



**NORTHERN COMMITTEE
SIXTH REGULAR SESSION**

7-10 September 2010

Fukuoka, Japan

Abstracts of Discussion on Pacific Bluefin Tuna in NC and Commission

WCPFC-NC6/IP-04

2 September 2010

In 2006

●Northern Committee 2nd Regular Session (11-13 September 2006)

(P.26 Proposed Work Programme)

Pacific bluefin tuna

2008 : Obtain and review complete assessment (ISC, w/ WCPFC data) and consider management action

In 2007

●Northern Committee 3rd Regular Session (11-13 September 2007)

(P. 3-4 Conservation and management measures for northern stocks)

Pacific bluefin tuna

17. Recalling the commitment from NC2 in 2006, the Chair invited CCMs to provide reports on national level actions that they had taken in response to the concerns about the stock status.

Summaries of action are listed below.

- Japan: Catches are mostly confined to the EEZ. An internal conference was established, with support from the government, to promote consultation between industry, scientists and administrators for the purpose of improving data collection and discussing management options.
- Chinese Taipei: Reported that it is planning to improve data quality, in part through an increase in the number of personnel dedicated to data collection from the fishery. The number of fishing vessels catching Pacific bluefin has declined.
- The Philippines: No Philippine flag vessels are targeting Pacific bluefin although several vessels claiming to Philippine flag ships, may be targeting bluefin, and, are currently under investigation.
- USA: Bluefin is not currently a major fishery for US fleets. Bluefin is taken opportunistically by purse seiners that target sardines throughout the year.
- Korea: Bluefin is not a target species for Korean fleets, although they are being caught by purse seiners that target mackerel in coastal areas in the southern part of the Korean peninsula.

18. The Chair noted that Mexico also supports a significant fishery for Pacific bluefin but does not participate in the NC. He suggested that the Secretariat write to the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and ask that NC discussions about Pacific bluefin be relayed to Mexico.

19. With regards to possible management options for Pacific bluefin, some participants were of the view that, as a precautionary measure, some effort at limitation was required, even as a voluntary measure as an interim arrangement. Others considered that, because a full stock assessment was scheduled for 2008, consideration of any management action could be postponed until the results of that assessment were available without adverse implications for the stock. It was also noted that the ISC had recommended no increase in fishing mortality and that some CCMs considered that the NC needed to respond to this advice.

20. The NC **agreed** to consider conservation and management measures for Pacific bluefin at its Fourth Regular Session, based on results of stock assessments, which will be conducted in 2008. Until that time, the NC **advised** its members to make the best effort, on a voluntary basis, *not* to increase the fishing mortality rate of Pacific bluefin (i.e. catch or effort). The NC also **requested** that members collect and submit scientific data to the ISC in order for it to better assess stocks.

(P.28 Work Programme)

Pacific bluefin tuna

2008 : Obtain and review the status of the stock based on provisional stock assessment from ISC. Review reports from CCMs on their domestic management measures, and consider management action.

2009 : Obtain and review available stock assessment (ISC, w/WCPFC data) and consider management action.

●WCPFC Commission 4th Regular Session

5.3 Advice and recommendations of NC3 to the Commission (P. 18)

Pacific bluefin tuna

120. Noting the uncertainty in the stock assessment, NC3 advised its members to voluntarily not increase the fishing mortality rate of Pacific bluefin tuna, and to collect and submit data to facilitate the stock assessment.

121. RMI, on behalf of FFA members, expressed support for the advice of NC3 with regards to Pacific bluefin tuna. The Commission endorsed the recommendation from NC3.

In 2008

●Northern Committee 4th Regular Session (9-11 September 2008)

(P.3 Conservation and management measures for the northern stocks)

2.3.1 Northern Pacific bluefin tuna

13. NC4 discussed a draft conservation and management measure (CMM) for Northern Pacific bluefin tuna provided by Japan. The chair invited members to participate in an informal discussion of the draft CMM because there were several concerns on the draft in terms of wording among members. After the informal discussion, the NC reached an agreement on the amended draft CMM with reservation of one member (Attachment H). The member made a statement on this matter (**Attachment I**). While the reservation is expected to be lifted in time for the Commission meeting in December, the NC may call a brief meeting, if necessary, in the margins of the Commission meeting to resolve the reservation. With this understanding, NC4 recommends that the Commission consider and adopt the attached draft CMM.

