



**SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE ROADMAP INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP
(SPA-Roadmap-IWG)
ELECTRONIC MEETING
10:00 – 14:00 Pohnpei Time, [15 July 2022]**

CHAIR'S DISCUSSION PAPER

**WCPFC-SPALB-RM-2022-02
28 June 2022**

1. Introduction

As the Chair, my intention for this paper is to put to a paper the key issues that our IWG can focus our discussions on given our many priorities and limited meeting times in the virtual meeting setting. I have summarized the key issues on where we are with the management of the South Pacific albacore (SPA) fisheries. The main guidance for our work is from our agreed work plan set and revised at the last IWG meeting in November 2021 and recommendations from the WCFPC18.

This paper also provides discussion points on the key issues to initiate our discussions. I look forward to receiving your comments either electronically or during the meeting day.

2. Meeting objectives

The meeting objectives identified for this IWG meeting are as follows:

- To provide an update on progress made
- To get direction on the next steps for progressing work on the following key tasks for IWG:
 - Review the implications of alternative future catch levels for the stock and fishery
 - Achieving an iTRP within the agreed 20-year timeframe, including through a harvest strategy
 - Setting an overall harvest level for SPA and split allocations between high seas and EEZs
 - Developing an enhanced CMM
- Provide input and advice on the development of the SPA harvest strategy/management procedure and priority elements for a new CMM.

The key discussion points identified for this IWG meeting are as follows:

- The implications of alternative future catch levels for the stock and fishery
- Direction on achieving an iTRP within the 20-year timeframe
- Direction on setting an overall SPA harvest level and how to allocate limits
- Direction on how to progress with the development of candidate MPs for the development of a harvest strategy

3. WCFPC18 Outcomes on SPA

Paragraphs 37 – 42 below are the outcomes of the WCFPC18 (*WCPFC Circular 2021 - 106 WCFPC18 Outcomes Document, 16 December 2021*)

<p>37. The Commission noted the advice of the SC17 related to a recalibration of the interim TRP for the SP albacore.</p>

38. The Commission noted the report of progress from the SP Albacore Roadmap Working Group (WCFPC18-2021-SPALB-RM-IWG)

39. The Commission noted the priorities for the SPA Roadmap WG for 2022, in particular, the development of harvest strategies for SPA, the setting of a TAC, and allocation, and encouraged CCMs to continue to work cooperatively in the IWG.

40. The Commission noted that the review of CMM 2015-02 *Conservation and Management Measure for South Pacific Albacore* is ongoing as part of the work of the SP Albacore Roadmap Working Group. The Commission encouraged the SPA Roadmap IWG to speed up its process and progress its recommendations.

41. The Commission noted concerns regarding the delayed process to implement an interim TRP adopted in 2018, and the need to take action to rebuild the stock to support the economic viability of fleets, and achieve a long-term TRP.

42. Given the urgency of these concerns, the Commission agreed that until a new CMM for South Pacific Albacore is adopted, each CCM is encouraged to take steps to implement interim controls on South Pacific albacore catch or effort across the convention area south of the equator.

- i. CCMs are encouraged to limit commercial fishing of South Pacific albacore within EEZs to domestically applied catch or effort limits in recent years.
- ii. Each CCM is encouraged to ensure that its flagged vessels fishing for this species shall not exceed the high seas catch or effort (such as number of vessels) of South Pacific albacore by its flagged vessels in recent years.

4. Key tasks for the IWG

a. *Interim TRP*

The current iTRP depletion level of 56% was agreed to at WCPFC15, with the objective of achieving an 8% increase in CPUE for the southern LL fishery as compared to 2013 levels, and where the timeline for achieving the iTRP was for no longer than 20 years. Four years have passed since the agreement of the iTRP and no action has been taken, therefore the implementation of any chosen means for achieving the iTRP will result in larger reductions in catches to make up for this delay.

