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Update on the South Pacific Albacore Roadmap IWG

WCPFC21-2024-22_Rev 1
26 November 2024

Submitted by the Chair of the SPA-RM-IWG

PURPOSE

1. This paper serves to provide background information on the tasks of the South Pacific Albacore IWG identified in the work plan for 2023-2026, in line with the SPA IWG work plan adopted at WCPFC19.
2. Significant efforts this year have been directed toward advancing key areas of work. These priorities aim to strengthen the management and conservation of South Pacific albacore through targeted initiatives, as outlined in the work plan in **Attachment 1**.

BACKGROUND

1. Significant milestones were achieved at WCPFC20 to advance the objectives outlined in the SPA IWG work plan. The key areas of progress include:
2. The Commission agreed on an interim target reference point (iTRP) for south Pacific albacore specified as four percent below the estimated average spawning potential depletion of the stock over the period 2017-2019 ($0.96 SB_{2017-2019}/SB_{F=0}$). This supersedes an earlier decision of the Commission made at WCPFC 15 (paragraphs 207 to 212). (Para 29 WCPFC 20 Outcomes Documents)

OUTCOMES OF SC20

South Pacific Albacore Stock Assessments

1. SC20 accepted this assessment for management advice, and expressed relatively high overall confidence in the assessment, noting the model still shows some lack of fit to the CPUE index and troll length frequency data. (Para 24 SC 20 Outcomes document)
2. The South Pacific-wide albacore tuna stock spawning biomass depletion is above the LRP, and F_{recent} is below F_{MSY} for all models in the uncertainty ensemble. The stock is not overfished (0% probability)

$SB_{\text{recent}}/SB_{F=0} < \text{LRP}$) and is not experiencing overfishing (100% probability $F_{\text{recent}} < F_{\text{MSY}}$). (Para 36 SC 20 outcomes document)

South Pacific Albacore TRP re-calibrations

3. SC20 recognized that WCPFC20 adopted an interim TRP for South Pacific albacore, defined as 4% below the estimated average spawning potential depletion of the stock over the period 2017-2019 ($0.96 SB_{2017-2019}/SB_{F=0}$). SC20 recommended the Commission note that the biomass depletion associated with the adopted interim TRP has been re-estimated to be 50% according to the 2024 SPA stock assessment outcomes. This biomass depletion when the interim TRP was adopted by WCPFC20 was previously estimated at 47% based on the 2021 SPA stock assessment (Para 105 SC20 outcomes document).

4. SC20 recommended the SMD and the Commission consider results from the evaluation of a range of alternative candidate South Pacific albacore target reference points provided in SC20-MI-WP-03, in reviewing the interim TRP and other scenarios recommended by SC20 (Para 106 SC20 outcomes document).

5. SC20 recommended that both catch numbers and weight be used for projections to inform the Commission discussion on reviewing the interim TRP for South Pacific albacore noting that projections conducted in terms of weight are more consistent with the MP evaluations and management through, for example, a TAC. SC20 further recommended that the SSP present trends in vulnerable biomass among specific WCPFC-CA longline fleets, and for WCPFC-CA catch levels to also be related to 2017-2019 levels (Para 107 SC20 outcomes document).

6. SC20 recommended including more scenarios for projections by fixing EPO catch at 2017-2019 levels and using multiple catch levels in the WCPFC-CA related to 2017-2019 levels (Para 108 SC20 outcomes document).

South Pacific Albacore Operating Models

7. SC20 adopted the operating model (OM) reference set, together with the proposed robustness set (Table 2, SC20-MI-WP-04), for the evaluation of candidate South Pacific albacore MPs. (Para 109 SC 20 outcomes document)

8. SC20 noted there are concerns about the range of uncertainty covered by the current operating model set. SC20 recommended that future work to elaborate the OM sets be conducted through the monitoring strategy and could include:

- a. development of scenarios for the impacts of climate change
- b. consideration of potential effects of effort creep and/or hyperstability in CPUE
- c. development of models that address uncertainties around stock structure to the robustness set. (Para 110 SC 20 outcomes document)

9. SC20 recommended that simulations be conducted to explore the implications of assuming a single stock OM when there could be multiple stocks. If ongoing genetics work confirms the presence of multiple-stocks and the simulations indicate that the single-stock assumption made in the OMs is problematic, then exceptional circumstances should be considered, and the OM sets should be revised to account for multiple reproductive stocks in the South Pacific. (Para 111 SC20 outcomes document)

