



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
TWENTY-SECOND REGULAR SESSION**

11-19 August 2026

Apia, Samoa (Hybrid)

REPORT OF THE PACIFIC TUNA TAGGING PROGRAMME STEERING COMMITTEE (PROJECT 42)

WCPFC-SC22-2026-RP-PTTP02

16 July 2026

PTTP Steering Committee

Report of the Annual PTTP Steering Committee

Preliminaries

The 2026 meeting of the PTTP Steering Committee was held via video conference on **2 July 2026** in preparation for the Twenty-Second Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee, to be held in Apia, Samoa. The meeting was scheduled earlier than usual to allow the Committee to consider a response to requests made by the WCPFC Finance and Administration Committee in 2025 (FAC19), regarding the scientific outputs from the PTTP and implications of cost-saving options, and to prepare that response for submission to SC22 as a Steering Committee working paper.

Simon Nicol (SPC) chaired the meeting. Present with him in the room in Noumea were members of the SPC Pacific Tuna Tagging team and associated colleagues who work closely with tagging data and the other scientific outputs from the project. Joe Scutt Phillips (SPC) presented a summary of the annual PTTP report and work-plan (SC22-RP-PTTP, its recommendations, and a draft of the FAC19 response paper.

Background

The goal of the Pacific Tuna Tagging Programme is to provide data and knowledge for the stock assessment and management of skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye tuna in the Pacific Ocean. The objectives of the PTTP were originally specified in WCPFC-SC6-2010/GN-IP-04 and revised in 2016 (SC12-RP-PTTP-01). A central item of business at this meeting was a proposed consolidation and update of these objectives and terms of reference, to better reflect the work the project currently delivers (see Section 5).

The PTTP Steering Committee was established by SC2 to provide guidance and oversight of the project document and subsequently of operational plans, implementation and analytical work. The current donors to the project are the WCPFC, the Republic of Korea, the Pacific Community (SPC) and other SPC-administered external project funds.

Review and adoption of agenda

The Chair welcomed participants and noted that the meeting was being recorded to support preparation of the summaries for SC22. No objections to recording were raised. The agenda was reviewed by those in attendance, with no requested changes, and was adopted from the draft. The adopted agenda is provided in **Annex 1**. A list of participants is provided in **Annex 2**.

2. Field Operations

SPC presented a summary of PTTP field operations across the last reporting period and the planned work for the remainder of 2026 and 2027. The full 2026–2029 work plan is provided in the PTTP Report (RP-PTTP-01), now posted to the SC22 web page.

2.1 Activities during 2026-2027

The Central Pacific 17 (CP17) cruise (June–August 2025): over 45 days, approximately 4,500 fish were tagged, with a majority bigeye, around one third yellowfin, and a small percentage of skipjack. Most fish were tagged on industry-shared drifting FADs provided by three groups that support Pacific tuna science: the American Tuna Boat Association, Bolton Tri-Marine group, and the Calvopesca Fishery Improvement Program. Most tags were released in the equatorial zone between 0–10°N, with a large size mode of bigeye (modal length 92 cm). A range of biological sampling was undertaken, supporting ageing, reproductive biology, heavy-metal pollutants, and genomics work.

The Western Pacific 7 (WP7) cruise series (February–March 2026): the first cruises of this series tagged approximately 25,000 tuna over 21 days spread across two separate cruises. The large majority were skipjack with yellowfin as the secondary component and a very small amount of bigeye. These activities took place in the Solomon Islands, with the dual priority of tagging skipjack and establishing the capabilities of the newly renovated pole-and-line tagging platform: its range, its ability to locate and tag fish, and the exploration of new bait grounds for future tagging. Biological sampling again supported ageing, genomics, epigenetic ageing and ecosystem-indicator work.

2.2 Work plan 2026-2027

Field operations for the remainder of 2026 and 2027 will focus on pole-and-line tagging cruises totalling approximately 60 charter-days per annum, and made seasonal where feasible. For the remainder of 2026 this effort will focus on skipjack in the Solomon Islands, continuing to test the performance and reliability of the refurbished vessel with a view to wider application across the Western Pacific. In 2027, subject to 2026 performance, cruises are anticipated to extend into the wider Western Pacific, including the Federated States of Micronesia and eastern warm-pool areas, potentially including archival tagging in collaboration with Japanese colleagues. Field trials of a prototype automatic tag-detection technology, resourced separately, are planned for 2027. Biological sampling of tuna and bycatch, including high-quality genetic sampling requiring specialist trained crew and equipment, will continue throughout.

2.3 Recommendations – Field Operations

The Steering Committee is invited to consider and endorse the PTTP field operations work plan, as detailed fully in the annual PTTP report, namely to:

- Continue to **maximise use of renovated pole & line** vessel
- **Prioritise skipjack tagging** with experimental designs that support stock assessment, harvest strategy work, and improved SEAPODYM climate projections
- Undertake **~60 days of tagging annually**, spread seasonally where feasible
- **Secondary target yellowfin** to support monitoring strategy
- **Revisit priorities annually** through Planning Advisory and Steering Committees
- Leverage at-sea science platform to **support continued biosampling** of tuna and bycatch, alongside high-quality genetic samples

In discussion, a question was raised seeking clarification of the final recommendation on leveraging the at-sea science platform. SPC explained that the PTTP budget covers the core tagging activities,

but that field operations also underwrite a wide range of biological sampling, mainly soft and hard tissues, genetics and high-quality genetic samples, that are only feasible because of the platform the PTP provides, with no additional implication for the PTP budget. Members were encouraged to consult the fuller work plan in the PTP Report, including the operational considerations added there. How to support climate change science through the experimental design of field operations was also raised, with SPC responding that part of the motivation to release skipjack tuna in the eastern area of the western Pacific was to better characterise the response to changing and new climate regimes by this species, through the integration of these data into SEAPODYM. Furthermore, the secondary scientific outputs provided through the PTP via the collection of hard and soft tissues was supporting work on variations in growth, ontogenetic responses to climate and identifying ecosystems changes.

