

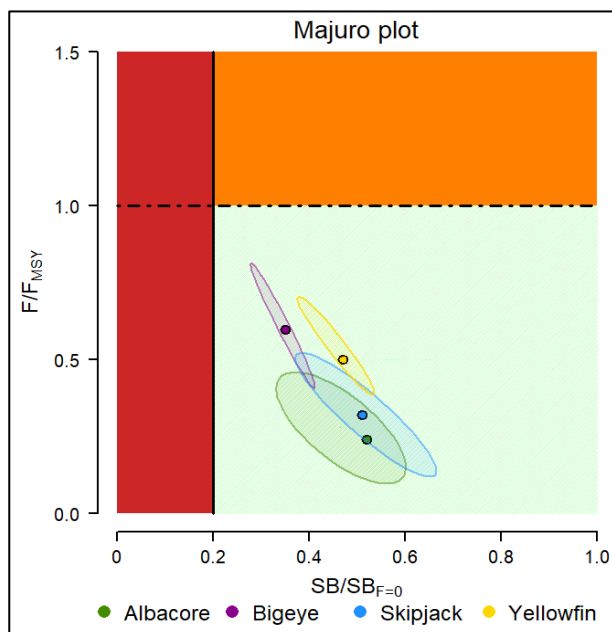
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2023 Annual Report of the Executive Director

WCPFC20-2023-05
19 October 2023

I. Introduction

Since its inaugural session in 2004, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) has achieved significant milestones over nearly two decades. In addition to the adoption of critical measures to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of six tuna species and two billfish species, there are measures in place to manage the impacts of fishing on various shark species, seabirds, sea turtles, mobulids, and cetaceans, including by reducing marine pollution and prohibiting large scale driftnets. Important programmes are also in place to support the Commission’s conservation and management framework, including a vessel monitoring system (VMS), regional observer programme (ROP), and a high seas boarding and inspection scheme (HSBI).



The Majuro plot showing most recent stock status for four key tuna species as being in a healthy state. Source: SPC, 2023.

Commission Members, Cooperating Non-Members (CNMs), and Participating Territories (collectively “CCMs”) submit data and other information on a regular basis to support scientific assessment and compliance evaluation, both to ensure that the Commission’s management measures are having their intended effect. Five of the six tuna species managed by the WCPFC are biologically healthy and one is on a path to meet its second rebuilding target ahead of schedule. Discussions are advanced in the development of a measure to protect and safeguard the lives of people who work aboard fishing vessels, complementing an existing Commission measure that protects and safeguards the lives of fisheries observers.

An ambitious, yet achievable work programme lies ahead for the Commission. The development of harvest strategies for six tuna species is underway, and a commitment is in place to incorporate climate

change impacts into fisheries management. The successful implementation of many of the Commission's monitoring programmes has revealed where gaps remain, which provides CCMs the opportunity to focus their efforts and to apply resources accordingly. Moreover, and not in any way trivial, the advancement of certain technologies has changed the way the world operates, and the Commission's work has benefited from greater efficiency that technology continues to provide.

In recognising the organisation's achievements in its relatively young life, it is also important to acknowledge the work that remains as well as the new or anticipated initiatives that will require attention, which includes ongoing efforts to support small island developing State (SIDS) members and participating territories in the work of the Commission. A core principle of the WCPFC is its explicit recognition of the unique requirements of SIDS and participating territories, embodied in Article 30 of the Convention as well as in the Convention's Preamble which reads:

Recognizing the ecological and geographical vulnerability of the small island developing States, territories and possessions in the region, their economic and social dependence on highly migratory fish stocks, and their need for specific assistance, including financial, scientific and technological assistance, to allow them to participate effectively in the conservation, management and sustainable use of the highly migratory fish stocks,

Further recognizing that smaller island developing States have unique needs which require special attention and consideration in the provision of financial, scientific and technological assistance,

The Commission has further operationalised these treaty commitments in its conservation and management measures (CMM) [2013-06](#) and [2013-07](#), as well as in its establishment of the Special Requirements Fund, other Trust Funds, and the Strategic Investment Plan which consolidate the Commission's [support](#) to developing States.

The range of stakeholders that rely on the WCPFC to fulfil its mandate is extensive. From consumers residing in coastal communities to the livelihoods of fishing vessel crew, the fisheries of the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) serve as sources of income and sources of protein at a global level. As custodians of the world's largest tuna fishery, the WCPFC's responsibility is significant, and ineffective management is not an option.

After almost two decades, WCPFC20 provides an opportunity for the Commission to reflect on its progress in 2023, realign its focus and application of resources, and enter 2024 with clear intent and a renewed willingness to resolve longstanding issues, modernize its management approach, and continue to be a leader of the world's tuna RFMOs in successfully ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of the Blue Pacific's valuable fisheries resources.

This report¹ takes a brief look back at the Commission's progress to date, considers how a changed world and changing priorities has shifted the organisation's focus, and offers a view of how innovation and political commitment from the membership can ensure the WCPFC is well positioned to manage the world's largest fishery successfully and effectively into the future.

¹ The Executive Director's [Report](#) to the 19th Technical and Compliance Committee provides additional technical information to support this report.

II. Overview of the Commission's 2023 Activities

The world emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic toward the end of 2022 and the Commission was able to meet in person for its 19th Regular Annual Session in Da Nang, Vietnam, after two years of virtual meetings. As the world transitioned back to life resembling something akin to pre-pandemic norms, the Commission also came together at WCPFC19 to select new executive leadership for its Secretariat. Ms. Rhea Moss-Christian was appointed as the Secretariat's new Executive Director, taking up her post in early March 2023.

With a well-experienced Secretariat team in place, the Executive Director transitioned seamlessly into the role, strongly supported by the staff and host nation of the Secretariat headquarters. Immediate observations were that the Secretariat team continues to not only operate at consistently high standards but is actively working to strengthen and improve its delivery of services to the Commission.

