

**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
Twenty-First Regular Session**

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WPEA-SPF Project Update

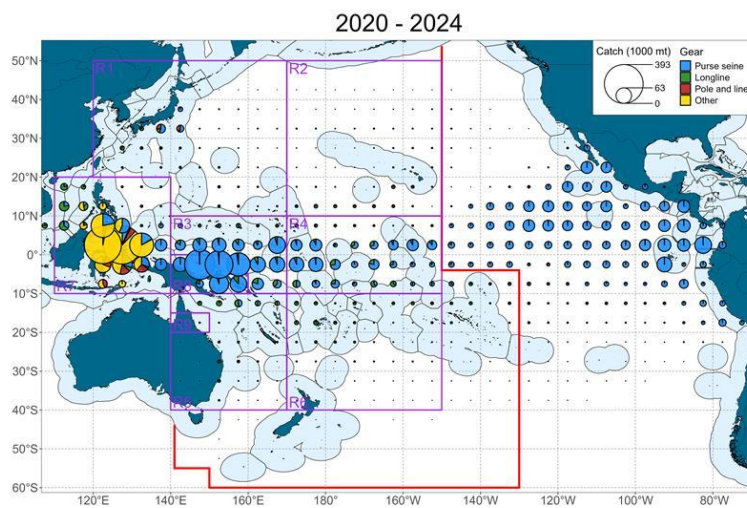
**WCPFC-SC21-2025/RP-WPEA-01
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1. Contextual overview

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief update on activities under the Western Pacific East Asia Sustainable Pacific Fisheries Activity (WPEA-SPF project) over the past 12 months, for the information and noting of the Scientific Committee (SC21).
- 1.2. 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.

Figure 1. Catch of yellowfin tuna by gear type from 2020-2024.



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- 1.3. 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 and the WPEA-ITM project concluded on 30 June 2024. This new project is the West Pacific East Asia – Sustainable Pacific Fisheries (WPEA-SPF) and started on 1 July 2024 and will run until 30 June 2027.
- 1.4. 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.
- 1.5. Recognizing the importance to the WCPFC of continuing to improve tuna data from these three countries, the Government of New Zealand is providing NZD 4.5 million over the period 2024 - 2027 for the Western Pacific East Asia Sustainable Pacific Fisheries Project (WPEA-SPF). The goal of the WPEA-SPF The goal of SPF is to increase prosperity, self-reliance and inclusivity across the Pacific region through a sustainably managed Pacific Ocean fisheries. We are thankful for the support from the Government of New Zealand.
- 1.6. The WPEA-SPF 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:
 - 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

2. Planned and completed activities

2.1. WPEA Shared Activities

- 2.1.1. A WPEA International Negotiations Fisheries Workshop was held at the University of Wollongong from 26-29 August, 2024 and included 16 delegates from the WPEA countries.



2.1.2. The workshop was facilitated by staff from ANCORS at UoW and was supported in person by experts Don Mackay, Angelique Pouponneau, Masa Miyahara, Bubba Cook, Johann Bell, and Glen Holmes. Case studies and presentations were given remotely by Rhea Christian-Moss (ED WCPFC), Laura Marot (EU), Sam McKechnie (SPC), and Heather Ward (NZ).

2.1.3. A range of topics were covered including:

- Global legal and institutional framework that prescribes how States interact and co-operate
- Law of the Sea, UN Fish Stocks Agreement and RFMOs
- Catch attribution, access agreements, charters and their significance for RFMOs
- New York and Global Oceans - AOSIS, G77, UN Oceans, Our Ocean and other cooperation
- WCPFC tropical tuna Fisheries – Fleets, species and interests
- NGO engagement in RFMOs and SE Asian Fisheries
- National Tuna Fisheries Management and Interests: Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam
- Harvest Strategies
- National Case Study – Japan as a coastal State
- National Case Study – The European Union
- International negotiations - different types of negotiations, approach for a negotiation, identifying “interests” and “solutions”, participation in negotiations, common mistakes.
- Insights into fisheries negotiations
- Climate change and WCPFC
- Global climate change negotiations
- Preparing for an international negotiation
- Case study – How does the EU Prepare for an international negotiation
- WCPFC science and data
- Global and regional developments in crew labour
- Case study – New Zealand
- Tactics and techniques for successful negotiation – strategy and advocacy
- A range of hands-on negotiations exercises

