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International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)

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The impacts of COVID-19 continue to present challenges to RFMOs. Even under these circumstances, WCPFC must ensure the uninterrupted, sustainable management of the tuna stocks and marine ecosystems under its purview.

Our Top Asks for WCPFC:

1. In 2022, adopt a harvest strategy for skipjack and Northern albacore and adopt interim TRPs for yellowfin and bigeye tuna.
2. In 2022, adopt the definition of biodegradable and categories of biodegradable FADs; By 2023, develop and adopt a FAD marking scheme, FAD ownership rules and rules for activation and deactivation of FAD buoys, a FAD-recovery policy and incentives, including alerting relevant coastal States; a clear timeframe to transition to FADs made primarily of biodegradable materials; and require FAD position and acoustic data.
3. Develop and adopt by 2023 a CMM for an Electronic Monitoring Program and Minimum Standards for the use of electronic monitoring in WCPFC fisheries.
4. In 2022, adopt the ROP Minimum Standards Data Fields in forms FC-1 and FC-2 as data to be collected by observers during transshipment events.
5. In 2022, require all sharks be landed with fins naturally attached without exceptions and prohibit both branchlines of wire trace and shark lines.

Tuna Conservation

What are the issues?

Effective management measures — consistent with advice from the WCPFC Scientific Committee — are needed to maintain bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack tuna fishing mortality and biomass at sustainable levels.

Why are we concerned?

In 2020, the Scientific Committee (SC) conducted assessments of bigeye and yellowfin tuna and found that they remain healthy. The SC recommended that fishing mortality on bigeye tuna stock should not be increased from the level that maintains spawning biomass at 2012-2015 levels until the Commission can agree on appropriate target reference points (TRPs) This year, the SC conducted a new skipjack stock assessment and noted that the stock continues to be moderately exploited and the level of fishing mortality is sustainable. While it did not reach consensus on management advice, the stock's status has not changed much since the 2019 assessment. Therefore, the previous SC management advice should still be valid. The Commission should take management action to ensure that the biomass depletion level fluctuates around the interim TRP (e.g., via a harvest control rule).

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

In 2022 adopt interim TRPs for bigeye and yellowfin and a comprehensive harvest strategy, including a harvest control rule, for Western Pacific skipjack and then, in 2023, adopt a new CMM for tuna conservation that limits fishing mortality for bigeye and yellowfin to the interim TRPs and includes the harvest control rule for skipjack, and which also removes all ambiguities and exemptions.

FAD Management

What are the issues?

Comprehensive fleet data on FAD deployments and usage are required, including deactivation date and reasons for the deactivation, to sustainably manage the tropical tuna purse seine fishery. The identification and implementation of FAD marking systems, recovery

schemes and ownership rules are critical to manage FADs until the end of their lifetime. Importantly, PNA has developed FAD minimum data fields to be recorded by purse seine vessel operators (WCPFC-SC18-2022/ST-IP/09) which would be useful for WCPFC's scientific work if applied throughout the Convention Area. To reduce the impact of FAD structure on the ecosystem, FADs should be constructed mainly with biodegradable materials. Data from echo-sounder buoys used to track FADs could help develop effective conservation measures. CMM 2021-01 contains provisions encouraging vessels to use or transition towards using non-plastic and biodegradable materials. In 2023, the Commission is to consider the adoption of measures on the implementation of biodegradable materials in FADs and review the current limit of 350 for active FADs.

Why are we concerned?

In the WCPFC, FAD sets account for about 33% of tropical tuna catches Fleets should be moving towards using biodegradable materials to mitigate ecosystem impacts on a clear timeline. The WCPFC (CMM 20201-01) currently only encourages vessels to carry equipment to retrieve FADs, including lost FADs, and report lost FADs to relevant coastal States. The WCPFC does not have FAD marking mechanisms. In addition, important data on FAD operations are not recorded by observers but they can be provided by vessel operators with appropriate quality controls.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

(1) In 2022, adopt the definition of biodegradable and categories of biodegradable FADs recommended by the SC and TCC.
(2) Develop and adopt by 2023:
- (i) a FAD marking scheme for all new FAD deployments, regardless of vessel type, that requires that FADs be marked on both the buoy and the FAD structure.
- (ii) FAD ownership rules and rules for activation and deactivation of FAD buoys.
- (iii) a FAD-recovery policy and incentives, including alerting relevant coastal States.
- (iv) a clear timeframe to transition to FADs made primarily with biodegradable materials and, in the interim, encourage further large-scale biodegradable FAD sea trials and for fleets to deploy a percentage of FADs made of biodegradable materials.
- (v) Revise the *Scientific Data to Be Provided to the Commission* to include FAD data requirements that are compatible with those being required by PNA.

