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Analysis of Trends in Fisheries Operating in the WCPFC IATTC Overlap Area

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Submitted by the Secretariat

Purpose:

1. This paper summarises the available data on fishing vessel activity and fishing catch and effort within the high seas area where the WCPFC and IATTC Convention Areas overlap (the overlap area) and all EEZs encompassed by the WCPFC convention area from which we have data. It presents trends in vessel numbers detected through the WCPFC Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), catch and effort data from aggregated reporting of data housed at the Pacific Community (SPC) and observer programmes, WCPFC High Seas Boarding and Inspection (HSBI) records, and transshipment declarations. The paper is intended to assist the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) in understanding the level and nature of fishing activity in this area and to support consideration of any monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) measures that may be necessary in this area.

Key messages

- a. Longline vessels dominate activity in the overlap area, with between 261 and 409 unique vessels detected by WCPFC VMS each year since 2013. The longliner fleet operating in the high seas overlap area has represented approximately 21–28% of all WCPFC high seas longliners on the WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels (RFV) in recent years.
- b. Longline catch from the high seas overlap area (OL-HS) has accounted for approximately 4–8% of total WCPFC-wide longline catch, with elevated proportions recorded in 2020–2021 and again in 2023–2024.
- c. Purse seine activity in the overlap area is modest but has shown a gradual upward trend in both vessel numbers (15–28 vessels per year) and catch proportions, with OL-HS purse seine catch reaching 1.7% of the WCPFC total in 2024.
- d. The catch data varies between the overlap area and that of the WCPO. For the purse seine fishery this is related to the higher prevalence of FAD sets in the overlap area compared to the WCPO resulting in higher catch of bigeye tuna. For the longline fishery, differences exist but it is uncertain what the reason for this is.
- e. Transshipment activity in the overlap area has grown markedly over recent years. 16% of all WCPFC-tracked transshipment events since 2016 have occurred in the overlap area, with annual proportions rising from under 1% in 2016 to nearly 25% in 2021 and stabilising at around 18–20% in 2022–2024.
- f. The majority of vessels (95%) detected in the overlap area are listed as active on the RFV,

across all flag States. However, some vessels flagged to Vanuatu, Japan, Canada, New Caledonia, Sierra Leone, and Singapore were not recorded as active on the WCPFC RFV.

- g. HSBI detections for longliners operating in the overlap area are consistently higher than relative effort estimates derived from aggregated or observer data in the overlap area compared to the WCPO high seas area. This suggests that the high seas overlap area may attract a disproportionate share of inspection activity relative to overall fleet presence, or that detections by inspection vessels are easier in the overlap area.
- h. Pole-and-line vessel activity in the overlap area peaked in 2020–2021 and has since declined to zero, consistent with broader fleet-level changes throughout the Pacific.

Introduction

- 2. The Convention Areas of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) overlap in the eastern Pacific Ocean, broadly in the area east of 150°W longitude. The overlap area includes a large proportion of the EEZ of French Polynesia. A caveat needs to be made with the use of this data. It includes only data available to the WCPFC. It does not include information that may be available to the IATTC on vessels numbers or catch by vessels that are operating under IATTC measures. Within the overlap area, fishing vessels subject to WCPFC conservation and management measures (CMMs) may also be operating within the IATTC Convention Area. Vessels subject to IATTC conservation and management measures may also be operating in the overlap area, outside the control of WCPFC CMMs. This creates an area of shared competency and potential regulatory complexity.
- 3. The overlap area is of ongoing management relevance because key tuna stocks including bigeye, yellowfin, and skipjack are under the competency of both RFMOs, and measures adopted by each RFMO are not always identical or fully aligned. The WCPFC has long recognised the need for coordination with IATTC on stock assessment, management, and compliance matters.
- 4. For the purposes of this analysis, the following area designations are used throughout. All logsheet catch and effort and VMS data were allocated to one of these areas based on the latitude and longitude of the report event:
 - **Overlap** — Combined EEZ and high seas waters within the WCPFC–IATTC overlap area;
 - **OL-EZ** — EEZ waters falling within the WCPFC–IATTC overlap area;
 - **OL-HS** — High seas within the WCPFC–IATTC overlap area;
 - **WCPO** — Combined EEZ and high seas waters within the WCPFC but outside of the overlap area;
 - **WP-EZ** — All EEZ waters within the WCPFC Convention outside of the overlap Area;
 - **WP-HS** — All high seas within the WCPFC Convention outside of the overlap Area.