2.1.4. The WPEA-SPF project provided support for a delegate from each WPEA country to attend SC20, TCC20, and WCPFC21.

2.1.5. The WPEA-SPF Project Working Group met in Hobart, Australia on 21-22 January 2025 to kick off the new project and to plan project activities for the year.



2.1.6.A WPEA Stock Assessment and Harvest Strategy workshop was held in Sydney, Australia from 5-9 May, 2025. This included 18 delegates from the WPEA countries.



2.1.7. The workshop was expertly run by the SPC Stock Assessment and Harvest Strategy teams and was supported by international stock assessment expert Keith Bigelow.

2.1.8. Key topics covered in the workshop included:

- Introduction to harvest strategies
- Management Procedures (MPs)
- The mixed fishery harvest strategy

- Introduction to WCPFC stock assessment
- Developing better abundance indices for WPEA stock assessment

2.2. Indonesia Activities

- 2.2.1. 12 enumerators were supported in Indonesia from July – December 2024 and continue to be supported in 2025. They are based out of the main WCPFC tuna fisheries port of Bitung, Sulawesi. The data collected by these enumerators is key to the calibration of the catch estimates used for WCPFC reporting.
- 2.2.2. 2 delegates from Indonesia were supported to attend the annual Pre Assessment Workshop (PAW) held at SPC headquarters in Noumea, New Caledonia from 7-11 March, 2025.
- 2.2.3. The time in Noumea around the PAW, allowed the delegates the opportunity to receive input and advice for the SKJ assessments analysis from swordfish and oceanic whitetip shark, plus the revision of the striped marlin assessment. It was also used to present and discuss recent work related to technical aspects that is relevant to the skipjack, billfish and shark assessment work and to consult and understand the process of the SKJ stock assessment in particular impact of SKJ harvest in the WPEA region within the WCPO.
- 2.2.4. At the time of writing of this report, the Indonesian Port Sampling Audit and Annual Catch Estimates workshop is in planning for 29 July – 7 August. The Port Sampling Audit will be in the port of Bitung, Sulawesi and will include a field visit to another landing site in the area. The ACE will be held in Jakarta and Bogor from 4-7 August.

2.3. Philippines Activities

- 2.3.1. 33 enumerators were supported in the Philippines from July – December 2024 and continue to be supported in 2025. They are based out of the main WCPFC tuna fisheries ports around the country. The data collected by these enumerators is entered into the National Stock Assessment Program Edges application which feeds into Tufman 2. This information is key to the calibration of the catch estimates used for WCPFC reporting.



- 2.3.2. The project also supported the Philippines port sampling, data coordination and country-wide fishery monitoring work leading up to 18th PH/WCPFC Annual Tuna Fisheries Catch Estimates Review Workshop and the 16th WCPFC-Philippines Annual Tuna Fisheries Catch Estimates Review Workshop held in Camiguin Island between 1-7 June, 2025.



16th WPEA-NSAP Tuna Data Review Workshop from June 2-4, 2025 in Camiguin



18th PTUNASTAT Annual Catch Estimates Review Workshop from June 6-7, 2025 in Camiguin

2.4. Vietnam Activities

Even though Vietnam has yet to sign the Implementing Agreement which will allow them to access project funding. SPC and the WPEA-SPF Project Manager were able to attend the Vietnam Annual Catch Estimates workshop held in Hanoi, Vietnam from 23-25 April, 2025. It was an abbreviated workshop due to limited funding, but the important catch estimates were agreed to and generated for WCPFC.



