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Global Fishing Watch Position Statement to WCPFC22

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Submitted by Global Fishing Watch

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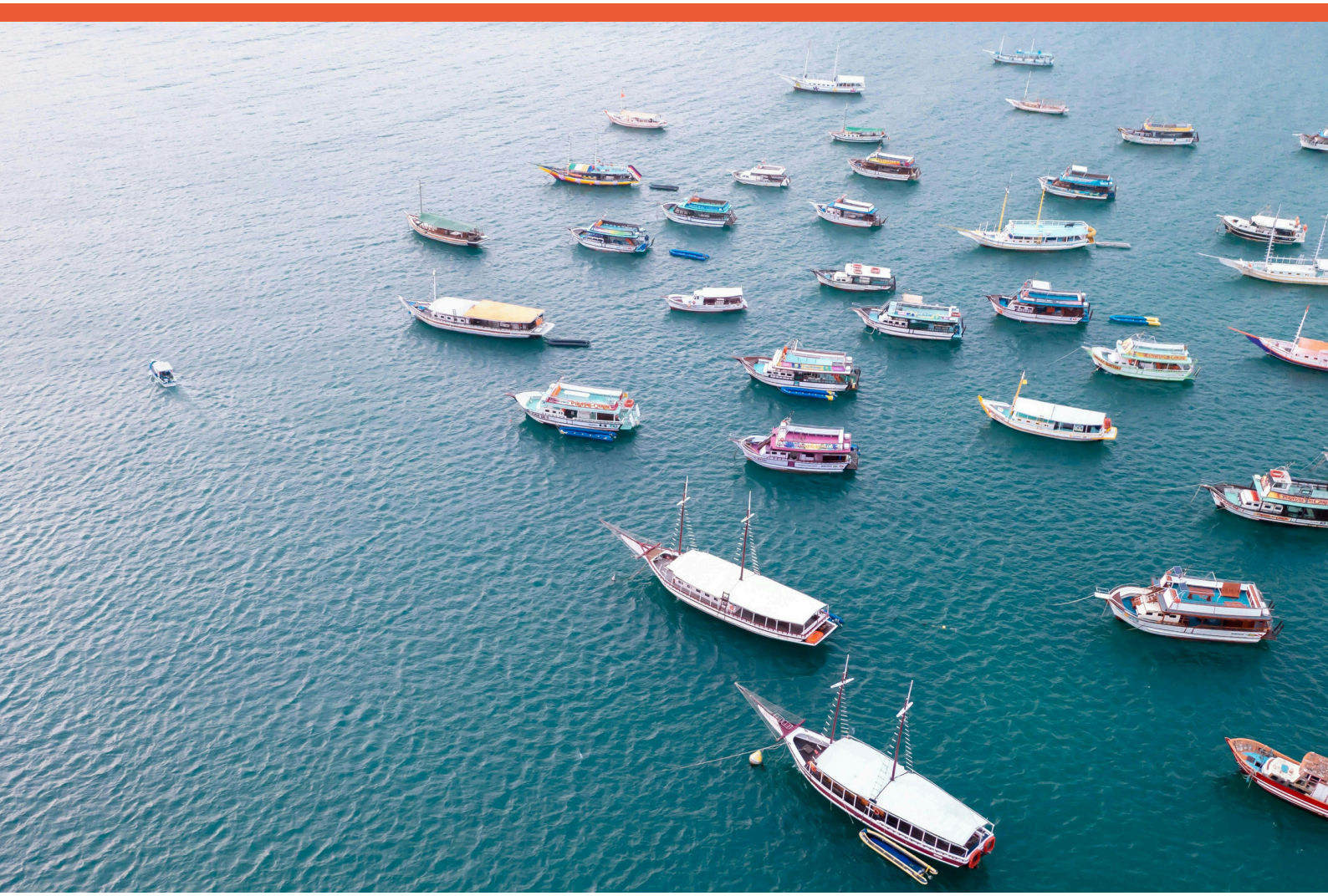


© Aerial view of boats on sea, William Justen de Vasconcellos

Global Fishing Watch position paper: 22nd Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC22)

Global Fishing Watch expresses its gratitude to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) for the opportunity to participate in its 22nd Session as an observer from December 1-5, 2025. We wish to thank the Chair, Members and Secretariat for their hard work in preparing for WCPFC22, as well as the Government of the Philippines for hosting this meeting.