Data have been extracted from the WCPFC Secretariat’s integrated data systems as well as data held by the Pacific Community (SPC) and include WCPFC VMS and vessel logsheet data, WCPFC High Seas Boarding and Inspection (HSBI) data and WCPFC transshipment monitoring records. Any data solely collected by or provided to the IATTC by its members were not included in this analysis. While the data represents the best available data to WCPFC, it does not include data that may be available to IATTC.

- 5. The following data streams have been used in this analysis:

- *Vessel Monitoring System (VMS)*: Position data reported by WCPFC CCMs, used to identify vessels operating within the overlap area. Meaningful fleet-wide VMS coverage is available from 2013 onwards.
- *Vessel logsheet data*: Logsheet data held by SPC (available from 2015).
- *High Seas Boarding and Inspection (HSBI) data*: Records of at-sea inspections conducted under the relevant WCPFC CMMs.
- *Transshipment declarations*: Records of transshipment events submitted to the WCPFC Secretariat, including location data (available from 2016).
- *WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels (RFV)*: The authorised list of vessels licensed to operate under WCPFC CMMs.

Review of the data

VMS vessel activity

6. Almost all vessels reporting to the WCPFC VMS in the overlap area are WCPFC CCMs (Figure 1). It is not known to what extent this is due to full coverage of all vessels operating in the area or limits to the reporting by WCPFC non-CCMs. The information presented here relate to vessels on the WCPFC RFV. It should be noted that CCMs may elect to choose to apply IATTC measures in the overlap area. Also, non-CCMs may be members or Cooperating Non-Parties (CNPs) of the IATTC, and therefore would be covered by IATTC measures.
7. Table 1 presents the number of unique vessels identified by WCPFC VMS as operating in the overlap area and the broader WCPFC Convention Area by year and vessel type. Longliners are the dominant vessel category in the high seas overlap area, with between 261 and 409 vessels detected annually since 2013. Vessel numbers peaked in 2013 and declined gradually through to 2024, with a slight increase to 269 longliners in 2025. Purse seiners have been present in small but broadly stable numbers (15–28 per year), while pole-and-line vessels peaked at 11 in 2020–2021 before declining to zero by 2024–2025. Support vessel types (bunkers and fish carriers) have remained relatively stable throughout the period. As noted above, this only covers the vessels identified by WCPFC VMS, not those vessels that are not reporting to the WCPFC VMS and which may fish in accordance with IATTC conservation and management measures.
8. Longliners in the OL-HS area have consistently represented approximately 21–28% of all WCPFC high seas longliners. This indicates that the overlap area accounts for a substantial and persistent share of high seas longlining effort within the Convention Area. The dominant flag CCMs for longliners in the overlap area are China, Chinese Taipei, and Korea (Republic of), which together account for the majority of vessels fishing in the overlap area over the full study period.
9. Almost all vessels operating in the overlap area and reporting to the WCPFC VMS are listed as active on the WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels. Across all flag CCMs the weighted RFV active rate exceeds 95%. Exceptions include some vessels flagged to Vanuatu (14 vessels not active on the RFV), Japan (9), Canada (1), New Caledonia (1), Sierra Leone (1), and Singapore (2). Some of these may relate to historical fishing and it is not clear that all these vessels were or are authorised under IATTC measures.
10. The number of longline vessels operating in the overlap area has declined through time while the number of purse seine vessels have remained relatively consistent (Figure 2). Bunker vessels in the overlap area have increased while fish carriers have decreased in the most recent years as have the purse seine vessels.