Along with the election of Dr. Josie M. Tamate of Niue as the new Commission Chair in late 2022, the change in leadership at the Secretariat injected new energy into efforts to complete current tasks and prepare for coming challenges. Chair Tamate took over from her predecessor Ms. Jung-re Riley Kim (Korea) to lead the Commission's ongoing review of its tropical tuna measure, a flagship measure of the WCPFC that covers two major fisheries and three species of tuna in the WCPO. These leadership transitions have also occurred when the Commission is commencing its effort to address climate change impacts as part of its mandate.

The Secretariat's operations resumed to nearly full capacity by the end of 2022, with the Commission's return to in-person meetings and the return of Secretariat staff who had been working remotely, to headquarters in Pohnpei. The continuation of in-person meetings throughout 2023 has ensured that the Secretariat's internationally recruited staff have resettled into their respective roles and adapted to a "new working normal" of operating comfortably in a virtual environment, in addition to a physical one. The Commission's decision to hold its 2023 meetings in a hybrid format reflects how the world has changed as a result of the global pandemic, and also of how technology has advanced in such a way that working environments are easily interchangeable.

The Commission's partnership with the Pacific Community's (SPC) Oceanic Fisheries Programme (OFP) to serve as WCPFC's Scientific Services Provider (SSP) remains strong. The Executive Director attended the biennial SPC Heads of Fisheries meeting in March 2023 and took the opportunity to meet with SPC Director-General Dr. Stuart Minchin and SPC's Director of Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) Neville Smith, to reaffirm the partnership between WCPFC and SPC. The consistently high-quality scientific advice and analyses provided by the WCPFC's SSP serves as the main foundation and the critical piece to ensuring sustainable fisheries management in the WCPO.

Another important partner to the WCPFC is the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), which continues to deliver the Commission's high seas vessel monitoring system (VMS) through a contract with Iceland-based software company, Trackwell.² The Secretariat took an opportunity in 2023 to meet with FFA Secretariat VMS officers as well as Trackwell representatives, which continued to strengthen these important working relationships established by the Commission.

² <https://trackwellfims.com/fisheries-management-systems/vms/>

The Commission also continues to be well-supported by its legal and rapporteur consulting agencies, with Dr. Penelope Ridings continuing as WCPFC Legal Advisor in 2023, and the new appointment of Dr. Tim Adams as the WCPFC Rapporteur. Both individuals bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to their respective roles, which has contributed to strong outcomes for the Commission's 2023 activities.

a. 2023 Commission Meetings and Workshops

Intersessional Working Groups

At its 19th regular session in 2022, the Commission reaffirmed its intention to progress several issues through eight different intersessional working groups (IWGs) ([Attachment A](#)). Each of the IWGs was chaired or co-chaired by CCMs, and their work has ensured that key work streams in the Commission's work programme were advanced between the regular annual sessions. Updates on each of the IWG's 2023 activities will be shared under the relevant agenda items at WCPFC20. Special recognition goes to the Chairs and co-Chairs of the Commission's 2023 IWGs, noting the significant additional workload that these CCM officials undertake throughout the year when they agree to lead these intersessional discussions. The Secretariat provided support to each of the IWGs, where required, and will continue to play its part in resourcing the Commission's IWG activities, including when IWGs meet in person or virtually.

Commission Subsidiary Bodies

19th Session of the Northern Committee (NC19)

The Northern Committee (NC) met virtually and in person in Fukuoka, Japan from 6-7 July 2023, following its eighth annual meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG-08) on the Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna with the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC). The NC continues to review and strengthen the Commission's management framework for North Pacific albacore and Pacific bluefin tunas, with the latter currently under a rebuilding plan and trending positively toward more sustainable catch levels. In addition, NC19 discussed addressing climate change impacts in fisheries management, emphasising that data collection to support scientific analyses is a critical first step. Following NC19, NC delegations participated in a meeting of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean³ (ISC), which continues to provide scientific advice on species under the purview of the NC.

NC Chair, Mr. Masanori Miyahara (Japan), will provide a report to WCPFC20 on NC19 outcomes on management of North Pacific albacore and Pacific bluefin tuna under Agenda Item 10.6 and 10.7, respectively, as well as Agenda Item 15. The outcomes of



NC Chair Masanori Miyahara (L) and WCPFC Science Manager Dr. SungKwon Soh (R) at the NC19 meeting in Fukuoka, July 2023. Photo by R. Moss-Christian

³ <https://isc.fra.go.jp/>

JWG-08 discussions on Pacific bluefin tuna will also be shared. The status of northern stocks will be covered in Agenda Item 8 with a presentation from the ISC.

19th Session of the Scientific Committee (SC19)

The Scientific Committee (SC) was hosted by the Government of Palau in 2023, bringing CCMs back together for the first time in three years for an in-person (and virtual) session. The SC considered a broad range of scientific research and analyses covering most of the WCPFC's highly migratory and straddling fish stocks, as well as non-target and associated or dependent species such as sea turtles, sharks, and seabirds. The comprehensive discussions also encompassed ecosystem and bycatch indicators, which the SSP will present to WCPFC20 under Agenda Item 9. This presentation will help to inform the Commission's consideration of climate change impacts on fisheries management decisions.



WCPFC delegations attending SC19 in Koror, Palau, August 2023. Photo by S. Rikin.

SC19 Acting Chair Ms. Emily Crigler (USA) will report on SC19's recommendations to WCPFC20 under Agenda Item 15. The SSP will present an overview of the status of stocks in the WCPO in Agenda Item 8.

19th Session of the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC19)



TCC19 Chair Mat Kertesz (second from left) presiding over discussions. Photo by B. Jaynes.

The Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) returned to its home in Pohnpei, FSM for its 2023 regular session, bringing TCC19 delegations to the Commission's headquarters for the first time since 2019. TCC19's agenda was particularly busy due to the two-year compliance review of draft Compliance Monitoring Reports (CMR) covering reporting years 2021 and 2022. TCC19 also turned its attention to reviewing the output of two data analysts working with the Secretariat in 2022 and 2023 on enhancing the value of CCM's data to support the Commission's management objectives. Some repeat issues were also considered at TCC, including the lack of data to independently verify certain obligations, as well as differences in interpretation of some obligations which presents challenges for compliance evaluation.