South Pacific Albacore Management Procedures

10. SC20 recommended that SSP focus primarily on the following two ASPM-derived estimators with a view to having a robust estimator, without obvious future data vulnerabilities:
 - a. A direct biomass depletion approach using mean SB/SBF=0 of the last three years; and
 - b. A ratio approach that uses Mean SB/SBF=0 of the last three year (same as in a.) relative to 2017-2019.519. (Para 112 SC 20 Outcomes document)
11. SC20 noted that there was bias in estimation model performance at low predicted stock sizes. SC20 recommended that this bias be addressed through the design of the HCR and its significance or otherwise will be evaluated through evaluation of candidate MPs. Should the estimation model bias become problematic in the MP design context, then steps will need to be taken to address that issue. (Para 113 SC 20 Outcomes document)
12. SC20 recommended that SSP conduct a Management Strategy Evaluation of a range of candidate MPs, using updated estimators together with HCR and maximum change metarule specifications similar to those presented at SC19 (SC19-MI-WP-06). (Para 114 SC20 Outcomes Document).
13. SC20 recommended that SSP, in addition to running projections assuming a single baseline for all fisheries within the Management Procedure evaluations, explore the potential implications of using different reference periods for different fisheries and gears within the MP. (Para 115 SC20 Outcomes document)
14. SC20 recommended that EPO catches be assumed to remain constant at recent levels but with an exploration of a case where the EPO is subject to MP controls (in a similar way to SC20-MI-WP-03). (Para 116 SC20 Outcomes document)
15. SC20 noted that it was desirable to constrain the number of candidate MPs evaluated for consideration and recommended that steps be taken to manage this, including using one-off variations from a base-case scenario, rather than a full factorial grid of options. (Para 117 SC20 Outcomes document)
16. SC20 recommended that, to the extent possible, the results of the above candidate MP evaluations be provided to the SMD and the Commission for their consideration or decision. (Para 118 SC 20 Outcomes document)

OUTCOMES OF SMD02

Interim TRP recalibrations

1. SMD02 reviewed a summary of the 2024 SP-ALB stock assessment before the SSP presented WCPFC-SMD02-2024-BP-01 and noted the recent high catches of South Pacific albacore in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. SMD02 generally supported maintaining the use of both weights and numbers in the South Pacific albacore catch-based projections. (Para 8 SMD02 Outcomes Document)

South Pacific Albacore Management Procedure

2. SMD02 supported maintaining all the current performance indicators noting that those focused on vulnerable biomass and catch stability are critical for South Pacific albacore fisheries. (Para 11 SMD02

Outcomes Document)

3. SMD02 supported a 3-year frequency for running the South Pacific albacore management procedure (MP), which is in line with the current skipjack MP, the South Pacific albacore assessment schedule, and the biology of South Pacific albacore, and which balances responsiveness to stock status changes and stability for fishery operations. (Para 11 SMD02 Outcomes Document)

4. SMD02 supported the removal of candidate MPs that use an absolute estimator, and MPs using Harvest Control Rule (HCR) 4, from the set of candidate MPs provided in WCPFC-SMD02-2024-BP-02. (Para 12 SMD02 Outcomes Document)

OUTCOMES OF TCC20

1. Subject to WCPFC21 outcome, continue the work of the SPA-IWG with an aim to draft a new CMM for submission to the Commission.

SPA-RM-IWG-05 OUTCOMES ([Chairs Summary Report](#))

1. The South Pacific Albacore (SPA) Roadmap Intersessional Working Group (SPA-RM-IWG) convened virtually on 11 October 2024 to deliberate on key priorities outlined in its Work Plan. Discussions encompassed several critical areas, including:

Harvest Strategy

2. The SPC provided an update on the South Pacific Albacore harvest strategy, focusing on progress with candidate Target Reference Points (TRPs) and Management Procedures (MPs). Discussions highlighted variations in biomass vulnerability among fleets due to differences in catch selectivity.

3. The IWG evaluated 16 candidate MPs using six performance indicators aligned with fishery objectives. The SPA-RM-IWG-05 requested the rescaling of Y-axes on the catch and effort variability performance indicator plots in the SPAMPLE web app (<https://ofp-sam.shinyapps.io/spample/>). This rescaling, focusing on relative variability or coefficients of variation, aims to facilitate comparisons across different harvest control rules.

Allocation Framework

4. Legal considerations for allocation were reviewed, including the use of historical catch data and fishing patterns in allocation criteria. Emphasis was placed on protecting key fisheries while aligning with principles established under the WCPF Convention. The SPA-RM-IWG-05 highlighted the relevance of Article 10(3), which outlines detailed allocation criteria, including the historical development of fisheries.

Conservation and Management Measure (CMM)

5. The need to develop or revise the Conservation and Management Measure for South Pacific Albacore was discussed, focusing on ensuring it addresses the full range of stocks and associated fisheries. Requests were made to consider specific fisheries and their unique contributions in any revisions.

Cooperation with the IATTC

6. Collaboration with the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) was explored, particularly regarding a South Pacific-wide stock assessment. Proposals included enhancing data sharing and aligning management measures. Establishing a joint working group between the two RFMOs was proposed to support coordinated management efforts.

7. The SPA-RM-IWG-05 supported increased cooperation and noted plans to present a document at the next WCPFC meeting to initiate discussions on collaboration with the IATTC.

Work Plan Review

8. The 2023-2026 work plan was reviewed, with a focus on meeting timelines for the development of interim targets and management procedures, given the critical importance of the fishery to the region. The SPA-RM-IWG Chair indicated that updates to the work plan would be completed intersessionally and presented at the next WCPFC meeting.