3. Recovery Network and Data

3.1 Activities during 2026-2027

Targeted trips were made to key locations in the recovery network to maintain and improve it, including canneries in Thailand and American Samoa, Noro (Solomon Islands), and ports in Papua New Guinea. Several of these visits also included training of observers, coordinators and debriefers across the range of tagging activities, including tag recovery and tag seeding. Validation of over 4,000 tag recaptures was undertaken in preparation for this year's yellowfin and bigeye stock assessments. As clarified in discussion, this validation is a desk-based, post-reporting process that draws on log sheets, VMS and other data sources, as well as on information from observers and tag recovery officers, not simply the finder alone, to confirm the date and location of recapture at a given scale of reliability.

Support for tag seeding has continued at the increased levels sustained since 2024–2025. Regional deployment is now running at roughly 50% above the historical maximum, and at an order of magnitude greater than the recent period, following pre-2022 low. A 2019 analysis (SC15-SA-IP-06) recommended a minimum of 34 kits per year to detect temporal changes in reporting rate; regional capacity is currently around 100 kits per year. This seeding supports well-characterised reporting rates for the tagging data the PTP generates: a critical input for both stock assessment and harvest strategy estimation methods, as well as independent analyses of tagging data.

3.2 Work plan 2026-2027

Planned work includes continued training of tag recovery officers and data-entry staff; maintenance and, where possible, expansion of the recovery network, with particular focus on Thailand and on re-establishing Western Pacific recovery capacity as tagging shifts to skipjack in that region, without letting Eastern Pacific recovery lapse; continued support for observer-led tag seeding experiments, whose benefits are expected to be evident at the next scheduled WCPO skipjack assessment in 2028; completion of data validation for this year's assessments and transition to validation ahead of the next skipjack assessment; and continued support for tag recovery officers in IATTC ports, where PTP tags from recent Central Pacific cruises, and, recently western Pacific tagging skipjack, continue to be recovered.

3.3 Recommendations – Recovery Network and Data

The Steering Committee is invited to:

- Note the **need for member participation and support in tag reporting** as both wild and seeded tags continue to be found throughout the fishery
- Note the **critical importance of effective tag seeding** for informing stock assessment, and support the increased deployment and fleet coverage of **tag seeding experiments through regional and national observer programmes**
- Consider and endorse the PTPP Recovery Network and Data work-plan
 - Promote **increased levels of tag seeding**
 - Continue to **invest in maintaining and improving the tag recovery network** associated with catches in the western Pacific region
 - Continue to **support tag recovery staff in the IATTC** convention area

In discussion, members noted the importance of re-establishing the Western Pacific recovery network as tagging effort returns to that region. It was noted that SPC has, over the past year, covered the salaries of tag recovery specialists in the Eastern Pacific field offices within the IATTC convention area; funding to support these staff is secured for at least the next 12 months (see Section 6). The status of tag recovery in the Philippines and progress of the automatic tag-detection (RFID) trials were also raised; initial RFID trials are expected in the first quarter of 2027, with initial results anticipated by the next reporting period.

4. Data Analysis

Many data-analysis activities are reported in detail in their own papers submitted to SC22. In brief, tagging data have been provided as inputs to this year's yellowfin and bigeye assessments (SC22-SA-IP-03), guiding decisions on region structure and external parameter estimation (SC22-SA-IP-01), and prepared for direct integration into MULTIFAN-CL assessments alongside estimation of tag reporting rates (SC22-SA-IP-05), tagging-induced mortality (SC22-SA-IP-04) and tag mixing (SC22-SA-IP-10). Tagging data files supporting the estimation and validation of movement parameters for the new SEAPODYM reference models have been updated (SC22-SA-IP-07, SC22-EB-WP-01). An independent estimation of bigeye natural mortality using cohort analysis was undertaken with colleagues from NOAA/USA (SC22-SA-IP-14). These tagging datasets continue to be used in the operating and estimation models and monitoring strategy for harvest strategy work, summarised across several SC22 papers (SC22-MI-WP-01, 02, 04, 05, 06).

4.1 Recommendations – Data Analysis

The Steering Committee is invited to consider and endorse the work plan for data analysis, namely to:

- Consider and endorse the data analysis workplan 2026-29:

- Continue to **incorporate tagging data into stock assessment and harvest strategy** work
- Continue to support exploration of **independent estimates of mortality, abundance, and movement**
- Continued and new **integration of tagging data into SEAPODYM** for improved climate projections
- Explore the potential for **RFID technology to automatically detect tags** at recapture, and develop **options for scale-up**

5. Response to the WCPFC Finance and Administration Committee

The principal item of business for this meeting was the project's response to requests made by the WCPFC Finance and Administration Committee at FAC19. Paragraph 54 of the FAC19 report recommended that the Commission *request the Scientific Services Provider examine options to improve cost efficiency in the tagging programme and report these options and their scientific implications to SC22, FAC20 and WCPFC23*. FAC19 (paragraph 55) also recommended that the Scientific Committee *clearly flag projects that leverage significant co-funding or in-kind contributions*.

