research and issues in their Appropriations reports, but unfortunately did not recognize the key threats and the need for research in the Pacific. Pacific HMS species, including Pacific bluefin, need additional scientific capacity and a more equitable, transparent process in the face of increasing pressure from non-U.S. fishing vessels and interests. In addition, there is continued need to ensure appropriate resources for PFMC staff and representatives to participate in the international management process.

A letter of support from the PFMC would reinforce the importance of equitable scientific research for Pacific HMS species, the value of MSE capacity and the need for PFMC engagement in the international negotiations, particularly Pacific bluefin tuna. In May, the Aquarium requested that the U.S. House and Senate Committees on Appropriations address these HMS research and management needs, and I would appreciate your support for a letter to recognize these priority requests.

Thank you for consideration of this request and please contact Josh Madeira (jmadeira@mbayaq.org) on my staff if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Spring".

Margaret Spring
Chief Conservation and Science Officer
Monterey Bay Aquarium