

Migratory Species Committee Report January 29, 2020 Dr. Stunz – Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab M, No. 1**) as written and approved the minutes (**Tab M, No. 2**) of the June 2019 meeting as written.

Report from the HMS AP and ICCAT AC Meetings

Dr. Greg Stunz provided an update of the recent activities of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) Advisory Committee. Dr. Stunz reviewed the status of a number of migratory species including shortfin mako shark, bluefin tuna, and yellowfin tuna. He stated that the recent stock assessment for shortfin mako indicated that the stock was experiencing overfishing, is overfished, and would likely require an extensive rebuilding plan. Yellowfin tuna does not require as restrictive management measures relative to shortfin mako, despite both species having more prolonged maturity schedules than originally thought, but the yellowfin stock still requires very close monitoring, as the fishery is on the verge of entering an overfished and overfishing status. Progress continues to be made on a bluefin stock assessment. Dr. Stunz emphasized that while ICCAT has a unique set of challenges due to the migratory nature of these species, they also face similar management problems addressed by the Council such as data uncertainties, observer coverage, and enforcement of regulations. Dr. Stunz reiterated that while migratory species are not directly managed by the Council, the advisory committees allow an avenue for Council members to communicate with the ICCAT commissioners about issues within the Gulf of Mexico.

The Committee asked if the ICCAT Advisory Council had provided any input on the status of blackfin tuna since anecdotal reporting has indicated that blackfin observations have recently declined. Dr. Stunz indicated that issues related to blackfin were not explicitly discussed but that he would provide an update on blackfin management status. Mr. Chester Brewer, a representative from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, reiterated the importance of continued monitoring of yellowfin in Gulf of Guinea as these directed fisheries capture a number of small juveniles. Dr. Stunz agreed and encouraged the Committee to continue being involved in migratory species issues.

Presentation on shark population abundance trends and depredation (Tab M, No. 4)

Ms. Karyl Brewster-Geisz, from the NOAA division of Highly Migratory Species (HMS), gave a presentation outlining shark management history, reported recent trends in abundance and landings, and identified a number of data needs related to attempting to quantify the depredation of fish by sharks. She indicated that a number of shark species, especially species within the large coastal complex, were still considered overfished. She stated that recent landings (since 2017) have been well below established quotas for many shark species and complexes. Ms. Brewster-Geisz also indicated that while HMS is aware of the concern surrounding depredation by sharks, more information is required to begin to address the problem. She stated that the seasonality, number of occurrences, identification of shark species, or fishing practices

potentially related to depredation are still poorly understood and best practices for collecting this type of information would need to be developed.

The Committee asked if there had been a decline in directed effort for shark harvest in the Gulf of Mexico since the implementation of better effort monitoring in 2014. Ms. Brewster-Geisz state that this is difficult to determine but she estimated that the number of permitted vessels has generally remained the same. The Committee inquired as to whether the recently documented increase in the sandbar shark stock would result in relaxing of current regulations. Ms. Brewster-Geisz indicated that HMS is exploring if harvest could be allowed while continuing to achieve rebuilding management goals. The Committee also asked if HMS was developing any ecosystem-based analyses techniques to help quantify potential shifts in shark predation selection. Ms. Brewster-Geisz indicated that while ecosystem-based approaches have not yet been directly input into stock assessments, investigations into these techniques are beginning within HMS. The Committee asked how many directed shark commercial fishermen from the Gulf of Mexico sat on the HMS advisory panel. Ms. Brewster-Geisz stated that one commercial shark fisherman from the Gulf of Mexico was active on the advisory panel. The Committee recommended that, while a small contingent of fishermen, that HMS staff focus effort to engage these fishermen as they supply a on-the-water knowledge that would be useful. Ms. Brewster-Geisz agreed and indicated that engagement with the industry would continue.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.