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Position Statement to WCPFC20

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Submitted by the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)



Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Annual Meeting, December 4 - 8, 2023

This Position Statement outlines issues that we urge the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) to act on at its upcoming meeting.



COMPLIANCE PROCESSES

2023 Asks

- Direct the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) Intersessional Working Group to develop guidelines for the participation of accredited observers and a scheme of responses to non-compliance to present to the Commission for adoption in 2024.

Background

A strong and transparent compliance process improves fisheries management by holding regional fisheries management organization (RFMO) members accountable. Transparency is an essential part of a modern and well-designed compliance process, yet the WCPFC is the only tuna RFMO that closes its compliance assessment process to observers. Although the CMS work plan adopted in 2020 includes developing a process for the participation of observers, no progress has been made on this item. Best practice recommendations to improve RFMO compliance processes are available in reports from ISSF and Pew Charitable Trusts: [2020 report](#), [2021 report](#), [2022 report](#).

Priorities to Progress

- Continue to refine and use the metrics to assess compliance for each CMM (i.e., audit points) and the Risk-Based Assessment Framework in the work of the CMS.

[RFMO Compliance Information & Resources](#)



TUNA STOCK CONSERVATION

2023 Asks

- Adopt a new conservation measure for tropical tunas that: (i) implements the outputs of the 2023 skipjack Management Procedure; (ii) limits fishing mortality for bigeye and yellowfin to the interim Target Reference Points; (iii) removes ambiguities and exemptions; and (iv) sets catch limits for fisheries that do not have them.
- Adopt a harvest control rule for North Pacific albacore to implement the [harvest strategy](#) for North Pacific albacore fishery adopted by the Commission in 2022.

Background

No tropical tuna stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) are overfished or experiencing overfishing. But skipjack tuna is close to its Target Reference Point. And the WCPO yellowfin stock is experiencing declines in spawning biomass in the westernmost equatorial region, due to catches from fisheries (other than longline and purse seine) that do not have catch limits. The WCPFC Scientific Committee (SC) endorsed the successful run of the skipjack Management Procedure this year—the output of which set maximum effort limits for purse seine and pole-and-line fisheries and recommended that maximum catches in all other fisheries be set to their respective baseline levels. In 2022, the WCPFC adopted a [harvest strategy](#) for the Northern Albacore fishery that was recommended by the Northern Committee. This year it should adopt a harvest control rule to implement its Northern Albacore harvest strategy as was done by the IATTC in August of this year.

Tuna Conservation Information & Resources



2023 Asks

- Establish an interim timeline, to be reviewed in 2024, for transitioning to 100% biodegradable FADs consistent with the timeline agreed by the IATTC.
- Adopt a requirement for provision of near-real-time FAD position and acoustic biomass records data for scientific use with appropriate time-lags to protect confidentiality.
- Task the FAD Working Group (FADMO-IWG) with developing in 2024: (i) a "FAD logbook" similar to what is used by the Parties to the Nauru Agreement; (ii) options for increased FAD detection and recovery; and (iii) guidelines to minimize the impact of FADs on sea turtles.

Background

FAD designs should be constructed mainly with biodegradable materials to reduce the impact of FAD structures on the ecosystem. Data from echo-sounder buoys used to track FADs can help improve tropical tuna stock assessments and develop more effective conservation measures.

At its August 2023 meeting, the IATTC adopted a timeline for transitioning to fully biodegradable FADs. WCPFC should adopt a timeline consistent with that of IATTC on an interim basis in 2023, to be reviewed in 2024. Further, the WCPFC SC made a number of recommendations for additional tasks that the working group should address as soon as possible, including: options for FAD recovery programs; developing a FAD logbook to be filled by operators; and guidelines for minimizing FAD impacts on sea turtles. The working group should also develop rules for FAD ownership, buoy activation/deactivation, and a FAD marking scheme consistent with the FAO Guidelines for both FAD structure and geolocating buoy.

Priorities to Progress

- Develop and implement science-based limits on FAD deployments and FAD sets.

- Develop and adopt clear rules for FAD ownership and for FAD buoy activation and deactivation.

