

JOINT WCPFC AND IATTC INFORMAL MEETING ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE TUNA

Virtual Meeting

10 AM, 20 May 2025 (Pohnpei Time) / 4 PM, 19 May 2025 (Pacific Daylight Time)

Duration: 2 hours

CO-CHAIRS' SUMMARY REPORT

SPAJWG-INF01-2025-00

OPENING REMARKS AND CONTEXT

1. The session was formally opened by the Executive Directors of the IATTC and WCPFC, who served as co-Chairs of the informal joint session. Each Executive Director welcomed the participants and emphasized the significance of this first informal meeting in initiating the process of establishing a Joint Working Group for the collaborative management of the South Pacific albacore fishery (SPAJWG). This step was taken following decisions by both Commissions on the issue of SPA at their respective annual meetings in 2024. Subsequently, WCPFC Members endorsed the idea of establishing a Joint Working Group in December 2024, with IATTC informally joining the initiative during the intersessional period.

2. The co-Chairs acknowledged the role assigned to the United States in facilitating the process by coordinating the drafting of the Terms of Reference (TOR). They emphasized that the goal is to develop a mutually agreeable version of the TOR that can be adopted by the IATTC at its 103rd Meeting in September 2025, and subsequently by the WCPFC at its Annual Session in December 2025, thereby enabling the SPAJWG to commence formal work in early 2026.

3. To ensure effective participation in the meeting, simultaneous interpretation was provided in English and Spanish, the working languages of the IATTC. This was made possible through the Zoom platform, which allowed participants to access dedicated interpretation channels managed by the interpreters' team.

4. Following the introductory remarks by the co-Chairs, the meeting was handed over to the Chairs of the IATTC and WCPFC Commissions, Dr. Andres Arens and Dr. Josie Tamate, respectively, to coordinate further discussions. Each of the Chairs provided opening remarks and echoed earlier comments about the importance of collaboration between the two organizations to effectively manage the South Pacific albacore fishery across the Pacific Ocean. The Chairs of the IATTC and WCPFC Commissions introduced the agenda, which was adopted without amendment (**Attachment A**).

5. Participants in the First Informal Virtual Session on Establishing a Joint Working Group on South Pacific Albacore Management (SPAJWG-INF01) included representatives from Australia, Chile, China, Ecuador, France, French Polynesia, Japan, Korea, Panama, Chinese Taipei, Tonga, United States of America, Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, Pacific Community, Marine Stewardship Council, the Nature Conservancy, IATTC Secretariat and WCPFC Secretariat. A list of participants is provided in **Attachment B**.

OVERVIEW OF CONSOLIDATED TERMS OF REFERENCE

6. A representative from the United States provided a general review of the consolidated draft TOR, which merged elements from drafts prepared by the WCPFC at its annual meeting in December 2024 and by the IATTC Secretariat in early 2025 (**Attachment C**). The representative highlighted key elements that were incorporated during the consolidation of the two draft TORs, including:

- A clause (Para 1) clarifying that organizations or individuals with scientific or practical fisheries expertise may be invited to participate by the SPAJWG or by either Commission.
- Specification (Para 2b) to enhance harmonization of harvest strategies and management actions through a workplan to be developed at its inaugural meeting in the first half of 2026.
- A provision (Para 2g) noting that the SPAJWG may undertake additional SPA-related tasks based on coordinated requests from both Commissions.
- Reporting responsibilities (Para 2h) to each Commission on the advances of the SPAJWG work.
- Decision-making processes in Para 6 suggest that consensus be the basis for all recommendations and conclusions.
- To optimize its work (para 8), the SPAJWG will coordinate with relevant subsidiary bodies and may seek input from diverse stakeholders, including organizations and individuals such as scientists and fishers.

COMMENTS AND REACTIONS TO THE DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

7. Participants expressed appreciation for the effort by the US in drafting the consolidated TOR and supported continuing the process. Several important comments were raised:

- A suggestion to allow time for a paragraph-by-paragraph review of the TOR before final adoption at a later meeting.
- Clarifications sought on stakeholder engagement language, especially in Para 8b, regarding “seek appropriate inputs” vs. “seek appropriate views” within formal SPAJWG processes.
- Several participants expressed concern about the second sentence of Paragraph 6 in the consolidated draft, which referred to the possibility of including majority and minority views in the SPAJWG’s recommendations if consensus could not be reached. They recommended either deleting this sentence or revising it with more precise language to ensure that the JWG may adopt recommendations only by complete consensus, without ambiguity. An observation was made regarding the participation status of territories such as French Polynesia, affirming the need for inclusive language that reflects their ability to participate in the SPAJWG under the respective frameworks of both Commissions, in a manner consistent with their basic instruments and, where applicable, established practice.

8. It was agreed that further refinement of the TOR would be undertaken intersessionally, with comments submitted to the Secretariats. The second informal virtual meeting is tentatively scheduled for late July to early August 2025.

PRELIMINARY TIMELINE AND WORK PLAN

9. A draft schedule was presented, outlining activities leading up to the launch of the SPAJWG in 2026. Key dates and milestones include:

- **May 2025:** First informal virtual meeting
- **June–July 2025:** Preparation of the work plan and timeline by the IATTC and WCPFC Secretariats and development by the United States of an update of the draft, consolidated TOR.