(3) Require vessels to report complete, near-real time (with a maximum time lag of 90 days) FAD position data and acoustic records from echosounder buoys for scientific use and require vessels to report other FAD-related data in a manner that is consistent with the PNA's minimum data fields to be recorded by purse seine vessel operators.
(4) Require observer coverage on supply vessels, the identification of the purse seine vessels each support, and reporting of the number of FADs being deployed and serviced annually.
(5) Request the Scientific Committee to provide science-based limits on FAD deployments, active FADs and/or FAD sets so that the Commission is able to adopt these limits in 2023.

Harvest Strategies

What are the issues?

Harvest Strategies — which include target and limit reference points together with harvest control rules — provide pre-agreed rules for managing fisheries resources and acting on stock status changes.

Why are we concerned?

The current MSC established deadlines for harvest strategy (HS) and HCR (Principle 1) conditions, if not met, could result in certifications being suspended. In the WCPFC: (i) HCRs must be adopted by **June 2023** for southern albacore and by **May 2024** for northern albacore; (ii) a HS must be in place by **June 2023** for western Pacific skipjack; and (iii) an HCR must be adopted by **June 2023** for western Pacific yellowfin. The new MSC Fisheries Standard will require a higher level of performance for RMFO managed fisheries. In order to achieve this level of performance, the WCPFC will need to agree harvest strategies shortly or risk running out of time to complete the newly required step of introducing catch or effort constraints to ensure the harvest strategy is applied in practice.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

(1) Adopt comprehensive Harvest Strategies for Western Pacific skipjack and Northern albacore, including harvest control rules.
(2) Accelerate the development of a harvest strategy for South Pacific albacore that will consider the entire South Pacific stock in the operating models, even if catches in the Eastern Pacific are not part of the "managed catches" in the candidate harvest control rules.

Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

OBSERVER COVERAGE AND ELECTRONIC MONITORING

What are the issues?

Comprehensive observer coverage is critical to effective fisheries management, compliance monitoring, and independent verification of catch, effort and species interactions (e.g., sharks, sea turtles and whale sharks). The COVID-19 Pandemic severely affected observer coverage in the purse seine and longline fisheries. The situation would have been different if there were minimum standards for Electronic Monitoring (EM) in place. The WCPFC has still not adopted an EM program or Standards Specifications and Procedures (SSPs) despite the work of the EMER Working Group that was established by the Commission in 2014.

Why are we concerned?

Some CCMs did not meet the minimum 5% observer coverage requirement for longline vessels adopted in 2007 — 13 years ago - even before the Pandemic - in 2020 the coverage was 4.5% and in 2021 it fell to 3%. The paucity of longline fishery data hinders both science and management. The EMER Working Group adopted a work plan this year that extends the drafting of the Electronic Monitoring Program (EM) SSPs and CMM(s) for an EM Program to mid 2023 or 2024.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

(1) Accelerate the development of a CMM for an Electronic Monitoring Program and the Minimum Standards through the EM/ER Working Group so that these are adopted by the Commission in 2023.
(2) Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial tuna fisheries, including all those engaged in at sea transshipment, by 2024.

TRANSSHIPMENT

What are the issues?

If not well-managed, transshipment at-sea can be a conduit for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fish to enter the supply chain. The WCPFC established a Working Group in 2018 to conduct a review of the existing transshipment CMM (CMM 2009-06).

Why are we concerned?