[FAD Management Information & Resources](#)



ELECTRONIC MONITORING AND REPORTING & OBSERVER COVERAGE

2023 Asks

- Task the Electronic Reporting and Electronic Monitoring Intersessional Working Group (ERandEM IWG) with finalizing Electronic Monitoring (EM) standards, specifications and procedures for adoption in 2024.
- Adopt a timeline and plan to substantially increase observer coverage in longline fisheries.

Background

Comprehensive observer coverage is critical to effective fisheries management, compliance monitoring, and independent verification of catch, effort, species composition and bycatch. 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) is feasible and necessary. WCPFC's minimum 5% observer coverage requirement for longline vessels is insufficient and not being fully met. Catch estimates of bycatch species is unreliable at 5% coverage. The SC recommended that the Commission explore options to expand the observer coverage on longline vessels through both human and electronic approaches.

The WCPFC has still not adopted an EM program or Standards Specifications and Procedures (SSPs), despite the work of the Working Group that was established by the Commission in 2014. That group's work must be reinvigorated so that this important monitoring tool can be implemented.

Priorities to Progress

- Adopt measures to increase observer coverage (human and/or electronic) on longline vessels from 5% as progress toward 100% coverage in industrial tuna fisheries, including all vessels engaged in at sea transshipment, by 2024.

[Electronic Monitoring and Reporting Information & Resources](#)



TRANSSHIPMENT REGULATION

2023 Asks

- Adopt revisions to CMM 2009-06 to strengthen the regulation of at-sea transshipment in line with [best practice standards](#), including requiring:
 - near real-time electronic reporting (not longer than 24 hours after the event) for all transshipment activity, using minimum standard data fields
 - use of AIS and that VMS data are reported for all transshipments of WCPFC-covered species
 - provision of observer data to the WCPFC, as well as the national program; and
 - establishing criteria for authorization of at-sea transshipment and a review process.

Background

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); however, it has made little progress and produced no recommendations to revise the current CMM to date. The current CMM is not aligned with [best practice standards](#).

Priorities to Progress

- Develop electronic reporting standards for transshipment observers or providers through the ERandEM IWG.

[Transshipment Regulation Information & Resources](#)



EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES (HARVEST STRATEGIES)

2023 Asks

- Adopt Target Reference Points and continue to develop Management Procedures for bigeye and yellowfin tuna.
- Ensure that the skipjack Management Procedure adopted last year is effectively implemented in the revised tropical tuna measure and adopt a monitoring strategy consistent with scientific advice.

Background

WCPFC made significant progress in adopting a Management Procedure for skipjack in 2022. This year is the first year for its implementation, and WCPFC needs to effectively integrate the Management Procedure outputs into the new tropical tuna measure. The Commission also should adopt a monitoring strategy that is consistent with scientific advice.

Priorities to Progress

- Accelerate development of harvest strategy for South Pacific albacore that considers entire South Pacific in operating models, as recommended by the SC.



BYCATCH MITIGATION & SHARK PROTECTIONS

2023 Asks

- Task the SC and the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) with reviewing CMM 2018-03 for seabirds and CMM 2018-04 for sea turtles in 2024 and provide advice on updated best practice mitigation options.
- Task the SC and TCC to provide recommendations in 2024 on CMM 2022-04, including with respect to the provisions for retained sharks to be landed with fins naturally attached, to support the Commission's review of its implementation and effectiveness as called for in the CMM.

Background

Some shark and seabird species are declining in abundance or are threatened. WCPFC needs to adopt improved and science-based conservation and management measures to limit fishing mortality on seabirds, sharks, rays, and marine mammals and strengthen data collection and reporting requirements.

Priorities to Progress

- Develop and adopt a recovery plan for oceanic white-tip sharks.

[Bycatch Reduction Information & Resources](#)



CAPACITY

Background

Experts agree that there is overcapacity, too many vessels, in the global tuna fleets. Fishing fleet overcapacity increases pressure to weaken management measures, and eventually it leads to stock overexploitation.

Priorities to Progress

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



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