SPC has prepared a draft working paper in response, to be submitted to SC22 under the stock assessment theme (SC22-2026-SA-WP-04). The paper summarises the PTTP's core work, the secondary work it leverages, the associated costs and levels of co-financing, and proposes an updated terms of reference reflecting what the project currently delivers. A draft was made available to members via SharePoint prior to the steering committee meeting, and was shared again during the meeting. The Steering Committee was asked to consider the paper and to support its submission to SC22 as a paper by the Steering Committee. A brief summary of the paper was presented, as follows.

5.1 PTTP Scientific outputs working paper

The PTTP continues to deliver fully against its core objective of providing mark-recapture data, while also underwriting an at-sea sampling platform that supports a wide range of secondary activities aligned with WCPFC science. The WCPFC contribution does not fund the project in isolation: both primary and secondary work mobilise significant cash and in-kind co-financing. Over the recent period (2022–2025), WCPFC resources met approximately 63% of the total cost of the core tagging activities. Over the lifetime of the project since 2006, non-WCPFC cash co-financing alone met approximately 77% of the cost of those core activities.

The average annual PTTP budget for 2022–2025 is summarised in Table 1, broken into key expenditure areas. The WCPFC contribution averaged approximately USD 791,000, met by cash co-financing (from the Republic of Korea and other SPC-administered external projects) of about 39% of total cost, and in-kind co-financing of about 24%, chiefly salary and analytical services provided by SPC.

Table 1. Average annual expenditure on PTTP core activities, 2022–2025 (USD).

	WCPFC PTTP Budget	Cash Co-finance	In-kind Co-finance
Salary Time*	123,000		506,000
Cruise Charters	211,000	207,000	
Travel and per diems	64,000	0	
Tags and Equipment	69,000	0	
Tag Recovery and Seeding	9,000	207,000	
Consultants and tag recovery	118,000	0	
Training	0	253,000	
Communication	7,000	23,000	
SPC Management Fees	160,000	154,000	
Miscellaneous Operating Costs	30,000		
Total	791,000	844,000	506,000
Percentage	37%	39%	24%

* Salary time includes one full-time fisheries scientist and fisheries technician, plus a proportion of time from senior and principal fisheries scientists, fisheries technicians and administration staff.

The costs associated with maintaining the tag recovery network, tag seeding, training, data validation and custody, and data preparation and analysis are considered fixed: without them, the remaining activities are rendered essentially useless. The only viable option to reduce costs is to reduce the number of charter days, which are already co-financed at roughly 50% in recent years. Such a reduction would degrade the quality of the tagging data for its core purposes, and of the tissue and genetic material collections supporting secondary activities. This would have major implications for WCPFC science areas including stock assessment, harvest strategies (particularly the skipjack management procedure), climate projections, and the Pacific Marine Specimen Bank, with knock-on budget implications for WCPFC projects P35b, P90, P100c, P120, P125, P128a and P129. A preliminary analysis indicates that of the order of USD 1.5 million per year would be required to recover the scientific work lost through such a reduction in charter days.

5.2 Proposed change of the Terms of Reference

The draft paper proposes a revision of the PTTP terms of reference, to better reflect what the project already delivers. The revision does not change the scope of core PTTP activities and carries no increased budget implication; its purpose is to consolidate a mandate that has shifted across various reports over the years, and to represent clearly the project's current activities, mandate and scientific outputs. The proposed terms of reference, provided in an annex to the draft paper, span six areas: background and purpose; objectives; scope, scheduling and requirements; secondary scientific outputs and the sampling platform; funding and co-financing; and governance and review.

The revised objectives, in summary, are to: generate mark-recapture and electronic tagging data for stock assessment, harvest strategy, monitoring and independent parameter estimation; maintain the recovery network at high, well-characterised reporting rates; curate, validate and prepare the

data; support estimation of key parameters (movement, growth, habitat use, mixing, mortality, abundance and fishing effects); operate the cruises as a shared sampling platform for other WCPFC projects where this does not compromise core tagging; and publish the results in technical reports and peer-reviewed literature. On governance, the revised terms of reference state clearly that the PTPP is implemented by SPC on behalf of WCPFC and overseen by the Steering Committee, which provides scientific and strategic direction, endorses cruise plans and reviews objectives and outputs; the Steering Committee will meet at least annually and report to the relevant SC meeting for endorsement, with a mid-term Planning Advisory Committee providing updates (the 2026 report of which is provided in Annex 4), and the terms of reference reviewed periodically.

5.3 Recommendations – FAC response paper

The recommendations of the draft paper, as they stand, are to:

- **note the technical value of the PTPP** in underpinning tuna **stock assessments**, the **management procedure** for WCPO skipjack tuna, **climate projections** and wider **WCPFC science** work
- respond to FAC's request noting that the **PTPP programme represents an integrated body of scientific work** that does not offer a menu of activities that can be scaled
- **endorse the updated Terms of Reference** for the project to reflect current scientific output of the project and WCPFC science needs
- **forward this paper and any desired commentary to FAC20 and WCPFC23**

The Chair and SPC emphasised that both the paper and its recommendations remain in draft, and that this was, in most cases, members' first sighting of the document. Members were invited to review the draft and provide comments, with a deadline of **12 July 2026**, to allow timely submission to SC22 and subsequent discussion in the online forum. It was noted that the working paper will be authored by the Steering Committee, and that the revised terms of reference may be best handled as an online discussion forum topic for SC22 efficiency. Members noted that much thought had gone into this draft response, and that it should be considered carefully by the steering committee, and following that, during the scientific committee.