Global Fishing Watch works to strengthen transparency of human activity at sea, providing publicly available data and tools that support science, compliance and decision-making. In this paper, Global Fishing Watch highlights two policy opportunities that WCPFC delegates can consider to work towards greater transparency and strengthen existing monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) measures in the fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing:

1. Require **Automated Information Systems (AIS)** to improve vessel tracking and safety at sea, which could complement a range of different conservation and management measures (CMMs).
2. Consider making **vessel beneficial ownership information** publicly available.

I. Vessel Tracking

Background

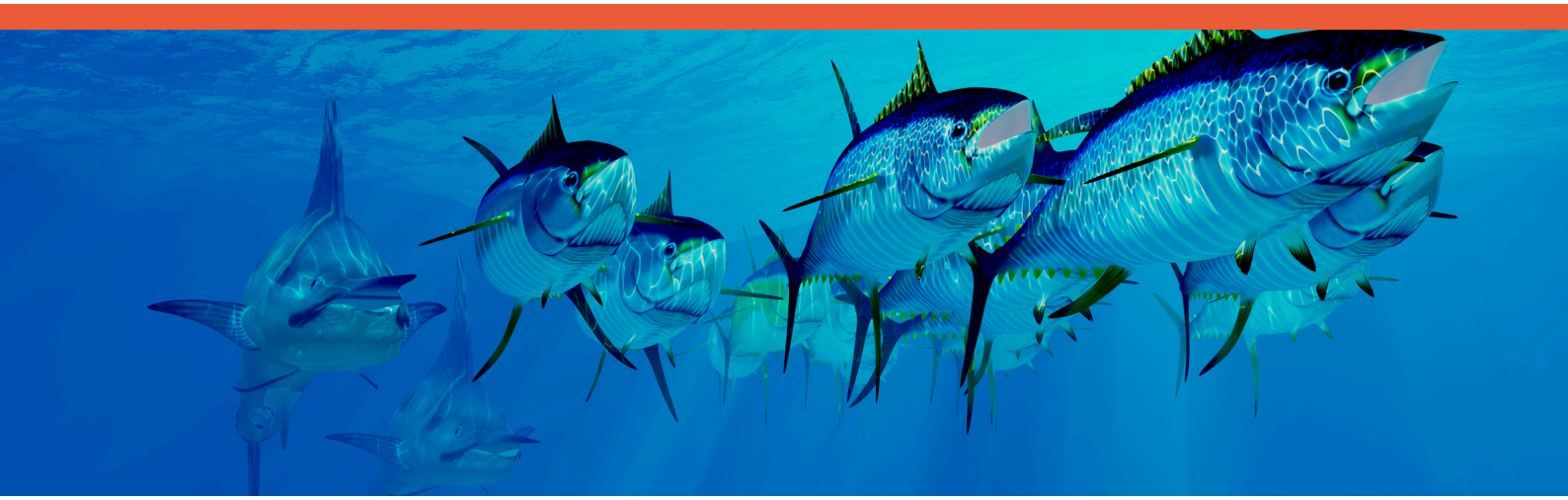
Vessel tracking is essential to ensure the proper management, enforcement and safety of fishing operations. The WCPFC, alongside the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), has already developed a commendable and robust Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) framework that provides secure positional reporting to flag States, the Secretariat and relevant coastal States. While VMS is the key tool in fisheries monitoring and management, Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) — open, internationally recognised systems designed primarily for collision avoidance and maritime safety — can be used as a complementary tool to VMS and help bridge gaps in several CMMs.

AIS is already required and implemented in several fora and instruments. In the western and central Pacific, the FFA has long recognized the utility of AIS and already requires it for foreign fishing vessels to be in Good Standing on the FFA Vessel Register (1). Other Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) and Arrangements call for AIS use in varied measures. For example, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources mandates the use of AIS for certain vessels under Conservation Measure 10-02 (2022) (2), and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission offers AIS as one tool for identifying illegal fishing vessels in Resolution 24/03 (3). Furthermore, the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention already mandates AIS for vessels of 300 gross tons and above engaged on international voyages as well as all passenger vessels (4), and the UN General Assembly has affirmed the importance of transparency and technology in fisheries via the 2024 UN Sustainable Fisheries Resolution (5).