The WPEA-SPF 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 9 years:

Annual catch estimates (mt) from the WPFC-CA as submitted to the WCPFC by each WPEA country									
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024²
Indonesia									
BET	28,760	11,063	19,574	19,162	22,898	22,617	28,108	32,937	32,937
SKJ	336,455	302,158	291,441	297,860	258,169	272,193	263,438	268,912	268,912
YFT	160,418	157,346	215,460	219,178	233,452	252,049	221,818	209,696	209,696
Total	525,633	470,567	526,475	536,200	514,519	546,859	513,364	511,545	511,545
Philippines³									
BET	5,410	5,356	3,894	5,197	4,100	2,354	2,586	5,153	4,981
SKJ	119,938	104,820	80,566	92,551	123,117	90,040	82,331	86,290	115,355
YFT	89,330	89,667	71,606	62,335	87,438	84,344	62,398	66,568	79,886
Total	214,678	199,843	156,066	160,083	214,655	176,738	147,315	158,011	200,222
Vietnam									
BET	4,867	3,923	3,618	2,458	3,464	3,175	2,208	1,249	1,229
SKJ	93,820	86,295	91,461	87,357	73,651	68,822	75,344	70,712	72,642
YFT	24,389	22,407	25,455	19,499	17,853	17,020	19,941	24,946	23,457
Total	123,076	112,625	120,534	109,314	94,968	89,017	97,493	96,907	97,328

3. Key achievements and challenges

- 3.1. One of the key achievements is the convening of the Annual Catch Estimates workshops in each of the three WPEA countries. These workshops are the focal point of the tuna year bringing together national and regional stakeholders to work through catch figures and agree on the annual estimates. At each workshop, recommendations from the previous workshop are reviewed and new recommendations are made to seek improvements in the quality and quantity of tuna data.
- 3.2. Other highlights are the occasions when all three countries come together for a shared workshop or meeting, such as the negotiations training, the stock assessment and harvest strategy workshop, and the annual WPEA-SPF planning meeting. This is when they all get to work together on shared objectives and challenges.
- 3.3. A special bonus this year was that we were able to time the stock assessment and harvest strategy workshop to coincide with the CSIRO run workshop for WCPFC Project 128: Improving understanding of connectivity of key tuna species in the Western Pacific and East Asia region with the WCPFC Convention Area. This allowed for additional participation and an overlap between SPC and CSIRO scientists working on the project. A separate report on Project 128 will be delivered to SC21.
- 3.4. The biggest challenge since the WPEA-SPF project began in July 2024, is that the Implementing Agreement between the WCPFC and the government of Vietnam has not yet been signed. This

² Indonesia's 2024 catches were carried over from 2023 until their 2024 ACEs are finalized, following the conclusion of their annual catch estimates workshop (7 August 2025)

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

is due to onerous and time-consuming internal processes within the Vietnamese government. It is hoped that the agreement will be signed very soon so Vietnam can fully participate in WPEA activities, particularly at the national level.

4. Partnership and collaboration

- 4.1. The WPEA-SPF Project Manager participated in the virtual Sustainable Pacific Fisheries Advisory Group meeting on 7 November and in person at the Sustainable Pacific Fisheries Working Group meeting in Auckland, New Zealand from 17-19 June, 2025. These meetings were with the other Sustainable Pacific Fisheries project delivery partners including NZ MFAT, NZ MPI (Te Patui), SPC and the FFA and the focus has been primarily on developing the Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) framework.
- 4.2. The WPEA-SPF project was also able to support the Project 128 - Improving understanding of connectivity of key tuna species in the Western Pacific and East Asia region with the WCPFC Convention Area work being carried out by CSIRO. This is important work for the WPEA countries and further reinforces the need for good tuna catch data to better understand the implications of stock movements and stock assessments in the region.