6. Any other business

6.1 Other Regional or Sub-Regional Tagging

Colleagues from the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) reported that a funding mechanism for Eastern Pacific tagging was agreed at the 2025 annual meeting, via a vessel assessment on active purse-seine vessels. Of a proposed budget of approximately USD 1.8 million, around 75% had been received by the 30 June 2026 deadline. Planning for a tagging trip is underway, taking a different approach from recent years by seeking industry support for access to drifting FADs and targeting skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye across the equatorial fishery. Tentative departure is around mid-February 2027, with the trip expected to last 90–120 days; bait availability under a possible strong El Niño is a noted concern.

IATTC also noted that funding received will continue to support the tag recovery specialists employed in the Eastern Pacific since 2019. SPC has covered the full cost of these specialists over the past 12 months; IATTC funding will now support them for at least the next 12 months, removing the need for continued SPC contribution in the near term. Continued collaboration will be discussed as the Eastern Pacific programme moves to full implementation.

6.2 Administrative Matters

It was noted that the proposed budget for 2027 is set out in the annual report, with no change from the budget forecast at SC21, and no budget changes are implicated by any of the reports or activities detailed at this meeting. The projected, annual WCPFC contribution to the PTPP would remain at USD 950,000.

A draft report of the Steering Committee, together with a consolidated statement of the recommendations from the PTPP Report, will be circulated to participants early in the week following the meeting. Members are invited to forward it within their delegations and to provide any further comments by approximately **15 July 2026**, for integration ahead of submission to SC22. Members were separately reminded that the [draft working paper responding to the FAC request, a distinct document, is available on an SPC SharePoint](#), with comments requested by **16 July 2026** to allow timely submission and online discussion ahead of SC22.

Consolidated Recommendations to SC22

The PTPP Steering Committee recommends that SC22:

- note the critical importance of effective tag seeding for informing stock assessment and harvest strategy monitoring, and support the increased deployment and fleet coverage of tag seeding experiments through regional and national observer programmes;
- note the need for member participation and support in tag reporting, for both wild and seeded tags;
- note the technical value of the PTPP in underpinning tuna stock assessments, the WCPO skipjack management procedure, climate projections and wider WCPFC science;
- consider and endorse the PTPP work plan for field operations, recovery network and data, and data analysis (RP-PTTP-01);
- consider and support the response to the FAC19 request (SC22-2026-SA-WP-04), including the proposed revision of the PTPP terms of reference, and its onward transmission to FAC20 and WCPFC23; and
- note the ongoing tagging activities of partner programmes, including the IATTC Eastern Pacific programme.

Annex 1. Adopted Agenda

PACIFIC TUNA TAGGING PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

Electronic Meeting ([MS Teams Link](#))
2nd July 2026 (from 11:00-12:00 hours Pohnpei time (UTC+11 hours))

ADOPTED AGENDA

WCPFC-SC22-2026

- 1. PRELIMINARIES**
 - 1.1 Review and Adoption of Agenda
- 2. FIELD OPERATIONS**
 - 2.1 2025-26 Activities
 - 2.2 Work-plan 2026-27
 - 2.3 Recommendations
- 3. RECOVERY NETWORK AND DATA**
 - 3.1 2025-26 Activities
 - 3.2 Work-plan 2026-27
 - 3.3 Recommendations
- 4. DATA ANALYSIS**
 - 4.1 2025-26 Activities
 - 4.2 Work-plan 2026-27
 - 4.3 Recommendations
- 5. RESPONSE TO 2025 FAC19 REQUEST**
 - 5.1 PTPP Scientific Outputs working paper ([SC22-SA-WP-02](#) draft)
 - 5.2 Proposed change to Terms of Reference
 - 5.3 Recommendations
- 6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**
 - 6.1 Invitation for updates from regional partners
 - 6.2 Administrative matters
 - 6.3 Any other business
- 7. ADOPTION OF REPORT**

Annex 2. List of Participants

Attendee	Affiliation
Beau Bigler	MIMRA, Marshall Islands
Dan Fuller	IATTC
Elaine Garvilles	WCPFC
Francis Tofuakalo	SPC
Jeff Muir	SPC
Joe Scutt Phillips	SPC
Leyla Knittweis	MPI, New Zealand
Marion Boutigny	SPC
Matthew Cunningham	SPC
Paul Hamer	SPC
Richard Douglas	SPC
Rohan Currey	ABARES, Australia
Simon Nicol	SPC (Chair)
SungKwon Soh	WCPFC
Valerie Allain	SPC
Yoshinori Aoki	FRA, Japan

Annex 3. PTPP Work Plan 2026–2029 (from SC22-RP-PTTP-01)