Potential policy options to incorporate AIS into the WCPFC framework

Given international recognition of AIS in different fora, WCPFC could consider adoption of AIS as an additional monitoring tool and lead progress on this across the RFMOs. While not exhaustive, three CMMs that Members could strengthen by incorporating AIS are:

1. **CMM 2014-02 (VMS)**: Under the current WCPFC VMS framework, there is no officially centralized system that allows Members to directly access VMS data from other flag states on an ongoing basis. Additionally, in cases where VMS transmissions are incomplete or interrupted — whether due to technical faults, environmental factors or other issues — AIS can provide a secondary means of vessel monitoring, ensuring that vessel movements remain visible. For example, under current rules, vessels with two consecutive VMS failures must manually report positions every six hours to the Secretariat and must return to port after 30 days if VMS remains unconnected to the Secretariat, causing costly interruptions to fishing activities. However, if that vessel also has AIS installed in accordance with agreed standards, it may still be able to continue operations, maintaining continuous monitoring and reducing unnecessary economic losses.
2. **CMM 2024-04 (Crew standards)**: The recently adopted WCPFC Crew Labour Standards (2024) positions WCPFC as a leader on this important topic. Here, AIS could add to safety measures by being used to help track the length of fishing trips, identify extended periods without port calls that may raise welfare concerns and verify reported port visits for crew changes. It also enables rapid response when crew safety is at risk, enhancing the Commission's ability to protect those working in its fisheries. Global Fishing Watch is already working on AIS data in this space with its Forced Labour Risk Model, which draws on AIS data to provide indications of when there may be risk of forced labour on a vessel which should be further investigated.
3. **CMM 2009-06 (Transshipment)**: Previous reports by Global Fishing Watch (2017 and 2018) have demonstrated that not all transshipment events are being reported to the WCPFC pursuant to 2009-06. Incorporating a requirement for AIS use for carrier, receiving, and fishing vessels could be used to determine areas where undocumented transshipment events may be occurring and undermining existing MCS measures. In particular, requiring AIS during transshipment events would improve transparency, and most carriers should already carry AIS per SOLAS requirements for vessels over 300 gross tons on international voyages.



© School of billfish and tuna, Corey Ford

Recommendations

Regarding vessel tracking, Global Fishing Watch recommends that WCPFC22 delegates:

➔ Discuss any analyses or information needs that could inform consideration of mandating AIS use in the WCPFC under different CMMs. These results could be presented at the next Scientific Committee or Technical and Compliance Committee meeting to guide decision making in 2026.

➔ Consider feasibility, benefits and challenges of including AIS requirements in CMM 2014-02 as a complementary tool to VMS, as well as CMMs 2024-04 and 2009-06. Global Fishing Watch recommends adding AIS language as a complementary tool to an existing CMM rather than adding an additional, new CMM.

➔ Ask that the WCPFC Secretariat, in any requested future reporting on BBNJ engagement, consider how AIS could support WCPFC and BBNJ discussions.

II. Vessel ownership transparency

Background

An emerging pillar of fisheries transparency is the improvement of ownership disclosure, both by making vessel ownership information publicly available and by advancing efforts to collect and share beneficial ownership (BO) data. BO transparency enables authorities to track and sanction individuals linked to IUU fishing, even when they operate through new companies or flags.

WCPFC has already demonstrated a commitment to BO transparency in several CMMs, including the WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels and Authorization to Fish (CMM 2018-06). This requires Members to ensure an authorized vessel has no history of IUU fishing, in part by "demonstrating that the previous owner or operator has no legal, beneficial or financial interest in, or control".

Recommendations

Regarding beneficial ownership, Global Fishing Watch recommends that WCPFC22 delegates:

➔ Take note of growing international calls for information sharing with respect to vessel ownership in the fight against IUU fishing, such as through the new OECD legal instrument (6).

➔ Collate the existing status of BO information shared under CMMs 2017-02, 2018-06 and 2019-17 to provide a baseline of available BO information in WCPFC, and discuss CCM BO support needs.

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Global Fishing Watch is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing ocean governance through increased transparency of human activity at sea. By creating and publicly sharing map visualizations, data and analysis tools, we aim to enable scientific research and transform the way our ocean is managed. We believe human activity at sea should be public knowledge in order to safeguard the global ocean for the common good of all.

Global Fishing Watch