



COMMISSION
Twenty-Second Regular Session
1-5 December 2025
Manila, Philippines (Hybrid)

WPEA-SPF Project Update

WCPFC22-2025-04_Rev01¹

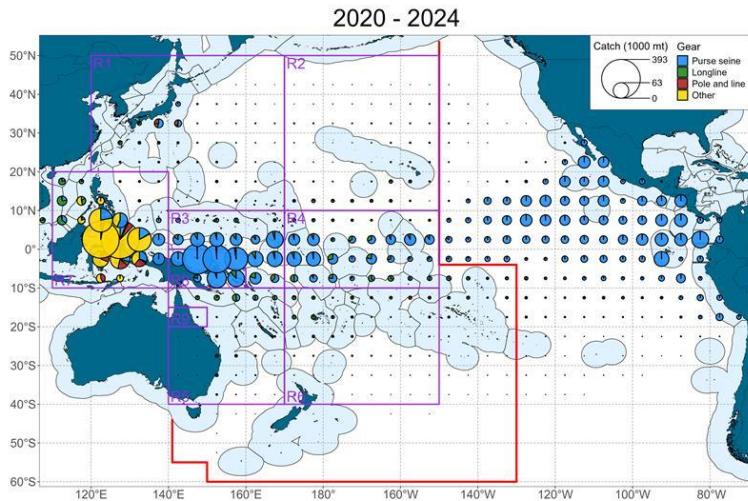
27 October 2025

Submitted by Lars Olsen²

Contextual overview

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 Commission (WCPFC22).
2. The tuna fisheries in the Pacific Ocean waters of Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam continue to 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 and effort in these waters has been highlighted as a key uncertainty in WCPO stock assessments at WCPFC for a number of years, and in 2025, key concerns were raised about the impacts of these catches on future projections of the bigeye stock, in particular.

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



The information provided on this map is for general informational purposes only. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) boundaries are subject to international agreements, disputes, and interpretations, which may not be fully captured here.

¹ A disclaimer has been added to Figure 1.

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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.
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 WCPFC meetings.
5. Recognizing the importance to the WCPFC of continuing to improve tuna data from these three countries, the Government of New Zealand has provided 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 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.
6. Given this iteration of the WPEA project has one and half years left (concluding June 2027), it is time for the Commission and the WPEA countries to start planning for any future WPEA work to improve the quality and quantity of data submitted to the Commission.
7. 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

Planned and completed activities

WPEA Shared Activities

8. 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.



9. 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.



10. The workshop was expertly run by the SPC Stock Assessment and Harvest Strategy teams and was supported by international stock assessment expert Keith Bigelow.
11. 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
12. Support for one WPEA delegate from each country to attend SC, TCC and WCPFC.

Indonesia Activities

13. 12 enumerators continued 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.
14. Two 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.
15. 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.
16. The 9th Indonesian Port Sampling Audit was held between 29 July – 31 August in Bitung, Sulawesi and included a field visit to Tumumpa, Manado, another landing site in the area. The 16 Annual Catch Estimates workshop was held in Jakarta and Bogor from 4-7 August.



Tumumpa Fishing Port, Manado, Sulawesi

Juvenile YFT or BET?



16th Annual Catch Estimates Workshop, Bogor, Java

Philippines Activities

17. 20 enumerators were supported in the Philippines in 2025. They are based out of the main tuna fisheries ports around the country. The data collected by these enumerators is entered into the National Stock Assessment Program Edges application (NSAP EDGES) which feeds into TUFMAN 2. This information is key to the calibration of the catch estimates used for WCPFC reporting.



18. 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 WPEA-NSAP Tuna Data Review Workshop held in Camiguin Island between 1-7 June, 2025.



Vietnam Activities

19. 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.