TCC19 Chair Mr. Mat Kertesz (Australia) will report on TCC19's recommendations to WCPFC20 under Agenda Item 15. The TCC Chair will also lead the review and finalization of the 2023 CMR for consideration and adoption by the Commission.

17th Session of the Finance and Administration Committee (FAC17)

The upcoming Finance and Administration Committee (FAC) will begin its deliberations on 3 December 2023, ahead of the start of WCPFC20. FAC17 will be co-chaired by Michael Brakke (USA) and David Power (Australia). CCMs will consider the usual issues before FAC, as well as the results of intersessional work relating to Secretariat staff salaries and remuneration. The Secretariat will also present information on its approach to aligning Secretariat resources to better support the Commission's work in 2024 and beyond.

Commission Workshops on the Tropical Tuna Measure

At WCPFC19, the Commission adopted a [Work Plan](#) for progressing its review and development of a new tropical tuna measure in 2023. This included a virtual workshop in June and a hybrid workshop in September, both led by the Commission Chair. The June and September workshops were a continuation of work that began in 2022, with the 4th workshop on 29-30 September 2023 culminating in agreement that the Chair would produce a [Consultative Draft](#) tropical tuna measure to guide discussions at WCPFC20. Funding support from the United States enabled WCPFC members to convene the 4th workshop in person in Pohnpei.

Western Pacific East Asia - Improved Tuna Monitoring Project (WPEA-ITM)

The Commission continues to prioritize the work being progressed through the WPEA-ITM project in support of data collection from the tropical fisheries of Indonesia, Philippines, and Vietnam (WPEA fisheries)⁴. SC19 reaffirmed its support for the project outcomes and its continuation as a critical contribution to the WCPFC's scientific understanding of key tuna species. In 2021, WPEA-ITM project countries (Indonesia, Philippines, and Vietnam) contributed approximately 28.7% of the total reported catch of oceanic tunas in the WCPFC Statistical Area, or 710,525 tons of the 2021 total of 2,476,891 tons. WPEA-ITM Project Coordinator Lars Olsen worked closely with WCPFC's SSP Principal Fisheries Scientist (Data Management) Peter Williams and Independent Consultant Barbara Hanchard to conduct workshops in each of the project countries in 2023. Each of the workshops brought data collection officers together to discuss methods, processes, and the importance of ongoing tuna catch monitoring to support critical stock assessment work in WCPFC.

b. Key Outcomes for the Commission in 2023

Harvest Strategy Development

The Commission adopted a [Management Procedure \(MP\) for Skipjack Tuna](#) at WCPFC19 in 2022 and tasked the Scientific Committee to review the performance and outputs of the initial run of the MP at SC19. SC19 noted that the 2023 run of the skipjack MP was consistent with expectations based on the management strategy evaluation (MSE) process, with all data requirements satisfied.⁵ The output of the 2023 run of the MP indicated that the maximum effort in the purse seine and pole-and-line fisheries and

⁴ WPEA fisheries include those in Indonesia, Philippines, and Viet Nam, where the total catch of skipjack, yellowfin, and bigeye tuna in the WPEA area comprises 30% of the total catch in the WCPO during 2018-2022.

⁵ See para 132 of [SC19 Outcomes Document](#).

the maximum catches in all other fisheries should be set to their respective baseline levels as set out in the skipjack MP CMM for the period 2024-2026.

An important next step for the skipjack MP is the Commission's adoption of a Monitoring Strategy, which will be considered at WCPFC20 under Agenda Item 10.2a(ii). This step in the harvest strategy framework is important for ensuring that the skipjack MP is performing as expected and that the required elements to evaluate its performance remain relevant. As the Commission moves forward in implementing its Harvest Strategy Work Plan, clear guidance and articulation of the roles for SC and TCC in 2024 will become more necessary.

The Commission will consider the progress on development of a harvest strategy for South Pacific albacore at WCPFC20 under Agenda Item 10.1. The Commission's discussions on this stock have been continuing intersessionally in 2023 through the South Pacific Albacore Roadmap IWG, chaired by Ms. Neomai Ravitu (Fiji). SC19 held extensive discussions on SP albacore harvest strategy development, including on candidate management procedures and an updated target reference point (TRP). The Commission's management guidance on priorities and features to be included in a SP albacore harvest strategy will be instructive for the SC's work in 2024.

Also important is the Commission's coordination with the IATTC in respect of efforts to adopt a Pacific-wide harvest strategy for SP albacore that is at least compatible, if not consistent, to avoid management gaps and ineffective management. In this vein, the outcome of the IATTC's 2023 annual meeting to work closely with SPC and the WCPFC to explore management strategies and work closely on stock assessment is especially encouraging. The Commission's partnership with IATTC on the management of shared stocks such as SP albacore builds on the long-standing cooperation through the WCPFC Northern Committee with IATTC on the Pacific-wide management of Pacific Bluefin tuna.

SC19 briefly discussed the Commission's ongoing consideration of a multi-species framework for developing mixed-fishery harvest strategies, which means that skipjack, South Pacific albacore, and bigeye are managed by individual MPs, and yellowfin is managed by these three single stock MPs. The Commission has the opportunity at WCPFC20 in Agenda Item 10.2a-c to review its current mixed-fishery framework approach to development of harvest strategies for four of its key tuna species, and task 2024 activities, accordingly.

The Northern Committee's approval of harvest control rules (HCR) for North Pacific albacore at its 19th session in July 2023 comes to WCPFC20 for adoption under Agenda Item 10.6. With the IATTC's adoption of HCRs for North Pacific albacore at its 101st Annual Session in August 2023, the Pacific Ocean region is set to have the world's first full harvest strategy adopted by two separate regional fisheries management organisations (RFMO). This is important for WCPFC as it continues its joint management discussions with IATTC on Pacific bluefin tuna and indeed, for development of harvest strategies overall.

With respect to Pacific bluefin tuna, NC19 reviewed and agreed to revisions to the WCPFC's conservation and management measure for Pacific Bluefin Tuna ([CMM 2021-02](#)) for adoption by the Commission at WCPFC20. The NC19 also agreed to recommend revisions to the Harvest Strategy for Pacific Bluefin Tuna Fisheries ([HS 2021-01](#)) for the Commission's review and adoption. The joint efforts between WCPFC-NC and IATTC have successfully contributed to the development of a rebuilding plan for Pacific Bluefin tuna, with WCPFC-NC and IATTC members acknowledging in 2023 that their rebuilding efforts are ahead of schedule.