Reported high seas transshipment events in the WCPO have more than doubled from 2011 to 2019. In 2021, 62% of vessels listed on the Record of Fishing Vessels were authorized to transship in the high seas, 85% of which are longliners. During the Pandemic, few observers were deployed on carrier or off-loading vessels. In 2021, 88% of transshipments were unobserved. The Commission agreed to lift the suspension of the requirement for transshipment observers as of 15 June 2022; however the transshipment CMM (2009-06) is not consistent with best practices and the Working Group has produced no recommendations thus far. There are no minimum standard data fields for observers on carriers to collect and no clear requirement to submit transhipment observer data to the Secretariat.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

(1) In 2022, adopt the WCPFC ROP Minimum Standard Data fields identified in forms FC-1 and FC-2 as data fields to be collected by transshipment observers during transshipment events and that these data be sent to the WCPFC Secretariat within 90 days after the observer disembarks the carrier vessel, as recommended by the TCC.
(2) In 2023, develop electronic reporting standards for transshipment observers or providers through the EMER Working Group.
(3) In 2023, adopt best practice amendments to CMM 2009-06, including:

(i) Require real time, or as close to near real-time, reporting for all transshipment activity.
(ii) Use AIS data to complement VMS information.
(iii) Set criteria for authorization of at-sea transshipment and establish a process for Commission review against those criteria.

Bycatch and Sharks

What are the issues?

WCPFC needs to improve measures and strengthen efforts to mitigate the bycatch of vulnerable species in both purse seine and longline fisheries. Science-based conservation and management measures to limit fishing mortality on seabirds, sharks, rays, and marine mammals and data collection and reporting requirements are also essential. The Conservation Management Measure for Sharks (CMM 2019-04) contains loopholes and exceptions. SC18 recommended the Commission consider revising CMM 2019-04, taking into account the results of Project 101 and previous studies, which considered several options, including the prohibition of branchlines of wire trace and shark lines, in order to reduce fishing mortality on oceanic whitetip shark and silky sharks.

Why are we concerned?

The SC noted with concern that oceanic whitetip sharks are overfished and experiencing overfishing according to the 2019 stock assessment and silky sharks are experiencing overfishing according to the 2018 stock assessment.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

(1) Revise CMM 2019-04 to require all sharks being landed with fins naturally attached without exceptions and to prohibit both branchlines of wire trace and shark lines.
(2) Adopt the *Graphics for Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans* recommended by the SC and TCC.
(3) Develop and adopt a recovery plan for oceanic white-tip sharks by 2023.

Compliance

What are the issues?

Strong compliance processes improve fisheries management by holding members accountable. An essential part of a modern and well-designed compliance process is transparency. ISSF publishes best practices for improving RFMO compliance processes.

Why are we concerned?

The WCPFC is the only tuna RFMO that closes its compliance assessment process to observers. The Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) work plan includes developing a process for the participation of observers. No progress has been made on this item yet.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

(1) Endorse the Audit Points and Risk-Based Assessment Framework so that both can be used by CCMs and the Secretariat for the CMS starting in 2023, as recommended by the TCC.
(2) Direct the CMS IWG to develop guidelines for the participation of observers to present to the Commission for adoption in 2023.

Capacity Management

What are the issues?

Experts agree that there is overcapacity, too many vessels, in the global tuna fleets.

Why are we concerned?

Fishing fleet overcapacity increases pressure to weaken management measures, and eventually it leads to stock overexploitation.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

Establish limited entry through closed vessel registries and develop a common currency to measure fishing capacity.

ISSF Global Priorities for Tuna RFMOs

Implementation of rigorous management procedures, including harvest control rules and reference points

Effective management of fleet capacity, including developing mechanisms that support developing coastal state engagement in the fishery

Science-based FAD management & fully non-entangling without netting and biodegradable FAD designs

Increased member compliance with all measures adopted, and greater transparency of processes reviewing member compliance with measures

Strengthened Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) measures and increased observer coverage, including through modern technologies such as electronic monitoring and e-reporting

Adoption of best-practice bycatch mitigation for sharks, seabirds and cetaceans and shark

Did You Know?

ISSF is leading research on biodegradable FADs in collaboration with fleets operating in the WCPO, coastal nations, and other stakeholders.

ISSF develops resources for the vessel community, including skippers guidebooks on bycatch-mitigation techniques and as well as reports on electronic monitoring and vessel monitoring systems.

ISSF also offers guidelines for implementing non-entangling and biodegradable FADs.

Five ISSF conservation measures focus on shark and bycatch mitigation.

Two ISSF conservation measures focus on FAD management

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