Field Operations

Year	Activities	Operational Considerations	Scientific Outputs
2026	Seasonal Pole & Line Tagging Cruises (~60 days in total) - Solomon Islands EEZ focused - primary focus SKJ - secondary YFT	Solomon Islands based tagging increases potential for a higher proportion of short time-at-liberty recaptures. This is mitigated by negotiations with NFD for their fleet to avoid areas where tagging has occurred and to spread releases across as many schools as possible	Tagging data for WCPO tuna stock assessments and harvest strategy development (<i>scientific services</i>)
	Test the performance and reliability of the refurbished FV Solomon Searcher for wider application in western Pacific	Identify and resolve vessel and gear performance issues that may restrict the FV Solomon Searcher from use in broader Western Pacific tagging cruises	Tagging data for SEAPODYM, improving movement estimation for stock assessment, harvest strategies and climate projections (<i>scientific services, P62</i>)
	Identify and establish new bait grounds for wider western Pacific tagging of SKJ	New bait grounds tested and available for wider western Pacific tagging cruises	External estimates of natural and fishing mortality, and abundance (<i>scientific services, P123</i>)
	Biological sampling of tuna and bycatch	Dedicated and experienced science samplers deployed on the cruises to undertake specific tasks and protocols to support broader SC work programme	Age-at-length parameters for WCPFC stock assessments (<i>Science Services, P129</i>) Independent estimates of movement (<i>Science Services</i>) Connectivity and stock structure (<i>Science Services</i>) Climate impacts on growth (<i>P121</i>) Ecosystem indicators (<i>P121</i>), climate impacts on tuna ecology and ecosystems (<i>P62, P121</i>)
	High-quality genetic sampling of tuna	Dedicated equipment and trained staff onboard to collect and preserve fresh samples in sterile and deep freeze conditions	Building of epigenetic clocks, genome deep sequencing, close-kin mark-recapture estimates (<i>P100d, P123</i>)
2027	Seasonal Pole & Line Tagging Cruises (~60 days in total) - Warm-pool focused (Solomon Is., Fed. States of Micronesia EEZ, eastern warm-pool) - primary focus SKJ - secondary YFT	Broader distribution of SKJ tag releases in the warm-pool. Extent of operations outside of Solomon Islands EEZ conditional of vessel performance and equipment tests in 2026 and access to and quality of bait grounds. Timely issuing of permits	<i>Scientific Services, P62</i>

	Archival tagging of yellowfin tuna	Collaboration and in-kind contribution from FRA Japan	Independent estimates of movement Spatial variability in growth and bioenergetics
	Biological sampling of tuna and bycatch	Deployment of dedicated samplers for specialised sampling	<i>Scientific Services, P62, P120, P121, P129</i>
	High-quality genetic sampling of tuna	Deployment of dedicated samplers for specialised sampling	<i>P100d, P123</i>
	RFID Automated tag detection field trials		Improve reporting and reporting rate priors (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
2028	Seasonal Pole & Line cruises (~60 days), and associated biological sampling	Locations contingent on success of 2027 research cruises	
2029	Seasonal Pole & Line cruises (~60 days), and associated biological sampling	Potential requirement to continue bigeye tagging time-series	

Tag Recovery Network and Data

Year	Activities	Operational Considerations	Scientific Outputs
2026	Training of tag recovery officers and new data entry staff	Preparatory work for increased focused on SKJ tagging in western Pacific while maintaining network capacity in central and eastern Pacific	Acquisition of high-quality tagging data (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
	Maintenance and expansion of tag recovery network Thailand		Continued and improved tag reporting (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
	Tag seeding	Seeding activity continues to be implemented by observer programmes, and is stratified by fleets and areas	Well characterised reporting rates (<i>Scientific Services</i>) Mapping of product flow to inform tag recovery network and <i>P114 Improving Cannery Receipt Data</i>
	Data validation for 2026 YFT and BET stock assessments	Quality control and assurance imposed on recovered tags	Maximal data available for stock assessments (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
	Support tag recovery officers in IATTC ports	Tags release during PTPP central pacific, and in smaller numbers, western pacific cruises, still being recovered in central/south American ports	Maximal data available for stock assessments (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
2027	Maintenance and expansion of tag recovery in warm-pool region	Warm-pool tag recovery network is operating efficiently. Weaknesses in network are identified and mitigated efficiently. Effective central and eastern Pacific network maintained (in collaboration with IATTC)	Acquisition of high-quality tagging data (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
	Tag Seeding	Seeding activity continues	
	Evaluation of RFID detection rate	Conditional on successful data from field trials	Well characterised reporting rates (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
	Data validation for 2028 SKJ stock assessment	Quality control and assurance imposed on recovered tags	Maximal data available for stock assessments (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
	Continued training of tag recovery officers for data entry	QA and QC of recovered tags completed efficiently	
	Support tag recovery officers in IATTC ports	Conditional on whether IATTC have funds to share financing of these positions in 2027	Maximal data available for stock assessments (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
2028	Continued tag seeding and recovery network maintenance		
	Data validation for 2028 SKJ stock assessment		
2029	Continued tag seeding and recovery network maintenance		

Data Analysis

Year	Activities	Operational Considerations	Scientific Outputs
2026	Data preparation for 2026 YFT and BET stock assessments		High quality stock assessments (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
	Estimation of reporting rates, tagging condition effects, and tag mixing rates for 2026 YFT and BET stock assessments		High quality stock assessments (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
	Data preparation for estimation and validation of SEAPODYM YFT and BET reference model movement parameters		Improved SEAPODYM reference models for climate projection (<i>P62</i>)
	Independent estimation of BET natural mortality	Conditional on accurate reporting rate estimations, collaboration with NOAA	Independent demographic parameter estimation (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
2027	Validation of independent natural mortality estimation through simulation testing	Conditional on staff resourcing, collaboration with NOAA	
	Data preparation and analysis for development of independent, spatiotemporal model for estimation of fishing mortality and abundance	Collaboration with DTU Aqua	Independent estimation of fishing mortality and abundance (<i>P123</i>)
	Analysis for potential of RFID tagging technology scale-up	Conditional of successful data from field trials, resourcing for analysis	Improved and well characterised reporting rates (<i>Scientific Services</i>)
2028	Data preparation for 2028 SKJ stock assessment		
	Estimation of reporting rates, tagging condition effects, and tag mixing rates for 2028 SKJ stock assessment		
2029	Data preparation and analyses for 2029 YFT and BET stock assessments		
	Data preparation for estimation and validation of post IPCC7 AR SEAPODYM reference solutions	Conditional on new ensemble ocean data products and resourcing for SEAPODYM development	

Annex 4. Report of the PTTP 2026 Planning Advisory Committee Meeting

27th February 2026

11:00-12:00 (UTC+11)

Hybrid Meeting: Nouméa and Microsoft Teams

Adopted agenda is given in Annex 1.