11. Within the overlap area, the longline vessels by flag CCMs are relatively consistent through time and most vessels are flagged to China and Chinese Taipei (Figure 3). Purse seiners flagged to the USA increased from 2012 to 2016 but their proportion of the total number of purse seine vessels has remained relatively consistent from then. Vessels flagged to the EU are the second most common purse seine vessels fishing in the overlap area. Pole and Line vessels are almost all flagged to the USA. The number of bunkers flagged to Panama increased from 2017 onwards with most of the remaining bunkers flagged to the Cook Islands. Fish carriers flagged to Vanuatu were prominent in the overlap area from 2014 to 2016, but are not particularly abundant thereafter. Fish carriers flagged to China have become more common in the overlap area since 2020.

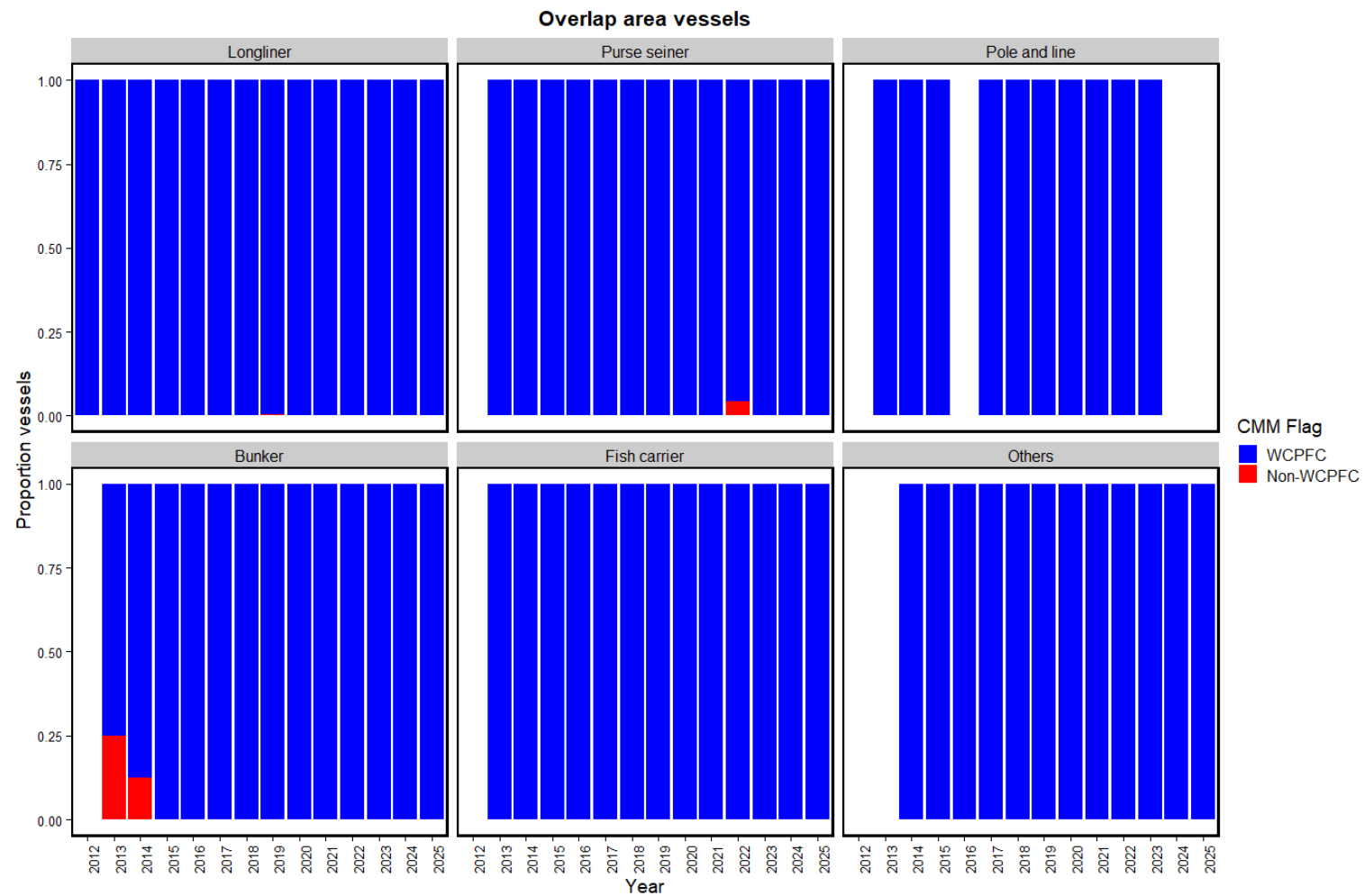


Figure 1: Vessels reporting to the VMS in the WCPFC-IATTC overlap area.

Table 1: The number of vessels reporting to the WCPFC VMS in the WCPFC Area and WCPFC - IATTC Overlap Area by year.

Unique vessels reporting to the VMS															
Area	Vessel	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
OL-EZ	Bunker	0	7	7	13	8	7	7	8	11	11	8	10	11	11
	Fish carrier	0	16	26	20	21	19	20	19	19	19	17	15	13	8
	Longliner	0	260	289	236	223	229	188	248	265	266	214	184	188	206