The 4th Catch Documentation Scheme-Technical Meeting also convened ahead of NC19 and reviewed options for budgetary and administrative considerations for the development of the electronic Pacific Bluefin Catch Documentation (ePBCD) system ([IATTC-NC-CDS04-2023/02](#)). Key discussion points included establishing the basis and location of the system, use of external service providers, demarcation of responsibility between the IATTC and WCPFC Secretariats, and cost sharing between the IATTC and WCPFC.

Science Activities

The Commission’s Scientific Committee received reports at SC19 on two 2023 stock assessments for yellowfin tuna and bigeye tuna in the WCPO. Additionally, the 2023 stock assessment for yellowfin tuna benefited from a 2022 peer review of the 2020 yellowfin tuna assessment. Details of each of these 2023 assessments is contained in [SC19 meeting documentation](#) as well as the [SC19 Outcomes Document](#), summarised as follows:

| WCPO tuna stock | 2022 WCPO catch data (preliminary estimate) | SC19 management advice ⁶ |
|------------------|---|--|
| Yellowfin | Total: 721,169 mt Longline: 84,232 mt Purse-seine: 379,715 mt | Spawning biomass is above the LRP and recent F is below F_{MSY} . The stock is not experiencing overfishing (100% probability $F_{recent} < F_{MSY}$) and is not in an overfished condition (0% probability $SB_{recent}/SB_{F=0} < LRP$). |
| Bigeye | Total: 140,664 mt Longline: 54,800 mt Purse-seine: 62,811 mt | Spawning biomass is above the biomass LRP and F_{recent} is below F_{MSY} . The stock is very likely not experiencing overfishing (100% probability $F_{recent} < F_{MSY}$) and is not in an overfished condition (0% probability $SB_{recent}/SB_{F=0} < LRP$) |

The Commission’s scientific foundation remained well supported in 2023 through its contract with SPC for several critical activities. The [Pacific Tuna Tagging Project](#) (PTTP), or “Project 42” continues to represent the largest budget expenditure for the Commission’s science programme (outside of advisory services from SPC), a clear reflection of its importance to the work of the WCPFC. The PTTP’s successful activities in 2022, 2023, and planned activities in 2024 that will enhance the Commission’s scientific understanding of important tuna fisheries was strongly supported by SC19, for the Commission’s endorsement at WCPFC20. In addition to the WCPFC, current donor support for the PTTP comes from the Republic of Korea, the European Union, the United States, and SPC.

Closely linked to this project is the stock assessment work carried out by the SPC. SC19 discussed options for increasing the Commission’s support to its science provider in the form of additional resources

⁶ See paras 22-41 of [SC19 Outcomes Document](#).

for stock assessment and associated analyses. The Commission will consider these options at FAC17 and WCPFC20.

The Commission's ongoing efforts to minimise the impacts of fishing on the wider marine ecosystem was seen in its 2023 research activities on non-entangling and biodegradable FADs (Project 110⁷). Noting research delays caused by COVID, SC19 reinforced its commitment to supporting research activities that were well underway in 2023 and being led by SPC and ISSF. The activities of Project 110 are essential to enabling the Commission to meet its commitment in the tropical tuna measure to reduce risks of entanglement of non-target species in FADs, as well as reduce marine debris. Project 110 is supported by the European Union and at SC19, ISSF offered additional funding for project-related activities in 2024.

The Commission's 2023 intersessional discussions through its FAD-Management Options IWG provided guidance to SC19's discussions on Project 110 activities, ensuring that research activities are aligning practically with implementation schedules, including the schedule set by the tropical tuna measure. The Commission will receive a further update from Mr. Jamel James (FSM), Chair of the IWG on FAD-Management Options at WCPFC20 under Agenda 10.2d, in relation to the review of CMM 2021-01.

The Commission's management of WCPO billfishes was reviewed at SC19, with stock information provided by SPC and ISC, with the ISC presenting results on its 2023 stock assessments for North Pacific swordfish and North Pacific striped marlin. SC19 reviewed the Commission's Billfish Research Plan (BRP) and the need for staggering scheduled assessments to ensure sufficient time and resources are available to support billfish assessments amidst other priority stock assessments for WCPO tuna stocks in the future.

The Commission's efforts to mitigate fishing impacts on non-target and associated or dependent species (NTADS) continued throughout 2023 with a report to SC19 on an in-process stock assessment for WCPO silky shark. Additional stock assessments are planned in 2024 for WCPO oceanic whitetip shark, as well as fishery characterisation of manta and mobulid rays and whale sharks. Development of effective mitigation measures for certain key shark species remains in process and data collection protocols through the Commission's Regional Observer Programme (ROP) are ongoing.

Similarly, the Commission continues to consider measures to mitigate fishing impacts on seabirds, led by New Zealand, with plans to develop a revised CMM for adoption at WCPFC21. The Commission's current work programme relating to FADs is expected to benefit sea turtles, noting that further work suggested by SC19 to develop best practices and guidelines to minimize FAD impacts on sea turtles would strengthen WCPFC's current measure. All current measures for NTADS will be reviewed at WCPFC20 under Agenda Item 12.

