



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE  
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**WPEA-ITM Project Update**

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**WCPFC-SC20-2024/RP-WPEA-01**

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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, for the information and noting of the Scientific Committee (SC20). The WPEA-ITM project concluded on 30 June 2024 and the Activity Completion Report is due to the donor on 30 September 2024.

**BACKGROUND**

2. The tuna fisheries in the Pacific Ocean waters of Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam continue represent around 30% of the annual catches of key tuna species in the WCPO, including a significant proportion (40%) of the total yellowfin tuna catch in the WCPO (see Figure 1). The lack of accurate data on catch, effort and the composition of catches in these waters has been highlighted as a key uncertainty in WCPO stock assessments at WCPFC for a number of years.

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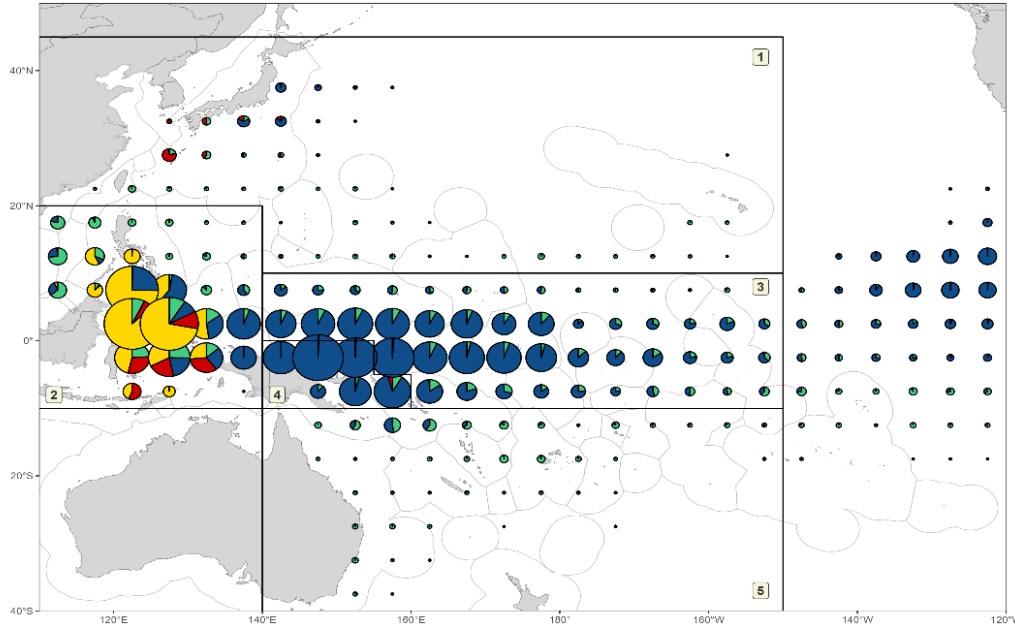


Figure 1. Distribution of yellowfin tuna catch by gear, 1990–2023 (longline - green; pole-and-line - red; purse seine - blue; other fisheries - yellow). The five-region spatial stratification used in stock assessment is shown.

3. In an effort to improve understanding of these fisheries and increase the accuracy of data available for stock assessments, a series of projects have been implemented since 2005 to support data collection in Indonesia and the Philippines, and later in Vietnam. These projects have included the Indonesia and Philippines Data Collection Project (IPDCP), the West Pacific East Asia Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (WPEA-OFM), and the Sustainable Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the West Pacific and East Asian Seas (WPEA-SM). The last WPEA-SM project, implemented by the WCPFC Secretariat and the three countries, terminated on 27 April 2019. This phase of the project, (WPEA-ITM) concluded on 30 June 2024, with a new phase called the West Pacific East Asia – Sustainable Pacific Fisheries (WPEA-SPF) starting 1 July 2024. The WPEA-SPF project will run until 30 June 2027.

4. Since these projects were first instituted in 2005, significant progress has been made on data collection, data analysis and verification, and the provision of catch estimates. Consequentially, the uncertainty in WCPO tuna stock assessments associated with tuna data in these three countries has been reduced. More detail on the activities and achievements of these projects can be found in WPEA updates to previous Scientific Committee meetings.

5. Recognising the importance to the WCPFC of continuing to improve tuna data from these three countries, the Government of New Zealand provided NZD 4.91 million over the period 2017-2023 for the Western Pacific East Asia Improved Tuna Monitoring Project (WPEA-ITM). The goal of the WPEA-ITM is to improve monitoring and management of tuna catches in Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam and contribute to reduced Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Due to delays associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government of New Zealand approved a project extension until 30 June and offered some additional funding to make the total NZD 5.23 million. We are thankful for the support from the Government of New Zealand.

6. The WPEA-ITM project is being managed by the WCPFC Secretariat, working closely with the national fisheries authorities in the three countries, and with SPC FAME playing a critical implementation

role. Project components include expanding the capacity of enumerator programs to gather tuna landings and port sampling data, building the capacities and sustainability of fisheries observer programs, supporting additional national policy and legal reviews to improve catch monitoring and governance, and building the capacity of national fisheries data management and analysis efforts.

