



REPORT FROM THE FIRST INFORMAL INTERSESSIONAL MEETING FOR THE REVIEW OF CMM 2018-04 SEA TURTLES (STIIWG01)

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WCPFC-SC22-2026-EB-WP09

Objective

To ensure CMM 2018-04 effectively reduces WCPFC fisheries impact on sea turtles.

The Mitigation Gap

85%

Deep-Set Longline Effort

CMM 2018-04 mitigation (eg. large circle hook, fish bait) is currently only required for shallow-set longline gear.

However, **deep-set** fisheries contribute significantly greater effort in the Convention Area, leaving a critical gap.

CMM Review Roadmap

WCPFC21

Agreement to Review

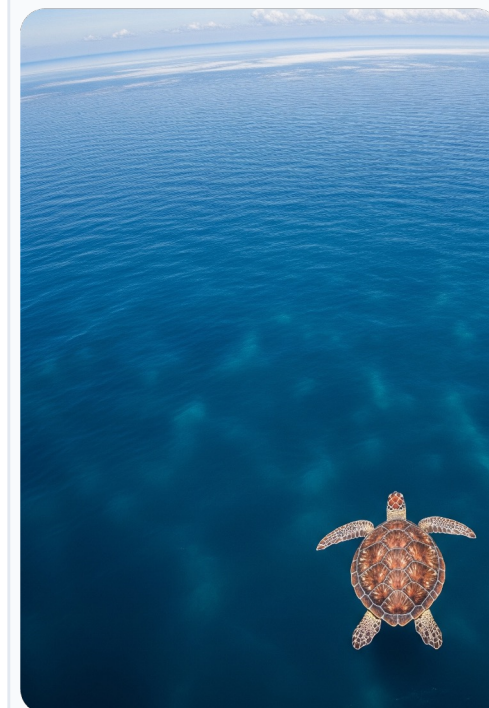
Review CMM 2018-04 in order to address scope limitations, clarify reporting requirements, and consider options for deep-set mitigation measures.

WCPFC22

Process to Review Adopted with the United States offering to lead the review process in 2026.

CMM Review (virtual): April 8 & 10

Participants from China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, Indonesia, Philippines, United States, IATTC, SPREP, Monterey Bay Aquarium, & Sharks Pacific.

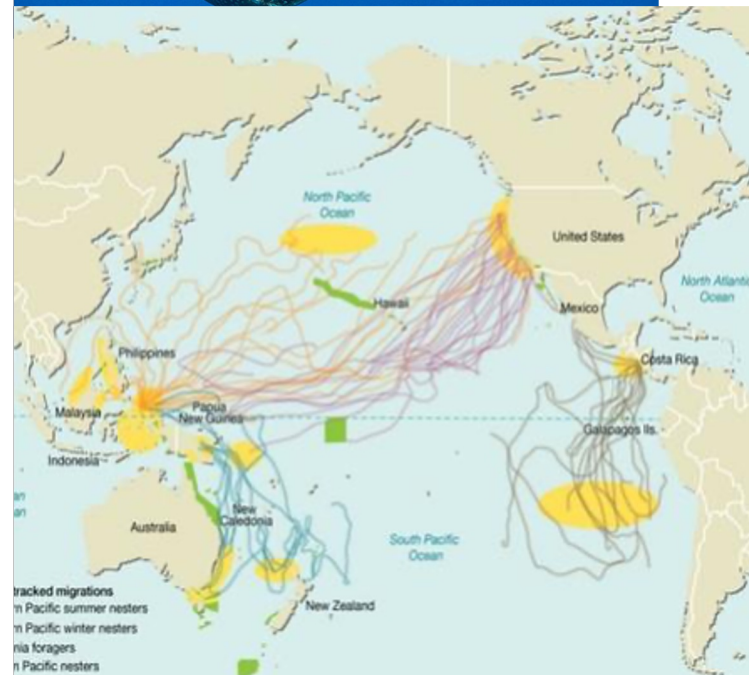


WORKSHOP TOPICS



Sea Turtle Populations in the WCPO, Threats, including Bycatch

- **Extinction Risk Analysis:** Pacific sea turtle populations are highly vulnerable; WCPO longline bycatch is a major threat.
- **Critical Concern:** West Pacific Leatherbacks assessed as Critically Endangered.
- **Mitigation Gap:** Mandated only for shallow-set gear, despite deep-set longlines contributing ~85% of total effort.



