



**SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE ROADMAP INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP  
(SPA-RM-IWG04)**

ELECTRONIC MEETING  
09:00 – 13:00 Pohnpei Time, Friday, 5 May 2023

---

**Proposal for a Revised Target Reference Point for South Pacific Albacore**

---

**SPA-RM-IWG04/WP-03**

**South Pacific Group (SPG)<sup>1</sup> and Australia**

---

<sup>1</sup> Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu

4 May 2023

Neomai Ravitu  
WCPFC SPA-IWG Chair  
Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission  
Kaselehlie Street PO Box 2356, Kolonia,  
Pohnpei State, 96941, Federated States of Micronesia

Dear SPA-IWG Chair,

**Proposal for a Revised Target Reference Point for South Pacific Albacore**

This proposal is made on behalf of the 6 members of the South Pacific Group (SPG)<sup>1</sup> and Australia. We have only just begun to socialise this proposal within the broader FFA, but want to take the opportunity to socialise it within the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) South Pacific Albacore Roadmap Intersessional Working Group (SPA-IWG) as well. We ask that you share this proposal with the entire WCPFC SPA-IWG in the lead up to the 5 May 2023 virtual meeting. We are prepared to provide a brief presentation on our proposal if requested and will welcome any initial feedback from CCMs, noting we are not seeking for this to be adopted or endorsed at this SPA IWG meeting.

Yours sincerely



Roseti Imo, Chair (Samoa)  
South Pacific Group

---

<sup>1</sup> Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu

## Proposal for a Revised Target Reference Point for South Pacific Albacore

This proposal is made on behalf of the 6 members of the South Pacific Group (SPG)<sup>1</sup> and Australia. We have only just begun to socialise this proposal within the broader FFA, but want to take the opportunity to socialise it within the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) South Pacific Albacore Roadmap Intersessional Working Group (SPA-IWG) as well. We welcome any initial feedback from CCMs, noting we are not seeking for this to be adopted or endorsed at this SPA IWG meeting.

The SPG, along with other members of the FFA, regard the current iTRP that seeks to achieve longline catch rates 8% higher than those in 2013 (most recently estimated at 0.68 SB/SBF=0) as untenable. The catch cuts required to achieve this iTRP are not acceptable to SPG members nor to the wider Commission. We note that FFA members in delegation paper “WCPFC19-2022-DP03-FFA position on key issues for WCPFC19” have stated this in clear terms.

As we are due to adopt a management objective for South Pacific albacore at the Commission meeting this December, the SPG plus Australia are proposing a revised iTRP that is more realistic and achievable and one that does not require excessive and economically counterproductive catch reductions. We would like to socialize the following proposal:

**The proposed interim target reference point is the estimated average depletion<sup>2</sup> of the South Pacific albacore tuna stock over the period 2017-2019 ( $SB_{2017-2019}/SB_{F=0}$ ).**

According to the most recent stock assessment (2021) this depletion level is estimated at 0.49 SB/SB<sub>F=0</sub> in the WCPFC-CA. For clarity, this iTRP is defined according to the reference period and not a depletion level. It is noted that the depletion value may change as the stock assessment is updated along with our perception of depletion over 2017-2019.

A more detailed rationale for this proposal is provided below, but the proposal generally reflects a shift in objectives away from purely catch rates and guaranteed viability of every vessel or fleet to now also considering the economic benefits of distant-water or foreign fleet activity within EEZs and the need for catches to support this. We consider that an iTRP associated with the reference years of 2017-2019 is relatable, achievable and will bring economic and sustainability benefits to all of us.

1. The proposed iTRP is associated with a reasonable level of average catch over the long term, in the vicinity of 60,000 t in the WCPO. This compares with the current iTRP that is associated with average catches close to 30,000 t over the long term in the WCPO which would require excessive and economically counterproductive catch reductions that are unrealistic (see Annex 1).
2. The 2017-19 reference period used in the iTRP is a recent ‘known quantity’ in terms of fishery performance and represents a period of relatively stable CPUE and reasonable economic performance in terms of domestic and foreign fishing activity amongst SPG members. It also

---

<sup>1</sup> Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu

<sup>2</sup> Spawning potential depletion refers to the estimated spawning potential as a percentage of the estimated spawning potential in the absence of fishing (i.e., the unfished spawning potential). The metric is dynamic and is estimated for each model time step.

avoids any fishery impacts that could be associated with the COVID 19 pandemic from 2020 onwards.