Project countries' catch estimates

20. 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	2024
Indonesia									
BET	28,760	11,063	19,574	19,162	22,898	22,617	28,108	32,937	43,499
SKJ	336,455	302,158	291,441	297,860	258,169	272,193	263,438	268,912	255,073
YFT	160,418	157,346	215,460	219,178	233,452	252,049	221,818	209,696	215,728
Total	525,633	470,567	526,475	536,200	514,519	546,859	513,364	511,545	514,300
Philippines³									
BET	2,845	4,454	2,364	4,464	4,035	2,821	3,014	5,153	4,981
SKJ	82,127	95,331	73,376	88,159	109,154	90,890	89,215	86,290	115,355
YFT	58,584	70,001	66,599	59,846	74,618	83,295	55,086	66,568	79,865
Total	143,556	169,786	142,339	152,469	187,807	177,006	147,315	158,011	200,201
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

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

Total	123,076	112,625	120,534	109,314	94,968	89,017	97,493	96,907	97,328
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Key achievements and challenges

21. One of the key achievements is the convening of the Annual Catch Estimates workshops in each of the three WPEA countries. These workshops bring together national and regional stakeholders to discuss fishing, sampling, and data collection activities for the previous year and to work through catch figures and agree on the annual estimates for key species to be reported to the WCPFC. At each workshop, recommendations from the previous workshop are reviewed and new recommendations are developed to guide activities in the coming year to improve the quality and quantity of data provided to the Commission, especially for key tuna species.
22. Other highlights are the occasions when all three countries come together for a shared workshop or meeting, such as the negotiations training, stock assessment and harvest strategy workshops, and the annual WPEA-SPF planning meeting. This is when the representatives from the three countries get to work together on shared objectives and challenges.
23. 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.
24. 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 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.

Partnership and collaboration

25. The WPEA-SPF Project Manager participated in a number of Sustainable Pacific Fisheries Advisory Group and Working Group meetings during the year. 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.
26. 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 accurate and representative tuna catch data to better understand the implications of stock movements and provide robust regional assessments.

Budget

27. Of the USD\$2,525,488 in operational budget, \$616,887 has been expended up to the end of September 2025, leaving a balance of \$1,908,601 remaining for the rest of the project. See the table in Annex 1 for more detail.

Key achievements, learnings, insights and risk management

28. The scope of the 'ACE' workshops is being expanded to support improved data collection and reporting for aggregate catch and effort and logbook data, to progressively increase the data-related capacities relative to WCPFC data reporting obligations.
29. In all countries, strategies are being developed to support internal capacity around annual data audit activities as part of the exit strategy.
30. A key learning from the transition from the WPEA-ITM project to the WPEA-SPF project is the need to forward plan for the next phase of the project. Delays in project setup and approvals can delay implementation. Planning for a next phase of the WPEA project (current project funding ends June 2027) will begin at the WPEA-SPF Working Group meeting to be held in January 2026. The focus will be on key needs moving forward and how to ensure sustainable resourcing (funding) for the important activities.
31. 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.

Planning for next 12 months

32. For the period of January – December 2026, a number of activities are planned.
33. Shared WPEA activities:
 - Data Gaps workshop
 - Climate change workshop
 - Stock Assessment mentoring of key national staff by SPC
 - Stock Assessment and Harvest Strategy workshop
 - Support to each WPEA country to attend SC, TCC, and WCPFC
34. Indonesia activities:
 - Operational level catch and effort data reporting training (train the trainer approach)
 - Operational training of catch and effort data reporting
 - Annual Data Reporting 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
35. Philippines activities:
 - Annual Data Reporting workshops
 - Support for enumerators
 - Purchase of port sampling tools
 - Enhancement and technical support on the NSAP EDGES reporting options including fixing of bugs in the system
36. Vietnam activities:
 - Stock assessment attachment at SPC focussed on R and follow-on national training workshops
 - Species identification training (train the trainer approach)

- Annual Data Reporting 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
- FishBase and Tufman 2 integration and training workshop

Annex 1: Budget and Expenditure for the WPEA-SPF project from July 2024 – September 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	76,155	183,200	119,003	183,200	0	128,200	0	20,000	0	638,138	195,158	442,980
Improved fisheries management and MCS&E capability	101,000	91,985	443,000	146,203	257,000	0	370,000	0	0	0	1,171,000	238,188	932,812
Improved observer and port data collection and management	152,500	77,165	272,800	106,376	143,800	0	147,250	0	0	0	716,350	183,541	532,809
TOTAL OUTPUT COSTS	377,038	245,305	899,000	371,582	584,000	0	645,450	0	20,000	0	2,525,488	616,887	1,908,601

Non-output	28,278	0	67,425	0	43,800	0	48,409	0	1,500	0	189,412	0	189,412
WCPFC overhead (7.5% of budget)	28,278		67,425		43,800		48,409		1,500				
TOTAL	405,316	245,305	966,425	371,582	627,800	0	693,859	0	21,500	0	2,714,900		