5. Budget

- 5.1. Of the USD\$2,525,488 in operational budget, \$478,082 has been expended up to the end of June 2025, leaving a balance of \$2,047,406 remaining for the rest of the project. See the table in the Annex for more detail.

6. Key learnings, insights and risk management

- 6.1. The main risk to project implementation has been the delay in getting the Implementing Agreement signed with Vietnam. This has delayed implementing project activities at the national level in Vietnam.
- 6.2. A key learning carried forward from the previous WPEA-ITM project is to have a good number of shared activities that can keep the project momentum going from the start. Often at the start of projects, there is delay in getting the activities implemented due to approvals, hiring of staff and other administrative hurdles. This project was able to conduct the share negotiations training one month after the project officially began.

7. Planning for next 12 months

- 7.1. For the period of July 2025 – June 2026, a number of activities are planned.

7.1.1. Shared WPEA activities:

- Observer Data workshop – scheduled for October 2025
- Climate change workshop – dates to be determined for 2026
- Stock Assessment and Harvest Strategy training
- Support to each WPEA country to attend SC, TCC, and WCPFC

7.1.2. Indonesia activities:

- Operational level catch and effort data reporting training (train the trainer approach)
- Operational training of catch and effort data reporting
- Annual Catch Estimates workshop

- Support of enumerators
- Large and smaller vessel fisheries profiles
- Exploration of establishing a national tuna data warehouse
- Observer data workshops
- Purchase of port sampling tools
- Workshop to improve port data collection methodology

7.1.3. Philippines activities:

- Annual Catch Estimates workshop
- Support for enumerators
- Purchase of port sampling tools

7.1.4. Vietnam activities:

- Stock assessment attachment at SPC focussed on R and follow on national training workshops
- Species identification training (train the trainer approach)
- Annual Catch Estimates workshop
- Support of enumerators and national observer data coordination
- Training on improving port data collection methodology
- Cost recovery study for building a national observer programme
- Purchase of port sampling tools
- Tufman 2 training

8. Annexes

8.1. Budget and Expenditure for the WPEA-SPF project from July 2024 – June 2025.

WPEA-SPF Activity	2024 (Q3-Q4) Budget	2024 (Q3-Q4) Expenditure	2025 (Q1-Q4) Budget	2025 (Q1-Q4) Expenditure	2026 (Q1-Q4) Budget	2026 (Q1-Q4) Expenditure	2027 (Q1-Q2) Budget	2027 (Q1-Q2) Expenditure	Completion period Budget	Completion period Exp	Total Budget 2024-2027	Total Exp 2024-2027	Balance 2024-2027
Partnerships and collaboration enhanced	\$123,538	\$74,524	\$183,200	\$66,404	\$183,200	\$ -	\$128,200	\$ -	\$20,000	\$ -	\$638,138	\$140,928	\$497,210
Improved fisheries management and MCS&E capability	\$101,000	\$70,385	\$443,000	\$138,203	\$257,000	\$ -	\$370,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$1,171,000	\$208,588	\$962,412
Improved observer and port data collection and management	\$152,500	\$55,565	\$272,800	\$73,000	\$143,800	\$ -	\$147,250	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$716,350	\$128,565	\$587,785
TOTAL OUTPUT COSTS	\$377,038	\$200,474	\$899,000	\$277,608	\$584,000	\$ -	\$645,450	\$ -	\$20,000	\$ -	\$2,525,488	\$478,082	\$2,047,406
Non-output	\$28,278	\$ -	\$67,425	\$ -	\$43,800	\$ -	\$48,409	\$ -	\$1,500	\$ -	\$189,412	\$ -	\$189,412
WCPFC overhead (7.5% of budget)	\$28,278		\$67,425		\$43,800		\$48,409		\$1,500				
TOTAL	\$405,316	\$200,474	\$966,425	\$277,608	\$627,800	\$ -	\$693,859	\$ -	\$21,500	\$ -	\$2,714,900		