Monitoring and Evaluation Activities

TCC19 reviewed two consecutive reporting years (2021 and 2022) in two draft Compliance Monitoring Reports (dCMRs) against a [list of obligations](#) agreed to by the Commission at WCPFC18. Two provisional Compliance Monitoring Reports (pCMRs) are recommended by TCC19 to the Commission for consideration at WCPFC20. A small working group is expected to meet at WCPFC20 to finalise the pCMRs

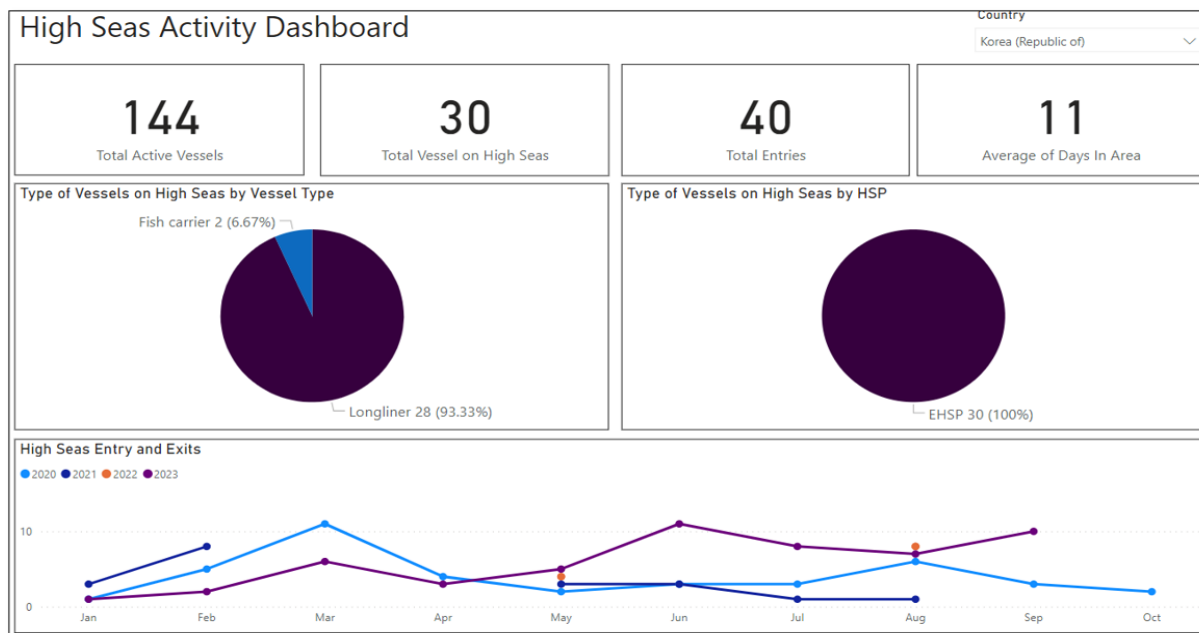
⁷ For further details, see SC19 papers: "[Progress report of Project 110: Non-entangling and biodegradable FAD trial in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean](#)" and "[Terms of Reference for a project to support additional work on trialling non-entangling and biodegradable FADs in the WCPO](#)".

for the Commission’s review and adoption. The Commission’s adoption of Audit Points at WCPFC19 contributed to some streamlining of the Secretariat’s processes to develop the dCMR, noting that the experience of applying and reviewing obligations against the new Audit Points for the first time at TCC19 offered some important lessons for informing future compliance reviews.

Pandemic and post-pandemic lessons offered the Secretariat an opportunity to review its formats and processes for delivering on key services to the Commission in 2023, particularly in relation to presentation of data to better align with Commission activities and priorities. One area of high priority for the Secretariat was leveraging two data analytical consultancies that explored the untapped value in multiple available data streams. This effort was in response to the Commission’s acknowledgement of the potential for data analysis to enhance its existing approach to information management and to ensure CCM’s would have the tools necessary to support their implementation of obligations.

TCC19 considered an informative presentation from the two consultants, Dr. Steve Brouwer and Mr. Douglas Jackson, which demonstrated the additional online tools that would offer CCMs greater ability to manage their national data in support of meeting their obligations to the Commission. An example of the type of product that enhanced data analysis can provide is shown in [Figure 1](#), below, which depicts a digital dashboard of fictional summary data for a CCM. A comprehensive report on the data analytical work is contained in TCC19 paper entitled “[Enhanced Data Analysis and Interpretation: Experiences and Opportunities](#).” Future opportunities are considered in [Section IV](#) of this report.

Figure 1.



Following the 2022 launch of the Compliance Case File System (CCFS) as an online tool accessible to CCMs from the WCPFC website, the Commission received two major [upgrades to its online systems](#) in 2023 with the delivery of an upgraded WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels database (RFV) and the database of WCPFC Conservation and Management Measures as part of a multi-year program of work to incrementally enhance the IT-related tools that support CCM reporting and implementation of

obligations. The Secretariat provided training sessions on the new online systems to Australia, Canada, China, Cook Islands, European Union, FSM, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Kiribati, RMI, Nauru, New Zealand, PNG, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Chinese Taipei, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, USA, Vanuatu, and El Salvador. FFA members also received a presentation on the upgraded systems at the FFA MCS Working Group in March 2023.

The aim of the presentations was to demonstrate the features of the new systems and ensure CCMs were using the system more efficiently. The RFV training sessions also provided CCMs with an opportunity to refresh their use of the CCFS, VMS-related reporting tools, the annual reporting system, and the broader processes that these systems support. Expanded [user guides](#) were also developed and made available to CCMs to assist with understanding and using the newly upgraded online systems. Feedback from CCMs throughout the year and at TCC19 confirmed the need and interest for ongoing Secretariat support to CCM users of Commission data management processes and this work is expected to continue in 2024.

With the enhanced data analytical work and the IT system upgrades planned for 2024 and forward, the Commission is expected to realise significant benefits to improve its monitoring efforts and ability to assess the effectiveness of its conservation and management measures.

Strengthening Commission Processes

In early 2023, the Secretariat began evaluating the [WCPFC website](#) in full, with a lens to further enhancing functionality for CCMs and improving user experiences of both CCMs and other stakeholders. Currently, the WCPFC website serves three broad functions: (1) provision of general information (to both CCMs and the public) and member-specific information and data to CCMs; (2) assistance to CCMs to manage information deliver on their obligations; (3) support to meetings, especially in terms of managing meeting documents.

As more of the Commission's routine activities move online, there is an urgent need to ensure that WCPFC's online tools can adequately and securely support required work now and into the future. A number of these tools have been or will soon be incorporated into the WCPFC website, which will be the primary avenue for achieving the next level of efficient functionality that will better facilitate the WCPFC's work going forward.

Under Article 15 of the Convention, one of the key functions of the Secretariat is to communicate the work of the Commission to its members and stakeholders, including promoting the activities of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies. Modern websites and other web-based platforms enable the continuous publication and exchange of news and information.