The recalibrated iTRP depletion level of 68% was presented at WCPFC18, but not agreed. The results of the 2021 assessment were consistent with the 2018 assessment in that the iTRP will not be achieved under recent catch levels in the southern WCPFC-CA. However, the recalibrated iTRP no longer serves the purpose it was set out to achieve in 2018 which was to “maintain an economically viable South Pacific albacore fishery”. The work presented to WCPFC18 based upon the 2021 stock assessment (WCPFC 18-2021-10) has identified that even further reductions of catch are required to achieve the recalibrated iTRP than for the agreed iTRP of 56%. Noting the discussion at WCPFC18, I have tasked the SSP to evaluate the implications of alternative future catch levels for the stock and fishery to allow discussion by the SPA IWG of the trade-offs involved in future management action, to clarify member’s objectives for the fishery.

The achievement of the iTRP can be progressed either through the adoption of a catch trajectory or through the implementation of a harvest strategy. Alternative catch pathways to achieve the agreed iTRP (56%) in the maximum time frame of 20 years were presented at our last SPA IWG meeting in November 2021, but no consensus was reached. Given that it is expected that future TRP-related catch levels will need to be adjusted in the face of increasing knowledge around SPA, the development and adoption of a harvest strategy is needed for the adaptive management of the stock. Catch pathways are intended to be used as a bridging mechanism until a harvest strategy is implemented, therefore selecting a pathway for achieving the iTRP can also be rolled into the development of candidate management procedures and a harvest strategy. Under a Harvest Strategy approach, the agreement is only required for the preferred management

procedure and once adopted will not generally require re-adjustment of the iTRP by WCPFC after each new assessment of the stock is presented.

Next steps/ Discussion Points

1. Review the implications of alternative future catch levels for the stock and fishery.
2. Discuss and advise WCPFC19 on management objectives for the SPA fishery to inform the iTRP.
3. Discuss options for achieving the agreed iTRP, whether through the development and adoption of catch projections or a management procedure for a harvest strategy, or a staged combination of the two approaches.

b. Overall harvest level

Although there were no discussions around the setting of overall harvest limits for SPA at WCPFC18, there were mounting concerns on the fluctuating and declining rate of the catches and CPUE of the SPA fishery experienced by all members, particularly by SIDS which are hit worst with their domestic longline fleets. The Commission agreed on the text in paragraph 42 of the *WCPFC18 Outcomes Document* to reflect the urgency of these concerns and are small steps towards putting in place agreed limits for this stock to prevent a further drastic decline in both catches and CPUE.

At our last SPA IWG meeting in November 2021, we looked at possible overall harvest levels (specifically, implemented through catch limits) under different trajectories and while there was no substantial discussion on how to progress these trajectories, there was a general agreement for the establishment of an overall harvest level to include the overlap area between WCPFC and IATTC.

The Management Procedure (MP) for the SPA work is currently underway, and the option of developing an MP that will determine the SPA overall harvest level is worth considering. The IWG can identify how to add value to this MP work going forward.

On the other hand, what can be spearheaded by the IWG is recommending a clear process for the setting the overall harvest level for the South Pacific albacore fishery, its implementation (e.g., through a TAC), and selecting which factors are required in determining what the allocation of the overall harvest level is.

Next steps/Discussion points

1. Discussion on the process for the development of the overall SPA harvest level to achieve the objectives for this stock.
2. Direction on possible scenarios to model possible harvest level limits.
3. Direction on how an overall harvest level limit should be split, i.e. how to allocate limit, including factor selection (e.g., catch history, value, etc.).

c. SPA MP

The IWG has been tasked by the Commission to develop a harvest strategy for SPA, which requires the development of a Management Procedure for SPA as agreed to at WCPFC18, and as prescribed in the Harvest Strategy Work Plan (CMM2014-06). The adoption of the preferred Management Procedure is earmarked for 2022 with implementation in 2023. The Commission tasked the SC to formally agree on the operating models to be used for MSE.

Next steps/ Discussion points

1. Discuss progressing the development of a candidate MP that is in line with management objectives.
2. Direction on how a 'best' candidate MP for harvest strategy might be selected.