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

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Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief update on activities under the Western Pacific East Asia - Improved Tuna Monitoring Activity (WPEA-ITM project) over the past 12 months and a preview of activities for 2024, for the information of the Commission (WCPFC20).

Summary of WPEA-ITM Activities in 2023

2. The WPEA-ITM Steering Committee met virtually on 3 February 2023 to review activities in 2022 and endorse the work plan and budget for 2023. The Steering Committee will meet again in person on 4 and 5 December in the margins of the WCPFC20 meeting. This will be an important meeting as the current project is due to finish at the end of 2024 and planning has commenced for another phase of the project to start when this one ends.
3. The WPEA-ITM Activity continued to support the development of catch estimates for the three project countries that make up the very important Region 5, key to the WCPFC’s ability to make robust stock assessments and fisheries management decisions. The three countries have reported the following total tuna catches for all gears in the WCPFC Statistical area over the past 7 years:

Annual catch estimates as submitted to the WCPFC by each WPEA country							
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Indonesia							
Skipjack tuna	336,455	302,158	291,441	297,860	258,169	272,193	263,438
Yellowfin tuna	160,418	157,346	215,460	219,178	233,452	252,049	221,818
Bigeye tuna	28,760	11,063	19,574	19,162	22,898	22,617	28,108
Total	525,633	470,567	526,475	536,200	514,519	546,859	513,364
Philippines²							
Skipjack tuna	79,515	89,741	73,377	88,389	109,154	90,040	82,331

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² Philippine catch figures do not include catches of Philippine flagged distant-water purse seine vessels.

Yellowfin tuna	60,763	75,575	67,546	59,846	73,619	84,344	62,398
Bigeye tuna	3,006	4,516	3,752	5,148	4,100	2,354	2,586
Total	143,284	169,832	144,675	153,383	186,873	176,738	147,315
Vietnam							
Skipjack tuna	93,820	86,295	91,461	87,357	73,651	68,822	75,344
Yellowfin tuna	24,389	22,407	25,455	19,499	17,853	17,020	19,941
Bigeye tuna	4,867	3,923	3,618	2,458	3,464	3,175	2,208
Total	123,076	112,625	120,534	109,314	94,968	89,017	97,493

4. Over the year of 2023, key activities of the WPEA-ITM have included:

Policy and legal frameworks

- WPEA-ITM: During the week of 27-31 March, 2023, SPC ran a Stock Assessment Workshop/Training focused on the WPEA project countries. Key representatives from each country attended this workshop in Sydney, Australia. The workshop focused on:
 - An improved understanding of WCPFC stock assessment data requirements, methods and interpretation of stock assessment outcomes.
 - A discussion on the data needs/enhancement for the WPEA region that could improve stock assessment outputs and related management advice for the WPEA region.
 - Building capacity of the WPEA members to interpret stock assessment outputs and consider these in relation to provision of management advice for their WPEA region including implications harvest strategies for tuna species.



Data collection and catch estimates

- Enumerators for all three countries were supported by WPEA-ITM. This included 32 in the Philippines, 15 in Indonesia, and 12 in Vietnam to support national enumerators in each country providing valuable port sampling data used to generate catch estimates for the WCPFC.
- Annual Data Review Workshops and Catch Estimation Meetings were supported in all three project countries, with final catch estimates produced from each workshop and submitted to

the WCPFC. The workshops demonstrated continued improvements in the collection and analysis of data on the total oceanic tuna catches that the countries and the Commission need to ensure sustainable management of tuna stocks and species. They also identified key issues compromising further improvements in the data, with recommendations made across all three project countries for further action in 2023 and 2024.

- Indonesia: The 14th Indonesia Annual Tuna Fisheries Catch Estimate Review Workshop (ITFACE-14) was held in person in Bogor from 30-31 May 2023.



- Philippines: The 16th PTUNASTAT Annual Catch Estimates Review Workshop was held in person in Legazpi City from 25-26 May, 2023.



- Vietnam: The 12th Annual Catch Estimates Workshop (VTFACE-12) was held in person in DaNang from 3-4 April, 2023.



Capacity building in IT area

- Philippines: The redevelopment of the Philippines National Stock Assessment Project (NSAP) database system which was completed in June 2021 continued with the roll-out of the system by SPC in January 16-19, 2023, which was attended by 60 people from NFRDI and BFAR. Additional IT equipment including tables for this rollout was sourced by the WPEA-ITM project. This new system has been developed on a web-browser/cloud hosted platform and will facilitate the entry and management of Philippines landings and port sampling data collected from hundreds of landing sites in Philippines provinces.
- Indonesia: Procurement of 5 new laptops, 3 portable hard drives and data projector were supported by the WPEA project.

Capacity building in fishery monitoring

- A shared Observer training for Indonesia and Vietnam was scheduled to be delivered by the Philippines in late 2023. This was postponed to early 2024 to optimize the attendance and logistics of this important shared training.

WPEA support by the SPC-OFP

- The contract for SPC's continued support under the project was maintained in 2023, allowing SPC to provide a range of forms of assistance in 2023. In addition to the support listed above, SPC also:
 - Continued development and ongoing support for the new National Stock Assessment (NSAP) Database system and the related mobile app (NSAP eDGES) used to collect data at landings sites throughout the Philippines. The cloud hosting of this system was moved from MS Azure to the SPC cloud server in late 2023.
 - Conducted the Philippines NSAP Database System Workshop (January 2023) in General Santos City which included training in the use of NSAP eDGES in both the meeting room and at the landing sites, and a review of NSAP reporting requirements.
 - Conducted a stock assessment and harvest strategy capacity building workshop (attended by six SPC staff) for the three WPEA countries (Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam), in Sydney, Australia over the period 27-30 March 2023.

- Provision of technical advice through participation at the Annual Catch Estimates and Data Review Workshops in Vietnam (April 2023), Philippines (May 2023) and Indonesia (June 2023).
 - Facilitated submission of 2023 scientific data submissions from three countries into WCPFC databases;
 - Provision of technical advice to Indonesia participants through the Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW) in June 2023.
 - Continued remote helpdesk support to Philippines and Vietnam for their use of SPC-developed database systems, and various support/advice to all WPEA countries regarding reporting from database systems and preparation of annual national catch estimates.
5. The End of Project Gap Analysis was completed in August and was presented to SC19 in Palau (SC19-RP-WPEA-02). This work is key to the development of the next phase of WPEA work to be managed by the WCPFC and will be discussed at the Steering Committee meeting in December 2023.
 6. Key work for 2024 includes continued support of port sampling data collection, developing accurate and reliable annual catch estimates, capacity building, joint observer training, and importantly the development of a new WPEA project to continue this critical work from 2025 forward.

Recommendations

7. WCPFC20 is invited to note the continuing progress of the WPEA-ITM project and acknowledge the importance of improved data and reporting from the WPEA region of the WCPFC Convention Area.
8. Given the current and increasing importance of the WPEA area to the management of key stocks in the Convention Area, WCPFC20 is invited to endorse the recommendations from SC19 to develop a new project proposal for the next phase of WPEA work. This should begin immediately after the current WPEA-ITM project expires at the end of 2024.