### SUMMARY OF WPEA-ITM ACTIVITIES IN 2023-24

7. The WPEA-ITM Steering Committee met in person in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam on 24-25 January 2024 to review activities in 2023 and endorse the work plan and budget for the first half of 2024. Draft activities were also proposed for the remainder of 2024 for consideration in the new project phase (WPEA-SPF).

8. Critically, national tuna data collection programs have continued, with enumerators and port sampling continuing in all three countries with support of the project. Other critical activities, such as the Annual Catch Estimates workshops have also been able to progress either remotely, in-person or using a combination of both. All three countries have also met their WCPFC reporting obligations, with the submission of their provisional data to WCPFC.

9. The WPEA-ITM Activity supports the development of catch estimates for the three project countries. The three countries have reported the following total tuna catches for all gears in the WCPFC Statistical area over the past 8 years:

Annual catch estimates (mt) from the WPCF-CA as submitted to the WCPFC by each WPEA country								
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 <sup>2</sup>
<b>Indonesia</b>								
<b>SKJ</b>	336,455	332,628	291,442	296,743	258,169	272,193	263,438	263,438
<b>YFT</b>	160,092	134,290	215,460	219,178	233,451	252,049	221,818	221,818
<b>BET</b>	28,344	12,095	19,573	19,163	22,899	22,618	28,108	28,108
<b>Total</b>	524,891	479,013	526,475	535,084	514,519	546,860	513,364	513,364
<b>Philippines<sup>3</sup></b>								
<b>SKJ</b>	82,127	95,331	73,376	88,159	109,154	90,286	82,331	86,290
<b>YFT</b>	58,584	70,001	66,599	59,846	74,618	83,799	62,398	66,568
<b>BET</b>	2,845	4,454	2,364	4,464	4,035	2,653	2,586	5,153
<b>Total</b>	143,556	169,786	142,339	152,469	187,807	176,738	147,315	158,011
<b>Vietnam</b>								
<b>SKJ</b>	93,561	86,295	91,528	87,357	81,009	68,822	75,907	70,712
<b>YFT</b>	21,811	22,407	24,704	19,499	17,587	17,020	20,712	24,946
<b>BET</b>	5,704	3,923	4,301	2,458	3,730	3,175	2,961	1,249
<b>Total</b>	121,076	112,625	120,533	109,314	102,326	89,017	99,580	96,907

10. Since the last update to the Scientific Committee, key activities of the WPEA-ITM have included:

#### Policy and legal frameworks

<sup>2</sup> Indonesia's 2023 catches were carried over from 2022 until their 2023 ACEs are finalized, following the conclusion of their annual catch estimates workshop (2 August 2024)

<sup>3</sup> Philippine catch figures do not include catches of Philippine flagged distant-water purse seine vessels.

- WPEA-ITM: During the week of 27-31 March, 2023, SPC ran a Stock Assessment Workshop/Training focused on the Region 5 WPEA 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.



- Two delegates from Indonesia attended the sixteenth SPC Pre-Assessment Workshop (PAW) from the 25th – 28th March 2024, and held one on one consultations with SPC scientists on YFT CPUE from the Indonesian handline fishery and port sampling audit for handline data from 2-4 April 2024, at SPC headquarters in Noumea.
  - This provided an opportunity to participate in the PAW, discuss recent work related to harvest strategy technical aspects, and other research that is relevant to the tuna, billfish and shark assessment work, and importantly consult and discuss challenges and solutions to conduct the YFT CPUE standardisation from handline fishery as well as to discuss a port sampling audit for handline data.

#### **Data collection and catch estimates**

- Enumerators for all three countries were supported by WPEA-ITM. This included 33 in the Philippines, 12 in Indonesia, and 12 in Vietnam to support that national enumerators in each country providing valuable port sampling data used to generate catch estimates for the WCPFC.
  - In the Philippines, region 12 enumerators as pilot site region used the NSAP eDGES application to directly upload data into the NSAP Tufman2 database.
- Annual Data Review Workshops and Catch Estimation Meetings were supported in all three 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 countries for further action in 2024 and 2025.

- Vietnam: The 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Catch Estimates Workshop (VTFACE-13) was held in person in DaNang from 25-27 March, 2024 with 45 participants.



- Philippines: The 17th PTUNASTAT Annual Catch Estimates Review Workshop was held in person in Tagaytay City from 22-25 May, 2024 with 60 participants.