WORKSHOP TOPICS



Sea Turtle Populations in the WCPO, plus Threats, including Bycatch

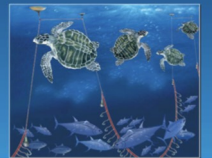
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Bycatch Mitigation & Safe Handling Practices

- **Gear Efficacy:** Circle hooks and finfish bait remain highly effective in shallow-set gear, but efficacy in deep-set gear is questioned.
- **Leatherback Threat:** Predominantly entangled in the line rather than biting baited hooks; requires targeted solutions.
- **Best Handling and Release Training Opportunity to strengthen:** CMM lacks mandatory training for safe handling and release—a critical operational weakness.



GUIDELINES TO REDUCE
SEA TURTLE MORTALITY
IN FISHING OPERATIONS



WORKSHOP TOPICS



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Bycatch Mitigation & Safe Handling Practices

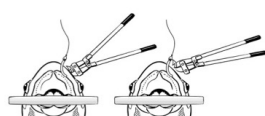
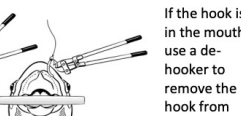
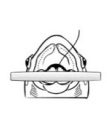
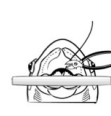
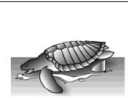
- **Gear Efficacy:** Circle hooks and finfish bait remain highly effective in shallow-set gear, but efficacy in deep-set gear is questioned.
- **Leatherback Threat:** Predominantly entangled in the line rather than biting baited hooks; requires targeted solutions.
- **Best Handling and Release Training Void:** WCPFC CMM lacks mandatory training for safe handling and release—a critical operational weakness.

Data Gaps & Future Analysis

- **Data Uncertainty** due to limited observer coverage & uneven spatial distribution relative to actual fishing effort.
- **Data Reporting:** Need clarification of SciData requirements and additional information from Regional Observer Programme (ROP) data when turtle interactions occur.
- **Joint Analysis Support:** Strong backing for US-led collaborative ROP data analysis, noting data confidentiality issues and inclusion of national scientists.

WCPFC Guidelines for the Handling of Sea Turtles

If a turtle is caught, the following steps should be taken to give it the best possible chance of survival. Operators of longline fishing vessels should follow Steps A to E if a sea turtle becomes hooked, and Steps A, C, D and E if it is entangled. If a sea turtle becomes entangled in a purse seine net, then operators should stop net roll as soon as the turtle comes out of the water, disentangle the turtle without injuring it and before resuming the net roll, then follow Steps A, C, D and E.

A	Assess the turtle's size: release the turtle if it is too big to handle safely, otherwise bring it on board without damaging it further
	If the turtle is too large to bring on board, stop the vessel and bring the turtle as close to the boat as possible without putting too much strain on the line. This is especially important if the turtle is hooked rather than entangled. Cut the line as close to the hook as practical and remove tangled line from before the turtle swims away.
	If the turtle is small then ideally use a dip net to lift the turtle on board. When bringing the animal on board, do not damage it further by lifting it using the hooked line or gaffing its body.
B	Once the turtle is on board, place a piece of wood in the turtle's mouth so it cannot bite, then cut the hook or line
	If the hook is in the mouth, use a de-hooker to remove the hook from the turtle.
	Using a bolt cutter to remove the barb of the hook before removing the hook itself can reduce the chance of damaging the turtle during de-hooking.
	If the insertion point of the hook is not visible, remove as much line as possible without pulling too hard on the hook itself, and cut the line as close to the hook as practical.
	
C	Assess the condition of the turtle before releasing it. When the turtle has recovered its strength, gently and promptly release it to the water. Resuscitation treatments may be applied to animals in bad condition.
	If the turtle is sluggish or not active when lifted on board, it may have water in its lungs. In this case the rear flippers should be raised about 20cm off the deck while it is recovering.
	If practicable, place the turtle in a secure shaded location of the boat and cover its body with wet towels. Do not spray the turtle in the face with water or cover its nostrils with the towel.
D	Carefully return the turtle to the water
	Gently put the turtle in the water head first, after slowing down or stopping the fishing vessel. Ensure that the turtle is clear of the vessel before motoring off.
E	Record the interaction in your logbook and inform your fisheries department
	Identify and record the turtle species, if possible, and record any tag numbers.