(P.33 STATEMENT ON NORTHERN PACIFIC BLUEFIN TUNA BY THE KOREAN DELEGATION)

Korea appreciates efforts made by ISC scientists to make a recommendation on the northern Pacific bluefin tuna and Japanese proposal based on the recommendation made by the Scientific Committee. However, Korea regrets that at this time Korea must express a reservation on the adoption of a proposed WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure on the northern Pacific bluefin tuna. Korea had no time to consult with local fishermen on the Japanese proposal and needs sufficient time to consult with local fishermen before making any formal decision on the northern Pacific bluefin tuna. Korea recognizes the important views of local fishermen, and will have a consultation with stakeholders in Korea as soon as possible. Korea intends to provide the Northern Committee Chairman with comments on the proposed WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure following this consultation.

(P.37 Work Program)

Pacific bluefin tuna

2009 : Review reports from CCMs on their domestic management measures, consider advice of IC and consider the need for management action

●WCPFC Commission 5th Regular Session

89. The recommendations for Pacific bluefin tuna are:

- That the current level of fishing mortality not be increased;
- If fishing mortality remains at the current level and environmental conditions remain favorable, then recruitment should be sufficient to maintain current yields well into the future; and
- Increases in fishing mortality above the current level, and/or unfavorable changes in environmental conditions, may result in recruitment levels that are insufficient to sustain the current productivity of the stock.

93. The NC Chair explained that Korea had entered a reservation to the management recommendation for Pacific bluefin tuna. The reasons for this reservation have been thoroughly explored with Korea, which has indicated it has no intention to increase its effort in 2009.

94. Korea stated that it is requesting a postponement, during which it will work to improve a statistical system on the northern Pacific bluefin tuna, study the distribution of Pacific bluefin in its coastal waters, and explore mechanisms for controlling effort given existing national laws and regulations.

95. Given Korea's reservation, the Chair of the NC suggested that Commission Members may wish to implement the recommendation on a voluntary basis and report their efforts in this regard to NC5. The recommendation can be reconsidered by NC5 and potentially developed into a draft CMM to be considered at WCPFC6. In 2009, the Chair of the NC will meet with representatives of Mexico to begin a dialogue on cooperative Pacific bluefin tuna management.

96. One CCM expressed concern that the management recommendation for Pacific bluefin: i) is not adequately precautionary; ii) is premised on an assumption that environmental conditions remain favorable; and iii) does not define current effort.

97. Gary Sakagawa, Chair of the ISC, informed the Commission that the ISC is currently holding a workshop designed to clarify points of uncertainty in the Pacific bluefin stock assessment. More informative scientific advice is expected to be available for WCPFC6.

98. Two CCMs expressed their concerns about the status of the Pacific bluefin stock, urging the ISC and the NC to work toward a revised management recommendation next year.

99. WCPFC5 **agreed** that CCMs are **requested** not to increase the level of fishing mortality on Pacific bluefin in 2009 on a voluntary basis and **tasked** the NC to work toward developing a draft CMM for Pacific bluefin for consideration at WCPFC6.

In 2009

•Northern Committee 5th Regular Session (7-10 September 2009)

25. The Committee noted that:

WCPFC5 agreed that CCMs are requested not to increase the level of fishing mortality on Pacific bluefin in 2009 on a voluntary basis and tasked NC5 to work toward developing a draft CMM for Pacific bluefin for consideration at WCPFC6

26. The WCPFC Chair invited CCMs to report on the voluntary action taken during the last 12 months to not increase the level of fishing effort on Pacific bluefin.