Participation list is given in Annex 2.

Executive Summary

- **CP17 cruise completed successfully** (June–August 2025): 4,446 conventional tags deployed across bigeye, yellowfin, and skipjack tuna, with notably larger-than-average fish sizes released
- **Tag seeding scaled up significantly**: Annual numbers of seeded tags have grown from 30–500/year (2020–2023) to 2,500–3,000/year since 2024, with reporting rates to be formally estimated from the first tranche of this scaled up programme in upcoming 2026 stock assessments
- **Under-representation on Korea, Kiribati, and Chinese Taipei flagged vessels for tag seeding deployments** remains a gap; Tuvalu has offered support to increase seeding on Korean-flagged vessels
- **Solomon Searcher renovation completed**: The refurbished pole & line vessel successfully completed a fishing trial in February 2026, releasing 3,290 tags, and is near-ready for PTTP research cruise charter operations
- **Three skipjack-focused cruises planned for 2026** (82 days total) aboard the Solomon Searcher, prioritising skipjack tagging data for inclusion in the 2028 stock assessment of that species, collection of biological samples, and Pacific Island technician training
- **RFID tag trial underway** with €59.7K New Zealand MFAT funding: Field trials on three purse seine vessels are scheduled for Q2–Q3 2026 and if successful, could significantly improve the quantity and accuracy of tag recoveries
- **SPC recommends prioritising skipjack tagging over the next 2–5 years** to recover lost time-series data gaps due to COVID and platform unavailability, and capitalize on the availability of the renovated pole & line tagging platform. This proposal will be presented to the Regular Steering Committee in **August 2026 for formal discussion**
- **PTTP data feeding into 2026 WCPO stock assessments** for yellowfin and bigeye tuna, as well as to two updated SEAPODYM reference models for these species
- **Budget transparency request pending**: WCPFC's 22nd Regular Session requested a clearer summary of how PTTP funds leverage other funding sources and provide scientific outputs; SPC confirmed this is in progress and should be prepared ahead of the scientific committee in August
- **Next formal meeting is the PTTP Steering Committee, early August 2026**, ahead of the WCPFC Scientific Committee — key agenda items will include the 2027–2028 tagging schedule, work plan and budget

Pre-meeting Background

The Pacific Tuna Tagging Project is a WCPFC project, implemented by The Pacific Community (SPC). It operates on a biennial schedule that alternates 2 main cruise types targeting different species and areas, generally using different platforms and fishing gears.

- Western Pacific (WP) type cruises are implemented onboard pole and line tuna vessels with range of action limited to areas where adequate live bait supply could be captured.
- Central Pacific (CP) type cruises are using long range longline tuna vessels that could be equipped with a variety of fishing gears allowing efficient and safe capture and release of tuna associated with Fishing Aggregation Devices (FAD).

Given the availability of a newly renovated pole & line tagging platform in the WCPO, we invite input from WCPFC members on reviewing this existing schedule considering current priorities and outputs from the PTTP.

The Planning Advisory Committee provides an informal meeting in which WCPFC members and collaborators can participate in:

- An overview of recent tagging activities and PTTP-supported project outputs
- Discussion of options and logistics for upcoming scientific cruise planning
- A chance to anticipate administrative and technical requirements in good time
- Coordination of potential research objectives with regional partners

1. Welcome and Preliminaries

Joe Scutt Phillips (SPC) acted as chair and welcomed all participants and presented the draft Agenda (Annex 1). No additions or alterations to the agenda were requested and so was adopted.

2. 2025 PTTP Activities Overview

a. CP17 Wild tagging

Jeff Muir (SPC) gave a summary of the wild tagging activities in 2025. The seventeenth bigeye and yellowfin tuna-focused tagging cruise, CP17, was conducted from 25 June-8 August 2025 in the Central Pacific. The longline vessel Gutsy Lady 4 was chartered and utilized for the trip, originating and returning to Honolulu, Hawaii.

During the 45-day cruise, 38 days fishing days were spent on tagging and sampling of bigeye (BET), yellowfin (YFT) and skipjack (SKJ) tuna on aggregations around drifting FAD (dFAD) and TAO moorings. Billfish and other bycatch species were also opportunistically captured for biological sampling. A collaborative trilateral agreement between SPC, industry partners and Satlink created access to over 1,000 dFADs in the study area including the EEZs of the Line Islands (Kiribati, Palmyra, Jarvis) and Phoenix Islands (Kiribati, Howland & Baker) and international waters.

Tagging operations released 4,446 conventional tags in BET (2,894; 31-11cm FL) YFT (1,481; 33-135cm FL) and SKJ (71; 34-74cm FL), of which 10 BET had an additional Satellite tag deployed as well. Larger fish were ubiquitous in the study area; the mode length for BET at 92cm was over 40cm larger than what has been encountered in the same region during previous cruises in the recent past.