In 2023, the Secretariat began publishing press releases and current news items in the "News" section of the website, rather than the previous practice of sharing updates almost exclusively through the Quarterly Newsletter. To complement this, in 2023 the Secretariat also began posting updates about Secretariat and Commission activities on [LinkedIn](#), an online platform oriented to professionals. By leveraging these select tools and online platforms, the Commission may also be able to advance its efforts to be more transparent about its activities, decision-making, and performance.

The broader and more efficient functionality that an improved website would provide to CCMs and stakeholders, coupled with a streamlined and strategic approach to promote the work of the Commission,

is expected to yield beneficial outcomes for the WCPFC overall. These outcomes include more efficient Commission data collection and monitoring processes and improved stakeholder engagement in support of the Commission's mandate, supported by the Secretariat.

The Commission's extensive experience with what are now well-established data collection and monitoring programmes has prompted the Secretariat to undertake a review in 2023 of its alignment of Secretariat resources to the Commission's shifting priorities. There is also an emerging need to consider additional programmes driven by for example, the ongoing development of and shift into monitoring and support to harvest strategies implementation, consideration of climate change impacts, and an increased focus on protecting the welfare of fishing vessel crew and observers. This presents a critical opportunity for the Commission to review its current systems and processes against technological advances that may identify new approaches to utilising scarce resources more efficiently. In other words, how can the Commission use its information and available resources more strategically to support its objectives? In this case, the Commission's further articulation of its annual work streams, and the priorities therein, will be vital. Additional information on the Secretariat's review will be provided to FAC17.

III. Commission's 2023 Budget and Trust Fund Accounts

The Commission approved a 2023 budget of USD8,819,999. In addition to funding the Secretariat's administrative and operations expenses, the 2023 budget covered the Commission's regular annual sessions of its subsidiary bodies. Funding for the 4th Tropical Tuna Measure workshop, which was not included in the Commission's budget, was provided by the United States. The Commission's 2023 budget supported critical scientific work such as the Pacific Tuna Tagging Project and important stock assessment activities. Similarly, the Commission's technical and compliance programme activities such as the ROP, VMS, and ongoing enhancements to data and information management and analysis were successfully supported by the 2023 budget.

The Commissions trust funds were effectively administered in 2023. The Japanese Trust Fund and the Chinese Taipei Trust fund both continue to provide funding for projects in support of SIDS activities. Additionally, voluntary contributions have been made by several Members to support the Commission's work in a variety of activities. The Special Requirements Fund (SRF) was heavily used in 2023 and the amount available in that fund is critically low, with full depletion expected before the end of 2023. Further details on donations and projects supported by the trust funds can be found in the *Report on the Status of Other Funds for 2023* (WCPFC20-2023-FAC17-07) which will be presented to the 17th Finance and Administration Committee ahead of WCPFC20.

IV. Looking Ahead: Opportunities for the Future

The Secretariat's updated Corporate Plan will cover the years 2024-2027 and will be discussed at WCPFC20 under Agenda Item 17.1. Success of the Commission's work programme is underpinned by a strong Secretariat that is positioned to respond to and meet Commission expectations, and the updated Corporate Plan has this goal in mind. Heightened global awareness on ocean-related issues, bolstered by increased access to information, is increasing pressure on organisations like the WCPFC to not only respond accordingly, but to respond at a high standard. Competing global crises such as climate change, regional conflicts, and threats to the global financial system mean that WCPFC's work is not easily confined or siloed. The Commission's commitment to developing fishing vessel crew labour standards, to apply the precautionary approach to the development and implementation of harvest strategies, to ensure due

consideration is given in fisheries management to impacts of climate change, and the call for submission of fisheries economic data (albeit voluntary) reflects the reality that effective international fisheries management sits in a multi-faceted landscape that requires a broad, global view.

a. Enhancing Value of Commission Data

TCC19's support for the continuation of the data analytical consultancies for an additional two years reflects the shared vision throughout the membership of the potential for strategic analytical tools to strengthen each CCM's ability to participate more effectively in the WCPFC. The experience of the two analytical consultancies has demonstrated the opportunities to improve the Secretariat's support so that CCMs can proactively address any data quality issues and reporting gaps and can also improve understanding around environmental indicators and fishing activities. More importantly, the demonstrated outcomes that enhanced data analysis yields is easily translated into a better managed fishery, overall, which further translates into better returns for all stakeholders.

The Commission's main monitoring programs are now well established with annual maintenance recognised as a core function of the Secretariat's work. Members continue to improve on their collection and submission of data each year which is evident from the work carried out by IWGs (e.g. IWG-ROP and TS-IWG) and the Secretariat with respect to data requirements to support independent verification. The impact of the Commission's data collection programmes can be partially seen in documentation provided in support of WCPFC20 Agenda items 10, 11, and 12. Information and data requirements support the full range of activities carried out by the Commission, ensuring that conservation and management measures, including harvest strategies, are having their intended effect, and are contributing toward meeting the Objective⁸ of the WCPFC Convention.

b. Strengthening of Online Tools and Platforms

Closely linked to enhanced data analysis is the strengthening of IT systems to support analytical work. The Secretariat has consistently modernised its data collection and reporting systems over the last several years to respond to Commission needs. This has resulted in a strengthening of each CCM's respective roles as flag States, coastal States, port States, and licensing States by empowering CCM's to have greater control over their information through Secretariat-supported data platforms. The Secretariat's website refresh is expected to generate an even greater level of support to CCMs and stakeholders. This approach reflects the technological advancements that have made several routine tasks more streamlined, and it acknowledges the opportunities that emerging technologies offer for supporting CCMs to engage in the work of the WCPFC in a secure and efficient online environment.

In a fishery as vast and as regionally and globally important as that of the WCPO, the challenge of prioritising activities and work streams is complicated by an equally vast range of stakeholder needs and interests. Streamlined and efficient support systems managed by the Secretariat offer members the opportunity to continue to cover the full scope of issues identified in the WCPFC Convention, and to do so in more meaningful ways. The continuous strengthening of the Commission's data collection programmes, further supported by the Commission's compliance monitoring scheme, is enabling a tighter focus on areas where gaps and weaknesses remain.

