



Management Objectives

Charting the future of tuna management

In recent years, managers of tuna fisheries around the world have begun to shift to using harvest strategies, or management procedures, because they offer a more predictable and stable approach than the traditional use of stock assessments followed by often contentious quota negotiations. The effectiveness of harvest strategies depends, in large part, on managers first agreeing to a set of management objectives for the fishery and the stock, and then using a process called management strategy evaluation (MSE) to select a harvest control rule that is most likely to achieve these goals.

Agreement on management objectives can be one of the most challenging steps in the process, but defining the objectives at the start helps ensure that they drive the selection of a final harvest control rule. Although legislative or convention objectives for fisheries are often expressed in general terms, the process of developing harvest strategies requires that they be spelled out in language that is meaningful, specific, and acceptable to managers, stakeholders, and scientists. An iterative process of suggestions and testing can help to build the mutual understanding about operational objectives.

Tuna regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) are generally guided by an overarching mandate to maintain populations (biomass, or B) at or above the level that can produce maximum sustainable yield (B_{MSY}). The harvest strategies approach allows managers to identify additional management objectives, such as fishery stability, which can be used to help set the target state for the fishery and stock, as well as the conditions to avoid, such as recruitment overfishing—when adult fish are depleted to the point where the stock cannot replenish itself.

Specific objectives help measure success

Managers of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission have taken the lead in recent years, outlining the basic categories of management objectives to be considered in harvest strategy development.¹ These categories are now being considered in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans as well.