An unprecedented number of biological sampling activities accomplished collection for five protocols. In total, 301 tuna and other pelagic fish (billfish, wahoo, mahimahi) were sampled.

b. Tag Seeding

Joe Scutt Phillips (SPC) gave an update on the increased levels of tag seeding that were implemented during 2025. Since 2024, SPC has been promoting and supporting an increase in levels of tag seeding implemented across the WCPO regional and national observer programmes. The original aim was to increase the number of seeded tags by around an order of magnitude, and this has almost been achieved with annual numbers increasing from 30-500 tags per year during the period 2020-2023, to 2500-3000 seeded tags per year since 2024.

In addition, an experimental design aiming to achieve better coverage across the fishery was implemented to deploy tag seeding kits with observers across vessel flags in proportion to the number of observer trips undertaken across flag during the recent period.

Results of these deployments closely match the original experimental design, with under-representation from only a few flags, notably Korea, Kiribati and Chinese Taipei. SPC thanked all those involved in the implementation of this scale-up, particularly observers and observer coordinators, and said that they will continue to promote and support such levels of tag seeding. The results of these experiments will inform the critical reporting rate parameters in WCPO assessments of skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye tuna.

PS Trips 2024-Current																		
Flag	CN	EC	ES	FM	JP	KI	KR	MH	NR	PA	PG	PH	SB	SV	TV	TW	US	VU
% Trips	1	0	0	10	6	9	6	6	5	NA	28	4	3	NA	2	10	6	4
% Seeded Tags 2024-Current																		
Flag	CN	EC	ES	FM	JP	KI	KR	MH	NR	PA	PG	PH	SB	SV	TV	TW	US	VU
% Tags	0	2.6	0.7	12.2	7.2	5.8	1.5	5.8	4.2	1.2	24.3	2.7	11.6	0.0	2.9	2.9	14.5	0.0
Diff	-1	3.5	0.4	2	0.7	-3.8	-4.5	-0.2	-1	NA	-2.2	-1.3	8.4	NA	0.8	-7.2	8.1	-4

3. 2026 PTTP Developments

a. Pole & Line Tagging Platform Renovation

Jeff Muir (SPC) gave a summary of the recent renovation of the Solomon flagged, NFD-owned pole and line vessel Soltai 105, now named the Solomon Searcher. The vessel spent 4 months in Nelson, NZ at Aimex Shipyard undergoing major renovations of all major systems. The project is a SPC-NFD collaboration of contributions and management of the project. All major systems were rebuilt or replaced which has renewed the vessel for 5+ years of service life. Range, safety and reliability of vessel are all restored.

b. Fishing Trial of the Solomon Searcher

A 4-day fishing trial was conducted 11-14 February 2026 in Noro, Solomon Islands, out of the NFD Noro Base onboard the Solomon Searcher.

The goals of the trial were:

1. Confirm functionality of all systems of the newly refurbished vessel
2. Use and confirm functionality of fishing equipment, including the bait boom and net
3. Reacquaint the vessel crew with pole and line fishing operations and tagging (last tagging cruise, WP-6 Sept. 2022)
4. Release conventional tags in SKJ and YFT

Tagging operations released 3,290 conventional tags deployed in SKJ (79%) and YFT (21%), fish mostly <40cm; small individuals suggesting a large seasonal recruitment of both species. Five bait sets were made in three nights at two baitgrounds in the Western Province: Munda and Patutiva. The vessel is nearly ready for charter; only a small list of work is left to do before upcoming charters. Further, the veteran pole and line crewman demonstrated their skill and knowledge had not faded in the four-year gap between the last pole and line fishing and the trial. Finally, the tag recapture network in the Solomons now has some wild tags being recaptured by local purse seine vessels and local skiffs, preparing everyone for the upcoming charter work that will undoubtedly have more recaptures ending up in the local purse seine fleet and cannery.

c. RFID-tag Trial

Jeff Muir (SPC) gave a summary of the RFID tag trial, following up on a feasibility study done in Mazatlán in late 2024. The project was awarded a €59.7K grant through New Zealand MFAT Funding with Intent program. The RFID field trials are scheduled for quarter 2-3 on three purse seine vessels, which will be instrumented with RFID reader devices. Dockside testing of equipment, including frozen tagged fish during unloading will confirm system installations are working. Then, tag seeding experiments at sea with RFID-tagged fish will confirm the quality data collected from system installations. These systems could greatly improve the quantity, precision and accuracy of tag recoveries installed. If successful, the systems will remain onboard the three vessels to detect wild tags deployed later in the year and in 2027.

4. 2026 Skipjack-focused Tagging Cruises

Jeff Muir (SPC) gave a summary of the provisional plans for 2026 tagging charters, utilizing the freshly refurbished Solomon Searcher for three cruises planned through the year, totalling 82 sea days. The goals of the tagging cruises are:

1. More SKJ tagging data for 2028 assessment
2. Intensive biosampling scheduled
3. Train Pacific Island technicians to work on tagging and biological sampling protocols effectively; and
4. Harness the potential of reliability, range and the lower cost of chartering of the vessel to expand range and options.

The table below summarizes the provisional details of each cruise:

	Solomons Domestic Cruise 1	SB-FM Pohnpei Cruise 2	SB-FM Chuuk - Mortlocks Cruise 3
Dates	Q1 2026	Q3 2026	Q3/4 2026
Duration	25d	29d	28d
CT Release Goal	10,000	7,500	5,000
Recapture numbers	High	Low	Low
DAL Prediction	Low	High	High
Release Type	aFADs/FSC	aFADs/dFADs/FSC	dFADs/FSC
SA Area	6/7	6/7	6/7
Sampling	PMSB/TBD	PMSB/TBD	PMSB/TBD

5. 2027-2028 Tagging Options

Joe Scutt Phillips (SPC) raised the recommendation from SC12 in 2016 for the tagging project schedule to be normalized between annually alternating skipjack-focused pole & line experiments, and bigeye-focused, trolling and sports fishing gear experiments. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and recent lack of a pole & line tagging platform, there has been a greatly reduced number of skipjack tagging experiments to continue the time-series for this input data source for WCPO stock assessments.