27. Japan reported that it had initiated consultation with a wide range of stakeholders in order to raise awareness about international perceptions concerning responsible fisheries management, and requested industry to constrain effort. A PowerPoint presentation was used to profile fisheries in Japan that are taking Pacific bluefin. Japan reported that purse-seine fishing associations had implemented a voluntary measure to not catch Pacific bluefin tuna that are less than 2 kilograms. Japan acknowledged that this is hard to regulate in mixed schools, but that vessels were encouraged to relocate away from fishing grounds where small tuna were encountered. Informal information suggests that the measure was well implemented and resulted in a substantial reduction in juvenile fish catches.

28. In response to a question from Korea regarding whether or not any domestic regulations have been implemented, and whether or not any juveniles have been taken in set nets, Japan replied that the measure by purse-seine associations to not catch Pacific bluefin tuna is voluntary, and that set net fisheries are regulated under an existing licensing system. The existing data demonstrate that juvenile bluefin are not taken in set nets because set nets take larger fish. Korea also noted that bluefin catches by small Japanese longliners had quadrupled from 2007 to 2008. Japan responded that the catch from these vessels is declining, and that they target adult bluefin. The bluefin tuna's variable migration path poses a challenge to introducing a catch limit; therefore, there is significant variability in catch from one year to another, probably as a result of environmental changes. Japan reported that bluefin catches declined substantially in 2009. Japan is uncertain what level of catch is gauged to be a "normal" year, and stated that it is not possible, as this point, to forecast the 2009 total catch.

29. Korea explained that its bluefin market is small and that it does not currently regulate fisheries on a species-by-species basis. It also noted that there is no concept of bycatch. The government does regulate the number of licenses by gear type, and is conducting a programme to reduce the number of licenses. In addition, a total allowable catch is set for mackerel purse-seine fisheries that also take Pacific bluefin. Korea explained that several types of fisheries take bluefin tuna: purse seine, coastal set net, and troll fisheries, for which the statistics on bluefin are poor. The Busan-based Research Institute currently estimates catches on the basis of market surveys, although enhanced monitoring of port landings is under development. Korea will report on the results of these efforts at the next ISC meeting. In 2008, the total estimated catch for purse seiners was 1,536 mt, an increase from 1,054 mt in 2007. No data are available on catches from other fisheries, which mainly consist of set nets with the possibility of some catch taken by other fishing gear, as reported to ISC.

30. Japan recalled that the discussion regarding a CMM for Pacific bluefin began at NC2, appealing to Korea to demonstrate to the international community its commitment to participate in NC efforts to establish sustainable measures for Pacific bluefin. Korea reiterated that, in Korean law there is no concept of bycatch or target species. Current bluefin catch levels are small, accounting for less than 1% of the total catch of Korean purse seiners, and so are considered bycatch. Korea noted that the catch level around the Korean peninsula is increasing, and that Korean fishermen want to pursue opportunities to catch bluefin. Japan noted that in 2003, Korea reported a catch of 2,000 mt, which was 10% of the total bluefin catch. As a result, in Japan's view, Korea has a significant role in conserving and managing the stock. Japan recalled ISC's advice that F should not be increased; therefore, in its view, the Korean government's policy of supporting the development of coastal fisheries for bluefin is not consistent with this advice. Korea recognized its right to develop and manage fisheries within waters under national jurisdiction, and expressed a desire to control bluefin fisheries within Korea's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by itself. Japan stated that when observing the operational basis of purse seiners, these vessels do target bluefin tuna. Korea advised that it had no available information to confirm the observation that Korean purse seiners target bluefin tuna, but would submit information to NC6 on this matter.

31. The Committee noted the principle of compatibility, the need to implement Measures that secure conservation and management of the stock throughout its range within the Convention Area and the provisions of the Convention requiring that measures within EEZs do not undermine the conservation and management measures put in place by the Commission.

32. Chinese Taipei reported that many small longline fisheries were fishing for Pacific bluefin from March to July. There is a limited entry control for this fishery. Last year the number of small longliners fishing for Pacific bluefin was lower than the 2002-2004 level. Size data for over 90% of the landings in domestic ports were measured and collected. Catches of Pacific bluefin for larger longliners (>100GRT) were less than one (1) metric tonne last year. Bluefin is only taken in insignificant amounts by other gear types. Chinese Taipei has an on-going programme of limiting fishing capacity and all longliners that are operating in the high seas in the fishery are installed with VMS for better monitoring purposes.