- **Late July–Early August 2025:** Second informal virtual meeting to finalize the TOR and work plan
- **September 2025:** Presentation of the draft TORs and work plan at the IATTC annual session, for adoption
- **December 2025:** Presentation of both documents at the WCPFC annual session, for adoption
- **Early 2026:** First formal meeting of the SPAJWG

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

10. Participants acknowledged the strong spirit of collaboration and agreed on the importance of this initiative for sustainable South Pacific albacore management. The following steps were confirmed:

- Circulation of the draft TOR and work plan for further written input
- Development of a full draft workplan to be prepared by both Secretariats
- Planning for the second informal session in July/August 2025 to finalize the TOR and workplan.

11. The Co-chairs reiterated the informal nature of the meeting and confirmed that a Co-Chairs' Summary Report would be prepared to serve as a record. All participants were thanked for their contributions and continued commitment.

**JOINT WCPFC AND IATTC WORKING GROUP MEETING ON THE MANAGEMENT OF
SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE TUNA
First Informal Session (SPAJWG-INF01)**

Agenda

- 1. Opening of the Meeting**
- 2. Adoption of the Agenda**
- 3. Draft Terms of Reference**
 - a. Background and context
 - b. Presentation of a consolidated draft (USA)
- 4. Timeline and Preliminary Considerations on a Workplan**
- 5. Other Issues**
- 6. Closure**

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**JOINT WCPFC AND IATTC WORKING GROUP MEETING ON THE MANAGEMENT OF
SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE TUNA**

First Informal Session (SPAJWG-INF01)

Draft Terms of Reference for the IATTC-WCPFC Joint Working Group on

South Pacific Albacore Tuna (SPAJWG)

Taking into account the mandates for cooperation and coordination between the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) with respect to the south Pacific albacore tuna contained in, *inter alia*, IATTC Resolution C-24-04 and the recommendation adopted by WCPFC21 instructing the Chair of the WCPFC to help develop Terms of Reference for the establishment of a Joint Working Group;

Recognizing that South Pacific albacore is an important tuna species harvested by members of both Commissions;

In accordance with the provisions of Article XXIV of the Antigua Convention and Article 22 of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean;

Agree:

To establish an IATTC-WCPFC Joint Working Group on South Pacific albacore tuna (SPAJWG) to enhance cooperation between WCPFC and IATTC for South Pacific albacore tuna research and management, with the following terms of reference:

1. The SPAJWG shall be composed of representatives designated by Members of both Commissions, and who may be accompanied by such experts or advisors as each Member may deem appropriate. The SPAJWG may also include, as observers, representatives of relevant intergovernmental organizations as well as non-governmental organizations accredited to either Commission. Organizations or individuals with recognized scientific or practical fisheries experience in matters related to the work of the SPAJWG may also be invited to participate by the SPAJWG or by either Commission.
2. The functions of the SPAJWG shall be the following:
 - a. To develop a common understanding and approach for the conservation and management of South Pacific albacore in both convention areas;
 - b. To enhance the harmonization of harvest strategies and other conservation and management actions through, *inter alia*, the development of a workplan for the SPAJWG which shall be developed at its inaugural meeting in the first half of 2026;
 - c. To develop compatible and/or harmonized management arrangements or measures for South Pacific albacore, as appropriate, across all fisheries, including the coordination of catch and/or effort levels between the two Commissions;
 - d. To coordinate scientific research and analyses and facilitate the collection and exchange of relevant fisheries data, scientific knowledge and expertise;

- e. To identify priority areas for improvement in monitoring, reporting, and data sharing;
 - f. To collaborate in the identification of ways to streamline the relevant decision-making processes within each Commission to ensure efficient progress towards the robust conservation and management of South Pacific albacore;
 - g. To undertake additional tasks related to South Pacific albacore, as appropriate and pursuant to corresponding requests from both Commissions;
 - h. To report to each Commission on the advances of its work.
- 3. Each Commission will appoint a co-chair of the SPAJWG for the term each will determine.
- 4. The Secretariats of both Commissions will coordinate the adoption and implementation of all arrangements needed for the work of the SPAJWG. This includes the preparation, translation and dissemination of meeting documents, information sharing, in a manner consistent with the applicable rules and procedures of each Commission. Unless otherwise provided for, the IATTC Secretariat shall be responsible for providing simultaneous English Spanish interpretation for meetings of the SPAJWG, and the translation of meeting documents between the two languages, as appropriate.
- 5. Meetings of the SPAJWG will be convened by the Co-Chairs, consistent with the relevant rules of procedure of both Commissions, and in consultation with the Chair and Director of each Commission, in a format to be decided on a case-by-case basis (virtual, presential or hybrid), taking into account the matters to be discussed and *inter alia*, the availability of funding.
- 6. The SPAJWG shall endeavor to adopt its conclusions and recommendations by consensus. If efforts to achieve consensus fail, the meeting reports shall so indicate and shall reflect the views of the majority and minority.
- 7. The conclusions and recommendations adopted by the SPAJWG:
 - a. where appropriate, shall be submitted first to the relevant subsidiary bodies of each Commission, for their consideration and/or endorsement and later submission to each Commission;
 - b. may be submitted to the Commissions directly, whenever they could not be considered and/or endorsed by the respective relevant subsidiary bodies or as directed by the Commissions themselves.
- 8. In order to optimize its work, as appropriate, the SPAJWG, through the Co-Chairs:
 - a. will ensure coordination with other relevant subsidiary bodies of both Commissions, particularly with a view to seeking their inputs;
 - b. may seek appropriate inputs from all relevant stakeholders, such as inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations or natural persons such as scientists, researchers, managers, fishers, etc.
- 9. These Terms of Reference shall enter into force at the time of their adoption by both Commissions, with the Terms of Reference and Workplan open for review by each Commission and revised as appropriate, annually.