- For Indonesia, the 15<sup>th</sup> Indonesia Annual Tuna Fisheries Catch Estimate Review Workshop (ITFACE-15) is being held in person in Bogor from 31 July – 2 August 2024.
- A training workshop on tuna data analysis was held in Hai Phong City, Vietnam from 18-22 March 2024 with 17 Vietnamese fisheries researchers and managers and two scientists from SPC. Key outcomes from the training were:
  - Developing a better understanding of the concepts, models and methodologies to conduct the tuna stock assessments;
  - An introduction to R and key R packages to analyse and estimate parameters/indicators for tuna fisheries and conduct data-limited stock assessments;
  - Discussions on how to produce management advice based on parameters/indicators and understanding uncertainties of models for tuna stock assessments; and
  - To acknowledge shortcomings and gaps of data for further analysis to produce informed management advice for the tuna fisheries in Viet Nam.



### **Capacity building in fishery monitoring**

- Vietnam held a port sampling data collection workshop on 21-22 December, 2023, supported by SPC, with a focus on defining the difficulties and challenges in collecting tuna data in general and collecting the port-sampling data in particular; understanding in data requirements for stock assessments and data collection methodologies in marine capture fisheries; understanding forms and protocols used to collect the tuna port-sampling data in 2024 and forwards; and collecting information and filling in the port-sampling data forms. It was attended by 42 people, 30 of which were from fishing ports around Vietnam. The rest were from DoF, RIMF, Nha Trang University, VINTUNA.
- The Philippines hosted a joint fisheries observer training course for 6 participants (each) from Indonesia and Vietnam at the BFAR MCS Station and PFDA Fishport Complex in Navotas City, Philippines from February 27 to March 12, 2024.

- This training was very well delivered by the Philippines and appreciated by Indonesia and Vietnam. It served as an excellent example of these three countries helping each other to comply with WCPFC standards.



- In Indonesia, a workshop to improve monitoring of tuna catches from Longline and Handline fisheries is scheduled to occur on 30 July in Bogor, Indonesia. With assistance from SPC, it is intended to develop a strategy to improve catch, effort and size data from the Indonesia handline and longline fishery participating in the WCPFC.

#### **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.
  - Continued development of Tufman2 including translation into Vietnamese and additional features for fishery-specific characteristics.
  - 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, March 2024), Philippines (May 2023, 2024) and Indonesia (June 2023, July 2024).
- Peer-reviewed of the stock assessment approach developed to inform the proposed quota-based management framework in Vietnam.
- Facilitated submission of 2023 and 2024 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.
- Supported a port sampling data collection workshop on 21-22 December, 2023 for Vietnam.
- Supported two delegates from Indonesia that attended the sixteenth SPC Pre-Assessment Workshop (PAW) from the 25th – 28th March 2024, and held one on one consultations with them on YFT CPUE from the Indonesian handline fishery and port sampling audit for handline data from 2-4 April 2024.
- Conducted a R training workshop on tuna data in Hai Phong City, Vietnam from 18-22 March 2024 with 17 Vietnamese fisheries researchers and managers.

11. The final focus in the first half of 2024 was to work with the WCPFC Secretariat and the Government of New Zealand to develop another phase of this important WPEA work. The WCPFC is pleased for the support of New Zealand for this next phase to be called WPEA Sustainable Pacific Fisheries (SPF) which will run from July 2024 to June 2027 for the value of NZD 4.5 million. This will allow this work to continue to progress the good work completed to date. Key information on the next phase of the project:

1. *The high-level goal of the Sustainable Pacific Fisheries activity is:*
  - *To increase prosperity, self-reliance and inclusivity across the Pacific region through a sustainably managed Pacific Ocean fisheries.*
2. *The long-term outcomes are:*
  - *Stronger national and Pacific regional fisheries governance and cooperation;*
  - *Pacific Ocean fisheries are protected and managed sustainably; and*
  - *Increased sustainable Pacific Ocean fisheries trade.*
3. *The medium-term outcomes are:*
  - *National and regional fisheries decision-making is more adaptive and consistently informed by quality scientific and traditional knowledge;*
  - *Growing and intentionally diverse regional cohort of emerging fisheries management leaders and experts;*
  - *Enhanced national and regional fisheries zone-based management across the Pacific Ocean; and*
  - *Sustainably improved detection, deterrence, and elimination of IUU fishing across the Pacific Ocean.*
4. *The short-term outcomes are:*
  - *Regional and multilateral efforts harnessed for more efficient, effective, and transformative responses to member needs;*



- *Increased national/Pacific capacity, capability and inclusivity (science, fisheries management, MCS&E, leadership);*
  - *Effective and integrated Pacific Ocean fisheries MCS&E (national/Pacific); and*
  - *Fisheries monitoring tools, data and analysis are robust, fit-for-purpose, regularly updated and utilized.*
5. *These outcomes have been translated to three WPEA-SPF outputs:*
- *Output 1: Partnerships and collaboration enhanced*
  - *Output 2: Improved fisheries management and MCS&E capability*
  - *Output 3: Improved observer and port data collection and management*
12. The WPEA-SPF project will report to WCPF Commission meetings on progress against these criteria.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13. SC20 will note the successful completion of the WPEA-ITM project and beginning of the next phase of this work being the WPEA-SPF project.**