



WEST PALM BEACH FISHING CLUB

~ Established 1934 ~



April 24, 2018

Mr. Craig Cockrell
HMS Management Division
Office of Sustainable Fisheries, F/SF1
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

RE: Comments on NOAA-NMFS-2018-0035

Dear Mr. Cockrell:

On behalf of the over 1,300 members of the venerable West Palm Beach Fishing Club (WPBFC) we would like to offer the following comments for consideration regarding management of bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico. The western population of Atlantic bluefin tuna remains severely depleted and the Gulf of Mexico is their only known major spawning ground. It is critical to protect bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico during their spawning season.

The WPBFC strongly urges the National Marine Fisheries Service to:

- Exclude any consideration of reduction modifications to the Gulf of Mexico Gear Restricted Areas (GRAs) from any proposed rule. If anything, consideration should be given to expanding/joining the two GRA's based upon the demonstrated success of these areas.
- Retain a January through June seasonal requirement for use of weak hooks on pelagic longline vessels.
- Thoroughly research any potential impacts from modifications to the Northeastern pelagic longline closed area before making any changes.

The WPBFC's experienced membership has witnessed the decline of bluefin tuna for decades. Back in the 1970's and 80's we were already concerned about changes in the size/age composition of the western North Atlantic stock and reductions in the mass migrations from the Gulf of Mexico past Cat Cay and Bimini in the western Bahamas during April-June. The thrill of catching bluefin tuna has become a thing of the past in our region due to overfishing the spawning biomass. The migrating schools of giants that once roamed the shallows of the Bahama Bank are a distant memory preserved only in old movie reels and angling history books. The WPBFC urges the NMFS not to diminish the progress that has been made in recent years. Fair and reasonable management measures, like those outlined above, which have been demonstrated to be effective, are required at this critical juncture to continue the rebuilding process for bluefin tuna.

Respectfully,

Tom Twyford, Jr.
President