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TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network

WWF-TRAFFIC POSITION STATEMENT TO WCPFC-4

INTRODUCTION

Recognizing that the WCPFC is now in its fourth year of existence, WWF and TRAFFIC believe that the time for action is now in collectively agreeing to and implementing conservation and management measures for the sustainable exploitation of the Pacific's tuna resources. The concern over the decline in some of our important tuna species is not fully reflected in the management of fishing behavior. We recognize that there are severe limitations to the capacity of many CCMs, however we must also recognize that our inaction will make a mockery of our ability to take firm decisions and implement them when they matter most. The level of actions undertaken by the Commission over the last 4 years does not reflect the seriousness of the declining tuna stocks.

WWF and TRAFFIC acknowledge the outcomes relating to sustainable tuna management arising out of meetings prior to WCPFC-4. They include among others, the 38th Pacific Islands Forum, Nuku'alofa, Tonga (Oct. 2007); the WCPFC secretariat contribution to the Joint Meeting of Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, Kobe, Japan (Jan. 2007); Forum Fisheries Committee meeting, Wellington, New Zealand (May 2007); and the meetings of the subsidiary committees of the WCPFC.

WWF and TRAFFIC urge the Commission to heed the advice of the Scientific Committee (SC) and the Technical Compliance Committee (TCC), and undertake the following actions:

- **REDUCTION OF FISHING MORTALITY**

WWF and TRAFFIC reiterate their support for the 2005 recommendation by the Scientific Committee that a reduction in fishing mortality of 39% is required to maintain the Bigeye tuna biomass at a level 20% above MSY; and a 26% reduction in fishing mortality on Yellowfin tuna is required to maintain biomass at 20% above MSY.

- **CATCH DOCUMENTATION SCHEME (CDS)**

WWF and TRAFFIC fully support the implementation of a Catch Documentation Scheme as a key priority for the WCPFC. We note the Report of the Joint Tuna RFMO Technical Working Group on Trade and Documentation which recommended that all tuna RFMOs adopt CDS schemes. A CDS is a transparent mechanism to track fish caught with a wide range of gears and practices from vessel to plate, providing a verification procedure on a near real time basis. We believe that a CDS measure will go a long way to combat IUU fishing.

- TRANSSHIPMENT MONITORING

WWF and TRAFFIC support a ban on high-seas transshipment as a measure to combat IUU fishing. We support in-port transshipment provided all transshipments are subject to observer coverage and take place in designated ports. We urge the Commission to develop its transshipment guidelines and encourage CCMs to work with the Commission on this issue.

- FISH AGGREGATION DEVICES (FADs)

WWF and TRAFFIC are concerned about significant bycatch of juvenile Bigeye and Yellowfin tuna, particularly by purse seine and pole and line vessels. WWF and TRAFFIC call for collaborative research to focus on the following: solutions to FAD closures such as time area management strategies for FAD use; identifying hotspots of juvenile Bigeye and Yellowfin tunas; determining a regime for observer coverage and reporting; and encouraging the use of best scientific advice in the management of FADs.

- ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED, UNREGULATED (IUU) FISHING

The threat of IUU fishing looms particularly large in this area. In this context WWF and TRAFFIC are concerned that fishing vessels continue to contravene agreements made by this Commission and its members.

WWF and TRAFFIC call on the WPCFC to implement robust sanctions against fishing vessels, support vessels, CCMs or cooperating non-member states that contravene any management measure. In fact, a full set of penalties agreed to by the members of the Commission must be put in place.

- REGIONAL OBSERVER PROGRAMME (ROP)

WWF and TRAFFIC recognize the challenges in implementing an effective and functional ROP, fully aware of the responsibilities of both the regional observers and vessel operators as specified under Article 28, and Article 3 of Annex III of the Convention. While the Commission is unlikely to agree to 100% observer coverage, which would be ideal, the Commission should nonetheless aim for coverage well above the 5% minimum initial level. We consider the 5% minimum initial level inadequate given the size of the Convention Area and the potential ecosystem impacts of fishing activities. WWF and TRAFFIC encourage a close collaborative effort between the SC and TCC recognizing that the role of the regional observer cuts across the tasks of both committees.

- ALLOCATION

WWF and TRAFFIC tabled a paper at WCPFC3 titled *"Conservation implications of allocation under the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission."* We reiterate our stand with respect to allocation of fishing opportunities, calling for:

- (a) the Commission to establish a process under which allocation issues can be progressed in a transparent, methodical and objective manner;
- (b) rapid resolution of allocation of fishing opportunities;
- (c) the allocation system developed by the Commission to have in-built flexibility and review provisions, for example to take account of the aspirations of new members.

- BY-CATCH MITIGATION

- **Sea Turtles**

WWF and TRAFFIC recognize that sea turtle by-catch in longline fishing operations continues to be a problem in the Western and Central Pacific. Already a range of progressive measures have been introduced globally including the use of circle hooks in place of j-hooks.

WWF and TRAFFIC further recognize that while trials and experiments on the use of circle hooks to reduce turtle by-catch have been, and are being undertaken around the world, the use of circle hooks as a turtle mitigation measure in the WCPFC area may be undermined by their impact on sharks. While insufficient data exists on the by-catch levels in the Western and Central Pacific, WWF and TRAFFIC urge the Commission to undertake precautionary measures in the absence of such data.

In addition, we urge that all member countries undertake research to determine the level of turtle bycatch in their fleets within one year and undertake within three years a program of trials with modified fishing gear and/or techniques to evaluate their effectiveness with respect to bycatch of turtles and catch rates of target species, and report back regarding data, activities and results to the SC and TCC.

- **Sharks**

WWF and TRAFFIC welcome the fact that the WCPFC have adopted a conservation and management measure that will become binding as of 1 January 2008. We are deeply concerned that the CMM on sharks exempts vessels under 24m, which represents an enormous number of vessels and catch of sharks. This exemption makes the CMM adopted by the WCPFC the weakest of all shark measures adopted by any of the tuna RFMO's and hence WWF and TRAFFIC wish to see the exemption deleted at this meeting. Secondly we wish to see a quantitative demonstration that the shark catches that result after 1 January 2008 represent catches at sustainable levels.

- **Seabirds**

WWF and TRAFFIC were concerned at the outcomes of the seabird discussion at WCPFC-3 (2006). We believe that the seabird bycatch mitigation specifications should be minimum standards, not mere guidelines.

The outcomes of SC3 and TCC3 have shown that the following needs to be undertaken:

- collaborative research must be encouraged on specifications that are not fully understood by CCMs
- information and data sharing among CCMs
- stop using guidelines and specifications as negotiating tools either to buy time or to stall progress in agreeing to specific measures;
- fishers must be clearly informed regarding operation of the specification of seabird mitigation measures

CONCLUSION

History is already repeating itself in the WCPO. As tuna populations in other parts of the world are depleted, fishing fleets are moving to the WCPO and are overfishing now. This Commission must be prepared to take the hard decisions to prevent fisheries collapse now.

Although the WCPFC is still young relative to other RFMOs, WWF and TRAFFIC are of the view that some CCMs in the WCPFC have come in rich with experience and have the benefit of hindsight because of their involvement in other RFMOs. With the WCPO considered to be the last frontier for tuna, the decisions on CMMs for the WCPFC are critical. Lessons from other RFMOs must be learnt.