33. The USA reported it does not have a target fishery for Pacific bluefin. Following a query from Korea concerning a reduction in the recreational Pacific bluefin catch since 2004, the USA responded that the catch reduction could be a result of the fish being intercepted in Mexican waters before they reach the fishing grounds of the US recreational fleet.

34. The Committee noted Mexico's preliminary 2008 catch estimate reported to ISC was 4,400 mt. The Chair noted an invitation had been extended to Mexico to participate in ISC and NC discussions but they had been unable to attend. It was also reported that recent exports of Mexican farmed bluefin had received low prices on the Japanese markets and that this

might constrain further expansion of bluefin farming enterprises in Mexico.

35. Vanuatu reported no bluefin catch.

36. In considering conservation and management options the Committee noted that the conservation advice from ISC for Pacific bluefin remained unchanged:

1. If F remains at the current level and environmental conditions remain favourable, the recruitment should be sufficient to maintain current yield well into the future.
2. A reduction in F in combination with favourable environmental conditions, should lead to greater SPR.
3. Increases in F above the current level, and/or unfavourable changes in environmental conditions, may result in recruitment levels which are insufficient to sustain the current productivity of the stock.

37. It was noted that with regard to advice on the current level of F , differing viewpoints were expressed by ISC members. Some members concurred with the findings of the PBFWG which stated:

4. Given the conclusions of the May-June 2008 stock assessment with regard to the current level of F relative to potential target and limit reference points, and residual uncertainties associated with key model parameters, it is important that the current level of F is not increased.

38. In contrast, other members suggested that the following statement better reflects the current understanding of the stock status relative to the range of reference points considered (Figure 1):

4bis. Given the conclusions of the July 2009 PBFWG, the current level of F relative to potential biological reference points, and increasing trend of juvenile F , it is important that the current [sic] level of F is decreased below the 2002-2004 levels on juvenile age classes.

39. The Committee noted that the conservation and management advice points 4 and 4bis are not inconsistent with each other. Both points describe limiting F with the second option advising on the need to decrease current F on juvenile fish. The USA noted that even with a decrease of F on juveniles the overall F is still greater than any commonly used reference point including F_{max} . As a result, it is the view of the USA that F should not be increased and probably needs to be reduced.

40. NC5 discussed a draft CMM for North Pacific bluefin tuna proposed by Japan (WCPFC-NC5-2009/DP01). Discussion was supported by a supplementary submission by Japan, which summarized NC discussions since 2006 with regard to Pacific bluefin (WCPFC-NC5-2009/IP07). It was noted that four elements need to be factored into the measure: i) high seas effort, ii) coastal fisheries effort, iii) target fisheries, and iv) fisheries that take bluefin as bycatch. Other factors considered for inclusion included: i) acceptance of a reference level of fishing effort (2002–2004 was considered to be an appropriate reference level on the basis of previous NC discussions), ii) a commitment that the measure apply throughout the stock's range, iii) the need to provide complete catch and effort data, and iv) identification of stock-specific reference points, v) large range of yearly fluctuations of catches, and vi) the special needs of artisanal fisheries.

41. Korea advised that it is not in a position to endorse Japan's proposal to a commitment not to increase effort. However, Korea undertook to control fishing effort in its own EEZ, and to not increase effort in the high seas. Little or no Pacific bluefin catch has been reported from the high seas fishery. In the meantime, Korean scientists will continue working to assess the stock's status and monitor environmental changes that may be resulting in increased catches.

42. Cook Islands, Vanuatu and Chinese Taipei advocated the need to maintain F at the current (2002–2004) level. The USA expressed concern about the relative lack of substantive measures endorsed by the NC during its four years of operation. While appreciating Japan's proposal, the USA noted that there is a need to address: i) the issue of increasing F on juveniles, and ii) freezing $F_{current}$ (2002–2004) as the reference period for measuring F (for the purpose of monitoring compliance with management measures). The USA recommended that there should be a process to establish stock-specific reference points, consistent with Convention provisions for bluefin tuna. The NC5 Chair agreed that it is a requirement for

regional fisheries management organizations to establish stock-specific reference points, and that the NC should consider making a commitment to this.