⁸ Article 2 of the WCPFC Convention states: *The objective of this Convention is to ensure, through effective management, the long-term conservation and sustainable use of highly migratory fish stocks in the western and central Pacific Ocean in accordance with the 1982 Convention and the Agreement.*

c. Closing Longstanding Data Gaps

Recent discussions at TCC19 on the longstanding absence of information to independently verify implementation of critical management measures showed that the commitment to close this data gap is there. But translating the commitment into action has proven to be difficult, thus far. Technology again has the potential to alleviate some of this difficulty in the medium term if the political resolve remains. The work currently being undertaken by the ERandEM WG is especially important in this effort. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the compliance monitoring experience is contributing significantly to the Commission's ability to prioritise certain issues and obligations requiring greater focus in any given year, including the need to close data gaps and direct attention to data-poor fishing activities.

V. Conclusion

The nature of multilateral settings with a focus on an economically-important resource is that progress happens in subtle ways, not always dramatically and not always obvious. But the cumulative impact of incremental changes can lead to significant gains in the longer term, provided the organisation is willing and prepared to adapt its processes to respond to external changes and pressures. The WCPFC has demonstrated this ability multiple times in its young history with the early establishment and ongoing strengthening of its scientific data foundation and important data collection and monitoring programmes. This work underpins the Commission's conservation and management measures and implements core principles and Commission functions as outlined in the WCPFC Convention.

The Commission's activities in 2023 contributed to important progress in its annual work programme, strongly supported by significant intersessional work and more focused discussions by the subsidiary bodies. The post-pandemic working norms and the availability of advanced technologies increased workloads and expectations in 2023, but it has also helped to support a more focused agenda for WCPFC20. The Commission has a clear opportunity at its upcoming 20th regular annual session to review and reflect on its conservation and management priorities, consider the need for a realigned strategic direction for the future, and refocus its 2024 work programme to ensure the WCPFC is meeting the needs of current and future generations.

The Commission's use of intersessional working groups ensures that key work streams continue to make progress between annual sessions. In addition, the intersessional work allows the subsidiary bodies to receive and provide input to support development of relevant recommendations to the Commission.

| Intersessional Working Group | Description of 2023 Activities |
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| <p>1. Regional Observer Program (IWG-ROP)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Develop a workplan and prioritise activities ii. Develop draft recommended modifications to ROP data fields with the intention of allowing for more useful consideration of ROP data in the CCFS and in the Compliance Monitoring Scheme processes, and while taking into account their implications, including the impact on observer workloads and observer safety, as well as any related training needs iii. Prioritize work on issues such as a solution to identifying interactions with whale sharks and cetaceans, and on the inclusion of ROP data fields that were identified in the TCC Workplan 2022-2024 project specific task (j), and to identify any CMM that should also be prioritized in this work |
| <p>2. Transshipment (TS-IWG)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Existing processes and systems for the collection and management of ROP data to the Commission and whether these could be used for observer transshipment data ii. The philosophy of the WCPFC SC Project 93 iii. The progress made through recent field work aimed at enhancing the data collection during at sea longline transshipment iv. Considerations around cooperation between WCPFC and other Pacific-basin based RFMOs in respect of transshipment monitoring e.g. possible expansion of cross endorsement v. Arrangement for purse seine and transshipment observers with IATTC and operationalizing the existing transshipment observer MOC with CCSBT vi. Consideration of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment, especially as they relate to the application of WCPFC ER reporting standards |

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| | vii. Data preparation, data compilation and analysis, and qualitative study, literature review and policy analysis as set out in the three stage Scope of Work agreed by the TS-IWG to support their review of the CMM |
| 3. Crew Labour Standards IWG | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Intersessional work to improve crew labour standards ii. Progress drafting a CMM |
| 4. FAD Management Options (FAD-MO IWG) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Review information related to the effectiveness of the limit on the number of FADs deployed as set out in paragraph 21 of CMM 2021-01, including review of the current FAD limit of 350 or any other limits and any advice on FAD monitoring ii. Review the effectiveness of paragraph 22 of CMM 2021-01 iii. Review recommendations from SC, TCC and WCPFC related to FAD limits and monitoring. iv. Finalization of proposed measures related to FAD limits and monitoring v. Adopt measures on the limits and monitoring of FADs |
| 5. Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS IWG) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Adopt remaining Audit Points ii. Develop Corrective Actions iii. Refine Aggregate Tables review process |
| 6. ERandEM Working Group (EM/ER WG) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Work to continue to enhance the WCPFC's monitoring programme ii. CCMs advising on next steps for the ERandEM WG work plan noting status of work completed in 2022 that highlighted three key pieces of work relating to an at-sea monitoring CMM, an 'Electronic Monitoring CMM and associated Standards, Specifications and Procedures |
| 7. Secretariat Professional Staff Remuneration (FAC WG) | With respect to broader issues related to the tri-annual market review and professional staff remuneration, FAC16 notes WCPFC19-2022-FAC16-10 but determined that additional information on relevant salary benchmarks and further discussion among CCMs is needed to reach consensus on future changes to professional staff salaries. FAC16 recommends that FAC Co-Chairs work intersessionally with the Secretariat and |

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| | <p>interested CCMs to identify potential recommendations for consideration of FAC17 on the following issues, without prejudice to future decision-making process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Options to align staff salary including the Executive Director, on a single simplified salary scale and/or other improvements related to the salary scale structure; ii. The advantages and disadvantages of changing the denomination of professional staff salaries from IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDR) to U.S. Dollars for greater clarity and to align with the currency of the Commission’s budget and financial accounts; iii. Options to establish automatic cost-of-living increases for staff salaries which could minimize the need for future salary reviews; iv. Changes to the content and frequency of salary market reviews including ensuring clearer comparison to the actual salary ranges of comparable positions in CROP agencies as well as remuneration of other relevant RFMO secretariats; v. Methods to ensure any changes to staff salaries do not result in lower remuneration for existing professional staff; vi. Any necessary changes to the Commission’s Staff Regulations or Financial Regulations to accomplish any resulting recommendations. |
| <p>8. South Pacific Albacore Roadmap (SPA-RM IWG)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Continue work to progress the agreed workplan to support the development of a SPA Management Procedure ii. Review scientific advice on the SPA stock status as the basis for the settings for the SPA Management Procedure including recommendations on a revised SPA interim Target Reference Point (iTRP) and SPA management objective |

Key Secretariat Activities in 2023

Overview

The current Secretariat staff complement comprises a group of highly committed, hardworking professionals. The locally hired contractors that provide security and building maintenance services serve as a backbone to the Secretariat's strength, ensuring that staff are operating in a safe and healthy work environment. The Secretariat continues to benefit from well-qualified support staff recruited from the local job market in Pohnpei, with some staff members entering their 15th year with the organization.