	Others	0	1	4	4	3	4	4	3	5	5	10	6	3	4
	Pole and line	0	1	2	3	0	1	7	9	10	11	5	2	0	0
	Purse seiner	0	1	9	8	18	12	6	5	15	12	11	13	18	8
OL-HS	Bunker	0	11	8	16	10	11	11	12	12	15	13	15	17	13
	Fish carrier	0	22	32	27	23	21	24	24	22	23	22	19	18	13
	Longliner	1	409	397	345	335	341	316	325	355	390	318	281	261	269
	Others	0	0	3	4	3	4	4	3	7	5	9	6	3	3
	Pole and line	0	3	2	3	0	3	7	10	10	11	6	3	0	0
	Purse seiner	0	16	15	18	28	20	21	17	18	20	23	24	23	15
WP-EZ	Bunker	0	30	28	32	29	28	27	28	32	38	53	30	33	30
	Fish carrier	0	189	230	228	220	234	224	220	209	215	302	199	190	214
	Longliner	3	1267	1245	1310	1292	1257	1259	1301	1263	1267	1380	1221	1114	1138
	Others	0	33	35	37	31	28	21	16	24	22	40	26	25	23
	Pole and line	0	49	53	58	53	51	50	50	49	51	46	40	37	34
	Purse seiner	0	253	298	295	281	280	282	278	268	287	323	271	268	273
	Support vessel	0	5	9	15	44	87	98	92	84	94	154	76	77	136
WP-HS	Bunker	0	29	27	30	30	28	27	29	32	41	36	29	36	31
	Fish carrier	1	186	215	215	214	227	223	227	226	246	225	208	214	225
	Longliner	11	1484	1367	1432	1439	1419	1407	1389	1429	1391	1326	1292	1245	1198
	Others	0	36	35	37	28	30	20	14	26	29	30	24	31	25
	Pole and line	0	52	50	60	56	60	61	63	68	65	56	52	46	44
	Purse seiner	1	258	274	288	278	275	273	283	268	286	264	259	266	267
	Support vessel	0	2	6	11	58	111	107	115	100	106	105	91	107	146