9. **Attachment 1** outlines an updated Work Plan for 2025–2027. The IWG seeks the guidance of WCPFC21 on the proposed updates in **Attachment 1**.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Guidance on Key SPA-RM Topics:

Given the complexity and interdependencies of the topics discussed by the SPA-RM-IWG, WCPFC21 is requested to provide guidance on prioritizing critical issues and propose strategies for efficiently advancing work on:

- i. Candidate interim Target Reference Points (ITRPs),
- ii. Candidate Management Procedures (MPs),
- iii. Development of a revised Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) for South Pacific albacore,
- iv. Allocation considerations under Article 10(3) of the WCPF Convention, and
- v. Collaboration with the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC).
- vi. Future work and amendments to the proposed work plan.

2. Support for SPA-RM-IWG Meetings:

The SPA-RM-IWG work plan for 2023–2026 (**Attachment 1**) includes the possibility of physical meetings to enhance progress. WCPFC21 is requested to support and provide funding for a physical meeting in 2026, ideally held back-to-back with an existing Commission meeting (e.g., TCC or SC) to optimize resources and minimize costs.

SPA Roadmap IWG Work Plan 2023 – 2026

Purpose

1. To define the responsibilities of the SPA Roadmap Inter Sessional Working Group (IWG) in progressing key issues on the management of the South Pacific albacore.

Terms of Reference

1. The terms of reference for the workgroup shall include consideration of the management issues:
 - a) Elements necessary for a pathway to support the development of the SPA management procedure, including the revision of the management objective and the iTRP.
 - b) Elements necessary for establishing an allocation framework.
 - c) Elements for developing a new conservation and management measure.
2. The roadmap will also contain(s) three main components:
 - a) Development of the SPA Management Procedure.
 - b) Allocation Framework: Develop recommendations for a framework on how the Commission allocates the overall limit for South Pacific Albacore, taking into consideration all fisheries, the interests and aspirations of SIDs and Participating Territories and the impacts of Climate Change and the actions required to achieve the biological and economic objectives of the fishery.
 - c) Development of a new CMM.

Work Plan:

This work plan addresses the main components identified through the TOR above. It is intended to be a working document that will be revised by the IWG as work progresses. *Considering the margins of the SC and/or TCC meetings for the IWG to meet; and the SMD type meeting to be a virtual meeting.

	Support the development and adoption of the Management Procedure	Establishing a framework for the allocation of the SPA TAC	Development of a new implementing CMM
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The IWG will progress the discussions on a management objective and the revision of the iTRP . - Progress the discussions and make recommendations on a management procedure for the SPA for the Commission to consider 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The IWG to identify and develop recommendations on key components and a process for establishing an allocation framework . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To develop a new measure that incorporates the allocation framework, as well as any other issues identified by the IWG, that will function as an implementing mechanism for the management procedure.
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To consider the South Pacific albacore (SPA) objectives and a revised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To consider key issues, principles and developments, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take note of discussions/progress from the MP and the SPA

	<p>interim TRP and recommendations for WCPFC20 to consider.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing development of the SPA management procedure and testing for the IWG to progress the discussions on the SPA MP development and provide guidance in the margins of the SC19 and/or TCC19. 	<p>required to be considered in the development of the allocation framework for the Commission to consider, in particular Article 10.3 of the Convention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report to the Commission on the progress of the work by the IWG. 	<p>Allocation framework developments, as well as other relevant considerations (including guidance from SC and TCC) to identify management measure implications to be addressed.</p>
2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing SPA Management Procedure development and testing and 'dry run' of MP application. - A Science management dialogue dedicated to SPA focused on selecting candidate MPs for potential adoption). - Recommend to the Commission to adopt a SPA management procedure. - Development of a CMM for a Management Procedure for SPA for adoption by WCPFC21 [This item depends on WCPFC 21 outcomes.] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Depending on outcomes from 2023, the IWG to consider recommending the start of the allocation process discussion. Potential physical workshop for allocation to be considered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take note of discussions/progress from the MP and the SPA allocation framework development, as well as other relevant considerations (including guidance from SC and TCC) to identify key elements for a revised CMM for the SPA
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The adopted management procedure is run for the first time in 2025 (the year after the stock assessment which is desirable) <p>[activities in 2025 are dependent on WCPFC21 outcomes]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Commission will hold a workshop, or workshops, dedicated to implementing arrangements and the allocation of SPA. - A science management dialogue with a partial focus on relevant science SPA issues and the SPA implementation arrangements. - Advice provided by SC21 and TCC21 on implementing CMM as appropriate. - Take note of discussions/progress on the MP and the SPA allocation framework development, as well as 	

		<p>other relevant considerations (including guidance from SC and TCC) to identify key elements for a new implementing CMM for SPA.</p> <p>- Adoption of a revised CMM for the management of SPA by WCPFC22.</p> <p>- Once adopted, the management procedure will be run for the first time in 2025.</p>
2026	-	Implementation of the Management Procedure would commence in 2026 and run in a three year cycle (2026-2028)