3. The proposed iTRP is defined according to a reference set of years and not in more absolute terms such a biomass depletion percentage. Specific depletion levels are susceptible to changes in our perception of stock status that occurs with each successive stock assessment or between the stock assessment and the set of operating models used to develop a management procedure. A reference years approach, while not perfect, provides a level of future proofing of the iTRP and gives it independence from any one assessment model. The proposed iTRP also references multiple years instead of one year thereby increasing robustness against single year peculiarities or estimation issues.
4. The proposed iTRP represents a deliberate shift away from using vulnerable biomass (a proxy for CPUE) to instead using spawning stock biomass ( $SB/SB_{F=0}$ ) within the reference period. Analyses suggests that the two quantities tend to vary together (strong correlation) so the iTRP based on spawning stock biomass in 2017-19 still has strong relevance in terms of CPUE - with stock conditions including CPUE during the reference period comprising a component of the target choice (see dot point 1). The shift to spawning stock biomass is also technically simpler, easier to understand and more consistent with other measures used in the WCPFC.
5. The proposed iTRP appears to provide for a sufficient 'buffer' to avoid unacceptable risks of breaching the adopted Limit Reference Point (LRP). On the basis of the information available at the moment (constant catch projections) the proposed iTRP is associated with a 17% risk of breaching the LRP (Annex 1). It is noted that the WCPFC requires that adopted harvest strategies have risks no greater than 20%. However, the SPG note that the actual LRP risk will be properly assessed when candidate management procedures that achieve this iTRP are tested through management strategy evaluation in 2023 and 2024.

We suggest that this proposal be the basis for the SPA-IWG, and the Commission, to progress their work on the development of an iTRP for south Pacific albacore this year. If CCMs have any questions or comments, please share them with myself at [roseti.imo@maf.gov.ws](mailto:roseti.imo@maf.gov.ws) and our SPG Technical Adviser, Lars Olsen at [olsenpacific@gmail.com](mailto:olsenpacific@gmail.com).

Yours sincerely



Roseti Imo, Chair (Samoa)  
South Pacific Group

## Annex 1 – Updated SPC Analyses to inform South Pacific albacore objectives and the TRP

Depletion			Vulnerable biomass		Approximate catch			F/F <sub>MSY</sub>
Long-term avg SB/SB <sub>F=0</sub> (WCPFC-CA)	SB/SB <sub>F=0</sub> rel. 2017-2019	Risk < LRP	VB rel. 2013+8%	VB rel. 2017-2019	Catch scalar	WCPFC-CA	Remainder EPO	Risk F > F <sub>MSY</sub>
<b>0.49</b>	0%	17%	-30%	-3%	0.86	62,500	15,600	12%
<b>0.51</b>	3%	16%	-28%	0%	0.84	60,500	15,600	12%
<b>0.41</b>	-17%	26%	-41%	-18%	1	72,200	15,600	17%
<b>0.47</b>	-4%	19%	-33%	-7%	0.9	65,000	15,600	14%
<b>0.53</b>	8%	14%	-25%	4%	0.8	57,800	15,600	10%
<b>0.58</b>	19%	8%	-18%	15%	0.7	50,500	15,600	6%
<b>0.64</b>	30%	4%	-10%	25%	0.6	43,300	15,600	3%
<b>0.69</b>	40%	1%	-3%	35%	0.5	36,100	15,600	0%

This analysis is an update from that provided in the paper WCPFC19-2022-15. It applies the same set of 72 models in the grid (from the 2021 stock assessment) weighted according to SC 2021 recommendations (with Seapodym movement down weighted). There are 100 replicates (iterations) per model. One important change compared to the earlier analysis is the treatment of model runs that generate NAs in the results. These are now interpreted as the stock crashing during the projection period whereas previously NA runs were excluded from the summary results. This has resulted in slightly different figures from the original table.

This analysis also includes results for two additional TRP candidates being spawning biomass depletion over 2017-19 (in green) and vulnerable biomass over 2017-19 (in yellow).