43. NC5 adopted a measure for 2010 that will not apply to Korea's EEZ or to artisanal fisheries, which will be recommended to the Commission (WCPFC-NC5-2009/DP01 Rev.2; Attachment C).

(P37 Work Program)

Pacific bluefin tuna

2010 : Review reports from CCMs as well as report from Korea on their domestic measures, consider advice of ISC on F and consider management action for 2011 and after.

●WCPFC Commission 6th Regular Session(7-11 December 2009)

(AGENDA ITEM 5 – NORTHERN COMMITTEE)

84. With regard to a draft CMM for Pacific bluefin tuna (WCPFC-2009/DP07, discussed further under Agenda 9.4), the NC Chair noted that good progress was made with the exception of obtaining consensus from Korea, which requested more time to study the species in its own waters. A draft CMM providing for total fishing effort for Pacific bluefin tuna not to be increased from 2001–2004 levels and reduced fishing mortality on Pacific bluefin tuna juveniles, with a one-year exemption for the Korean EEZ, was agreed by the NC. The NC Chair expressed his expectation that Korea would join in the management measures for this species after the one-year exemption expires.

85. Four CCMs, two of whom are also members of the NC, joined the Chair in expressing their concern regarding the exemption for the Korean EEZ and the need to implement the management measures across all fisheries catching Pacific bluefin tuna as of 2011.

86. Korea stated that the catch of Pacific bluefin, most of which occurs around Cheju Island, is mainly bycatch and amounts to less than 1,500 t. Korea is undertaking a research programme costing over US\$ 1 million to understand more about the status and catch of the species in Korean waters.

87. In response to the preceding intervention by Korea, Japan queried the characterization of Korea's Pacific bluefin tuna catch as bycatch based on a comparison with its own records from the area. Korea corrected its statement on bycatch by saying that, in Korean law, there is no concept of bycatch or target species. Fishing licenses are permitted by fishing gear type and purse-seine vessels mainly targeting mackerels take Pacific bluefin tuna, which accounts for less than 1% of total catch by the purse-seine vessels.

88. In response to a separate question regarding catches of juvenile Pacific bluefin tuna by purse-seine vessels, Japan explained that it has implemented a voluntary minimum fish size limit of 2 kg for purse-seine vessels. Japan also explained its intention to introduce a programme to collect information on Pacific bluefin tuna imported from Korea. Comments regarding the importance of Mexico in developing management measures for this species were reiterated (see Section 2.2).

89. The IATTC informed WCPFC that its staff will soon recommend a similar management measure for Pacific bluefin tuna for IATTC adoption. The IATTC holds substantial observer data on Pacific bluefin tuna catches and these data, and IATTC expertise, are being shared with the ISC for scientific purposes.

90. The NC Chair announced that a joint meeting between the NC and IATTC is planned in order to discuss Pacific bluefin tuna management measures across the North Pacific and that CCMs and scientists will be invited to attend.

(AGENDA ITEM 9 – CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES)

324. The Chair of the NC presented a draft CMM for Pacific bluefin tuna (WCPFC6-2009/DP07) (see Agenda Item 5.1).

The measure provides for holding fishing effort to levels no greater than the 2002–2004 levels for 2010, with the Korean EEZ being exempt from this measure.

325. While welcoming a CMM for Pacific bluefin tuna, some CCMs expressed concerns about the exemption of the Korean EEZ from the measure and urged the NC to work toward applying the measure throughout the entire area north of 20°N from 2011 onward.

326. One CCM questioned the definition of —artisanal fisheries‡ and —2002–2004‡ level.

327. Tokelau, on behalf of FFA members, requested that the NC continue to monitor fishing mortality on age 1–3 fish as this is of particular concern.

328. WCPFC6 adopted WCPFC6-2009/DP07 as a new CMM for Pacific bluefin tuna for 2010 (CMM 2009-7) with the request of CCMs that the measure also apply to the Korean EEZ after 1 January 2011 (Attachment GG).