In light of the recent renovation of a Solomon Islands pole & line vessel, now the *Solomon Searcher*, SPC indicated its intention to capitalize on the vessel's availability, ability to leverage parallel use of this vessel, and benefit from the associated sampling of soft and hard tissues for scientific work, and maximize skipjack-focused tagging over the next 2 to 5 year period. This will be put to the Regular Steering Committee of the PTPP in August 2026 for discussion.

6. Tag Recovery and Tagging Supported Projects

Joe Scutt Phillips (SPC) also provided a brief overview of the tag recovery network, which SPC maintains and appears to have benefited from increased exposure to seeded tags across fleets. PTPP data will be incorporated into the 2026 stock assessments of WCPO yellowfin and bigeye tuna, as well as those auxiliary analyses informing tagging condition effects, tag reporting and tag mixing. Similarly, updated tagging data from the PTPP are being used in estimation and validation of two updated SEAPODYM reference models for these species.

A number of other projects underway during 2025-26 are also using PTTP data, including movement and distribution modelling projects, feeding and bioenergetics projects, growth and movement studies using hard parts, and genetics and contaminant studies using soft tissues, all obtained from PTTP research cruises.

7. Any other business

No other business was raised by participants in the meeting

Questions/Interventions:

1. Kiyofuji Hidetada (FRA-Japan) asked why one of the planned 2026 skipjack cruises was targeted for the third quarter.
Joe (SPC) responded that typically, any cruise that partially benefited from drifting FAD access was targeted for Q3 to coincide with the WCPO FAD-closure period. Simon Nicol and Jeff (SPC) also highlighted that due to the recent renovation of the pole & line vessel, some contingency time was added to the schedule to allow margin for changes or adaptations needed after the first cruise in Q1.
2. Nicholas Ducharme-Barth (USA) noted the discussion that occurred during the 22nd Regular Session of WCPFC in 2025 requesting clarification on how the budget of the PTTP was used to provide different science outputs.
Joe (SPC) confirmed that, yes, discussions were in place for providing this summary on how PTTP funds contribute to leveraging funding from other sources and provide the various scientific outputs of the project.
3. Mike Batty (Tuvalu) noted that skipjack was a priority for Tuvalu, and agreed that capitalizing on skipjack tagging in the WCPO was an appropriate strategy.
4. Elaine Garvilles (WCPFC) asked whether there was any difference in the RFID tags that were going to be trialled, compared to regular conventional tags.
Joe (SPC) replied that physically they were almost indistinguishable from the typical conventional tags used in by the PTTP historically, but RFID tags contain a small microchip around the size of a grain of rice.
5. Elaine (WCPFC) also asked if there were any possibilities for tagging experiments to be carried out in the West Pacific East Asia area.
Simon (SPC) replied that, depending on the success of the newly renovated pole & line vessel, the possibilities for extending the range and carrying out new types of tagging experiments were certainly possible, but that they would require significant financial and logistical support from member countries.
6. Mike Batty (Tuvalu) also asked whether SPC had been happy with the current return rates of tag seeding, and noted that Tuvalu places a lot of observers on Korean flagged vessels, and so was happy to support increasing tag seeding on these flags.
Joe (SPC) replied that reporting rates varied considerably across a number of factors, and that the reporting rate estimations due for the upcoming WCPO tuna stock

assessments would be the first chance to take a detailed look at this since the scale up in tag seeding. He thanked Mike for his support on increasing tag seeding on Korean flagged vessels, and said that the team would be in touch to facilitate this.

Closing statement: There were no other questions or concerns brought up by participants; this summary of the meeting was shared with participants for comment or follow-up questions.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be the standing PTTP Steering Committee, to be held prior/during to the WCPFC Scientific Committee in early August 2026.

Annex 1. Adopted Agenda

Pacific Tuna Tagging Project Planning Advisory Committee Meeting

27th February 11am to 12am Solomon Islands time (UTC+11)

Virtual Meeting, MS Teams ([Meeting Link](#))

Agenda

1. Welcome, preliminaries
2. 2025 PTTP Activities Overview
 - a. CP17 Wild tagging
 - b. Tag Seeding
3. 2026 PTTP Developments
 - a. Pole & Line Tagging Platform Renovation
 - b. RFID-tag Trial
4. 2026 Skipjack-focused tagging cruises
5. 2027-2028 tagging options
6. Tag recovery and tagging supported projects
7. Any other business

Annex 2. Attendance Report

<i>Name</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>
<i>Hasegawa Takaaki</i>	FRA-Japan
<i>Kiyofuji Hidetada</i>	FRA-Japan
<i>Yokoyama Norihiko</i>	FRA-Japan
<i>Daniel Fuller</i>	IATTC
<i>Charlyn Golu</i>	Solomon Islands
<i>Bruno Leroy</i>	SPC
<i>Jeff Muir</i>	SPC
<i>Joe Scutt Phillips</i>	SPC
<i>Matthew Cunningham</i>	SPC
<i>Simon Nicol</i>	SPC
<i>Michael Batty</i>	Tuvalu
<i>Michelle Sculley</i>	USA
<i>Nicholas Ducharme Barth</i>	USA
<i>Elaine Garvilles</i>	WCPFC
<i>Sungkwon Soh</i>	WCPFC