The Secretariat's management posts are predominately across the Compliance section and include the ROP Coordinator (Karl Staisch), the VMS Manager (Albert Carlot), and the Assistant Compliance Manager (Eidre Sharp). In addition, an Assistant Science Manager (Elaine Garvilles) supports the Secretariat's scientific activities, and an ICT Manager (Tim Jones) provides overall technological support to the organization.

Three posts at the senior leadership level provide daily oversight of the Secretariat's operations and regular guidance and support to the Executive Director. These consist of the Finance and Administration Manager (Aaron Nighswander), the Science Manager (Dr. SungKwon Soh), and the Compliance Manager (Dr. Lara Manarangi-Trott).

The current team of support staff in the Secretariat brings extensive experience and deep knowledge about the WCPFC to their work, gained through many years of service in their respective roles. These include the Record of Fishing Vessels Officer (Jeannie Nanpei Hawley), VMS Officer (Milo Abello), Administrative Officer (Lucille Martinez), Finance Officer (Merisa Delcampo), and Executive Assistant (Arlene Takesy).

The Secretariat team continues to operate at consistently high standards and has demonstrated a renewed commitment throughout 2023 to serving the WCPFC membership and other stakeholders. The Commission is invited to further acknowledge the excellent support provided by the Secretariat to the incoming Executive Director throughout the 2023 transition in the Secretariat's leadership.

2023 Activities

A. *CCM capacity building*

The Secretariat supported CCM attachments in May and June for fisheries officials from Nauru, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu. The attachments allowed participants to deepen their understanding of the Commission's day-to-day activities and annual processes. The program covered a wide range of topics, with particular emphasis on vessel management processes including the Vessel Monitoring System, Compliance Case File management for tracking action on potential non-compliance, and the annual compliance monitoring report (CMR) process. The Secretariat also provided a demonstration of available tools to assist WCPFC members to identify and address compliance issues throughout the year, reducing reliance on the annual CMR process. The Secretariat's Assistant Compliance Manager, Record of Fishing Vessels Officer, and ICT Manager travelled to FFA Headquarters in March 2023 to attend the annual FFA MCS Working Group. While there, the team provided demonstrations of the Secretariat's upgraded online

systems as well as worked with FFA member officials on reporting requirements. In August 2023, the Compliance Manager provided a presentation to the PNA Compliance Data Review Internship Program, which overviewed the WCPFC Compliance Monitoring Scheme, Annual Reporting, and CCFS.

B. Internships and Attachments

The Secretariat welcomed two individuals under its Internships and Attachments program. Mr. Joe Silem-Enlet joined the Secretariat in May and June 2023 to carry out field research as part of his studies toward a Ph.D. in Marine Affairs at the University of Rhode Island. Mr. Silem-Enlet is a former Consul-General of the Federated States of Micronesia in Portland, Oregon, and has extensive experience working on matters relevant to the North Pacific.

Ms. Elise Stull joined the Secretariat in August to December 2023, providing strong support to the Secretariat's Compliance team during TCC19 and to the Commission Chair during the 4th Tropical Tuna Measure Workshop. Ms. Stull is a trained lawyer with extensive knowledge in international ocean-related issues, gained through experience in supporting the FSM overseas missions to the United Nations and the United States, respectively.

The Secretariat has benefited immensely from Mr. Silem-Enlet's and Ms. Stull's professional knowledge and experience and welcomes their participation in WCPFC20 as part of the Secretariat complement.

The Secretariat is also supporting a remote attachment in 2023 of Ms. Maia Perraudeau, a Ph.D. Researcher at the Department of Law, European University Institute in Firenze, Italy. Ms. Perraudeau's research is focused on decision making in tuna RFMO's and the Secretariat is pleased to support her studies. Ms. Perraudeau will participate virtually at WCPFC20 as a member of the Secretariat team.

C. Host government relations and community engagement

The Secretariat's relationship with the Pohnpei state government and the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia remains strong. The Executive Director paid a courtesy visit to the Pohnpei State Governor, Hon. Reed P. Oliver, shortly after she assumed her post. Further courtesy visits are planned with the Speaker of the Pohnpei State Legislature and the FSM Secretary of Foreign Affairs.

The Secretariat implemented the Commission's community engagement efforts in 2023 through sponsorship of local fishing tournaments, participation in community sporting events, and contributions to national tourism and economic development initiatives. Interactions with the local community in Pohnpei contribute to goodwill from the public toward WCPFC Headquarters and associated activities.

D. Workshops and presentations

Several Secretariat staff participated in various workshops or delivered presentations to different forums throughout 2023. These included participation in FAO and FFA workshops, the Pacific Tuna Forum, and online presentations to subject-specific webinars covering topics such as harvest strategies and high seas boarding and inspection activities. These opportunities allow Secretariat

staff to build their capacity as well as develop important networks that support the Secretariat's role in the WCPFC.

E. Staff changes

Staffing at the Secretariat has been relatively stable and with the exception of a new Executive Director who started in March, there have been no changes in professional staff in 2023. There has been some turnover in support staff and vacant positions have either been filled or are in the recruitment process.

F. Staff training

All Secretariat staff have received IT security training, and a training program has been implemented to enhance IT skills through both in-house and online trainings for staff. In addition, several support staff are undertaking additional coursework at postsecondary institutions to further their personal academic qualifications.