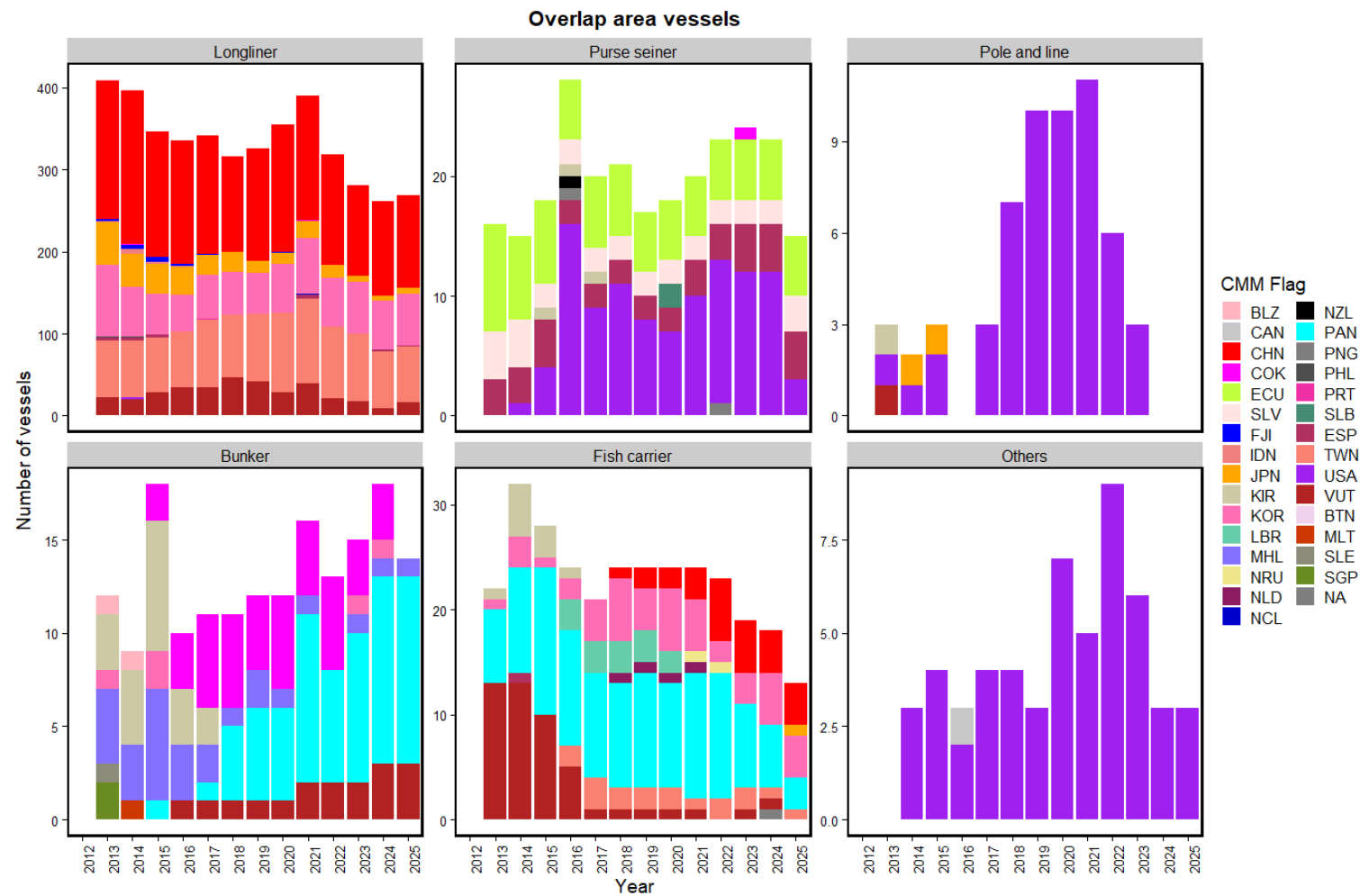


Figure 2: Vessels reporting to the WCPFC VMS in the WCPFC-IATTC overlap area.

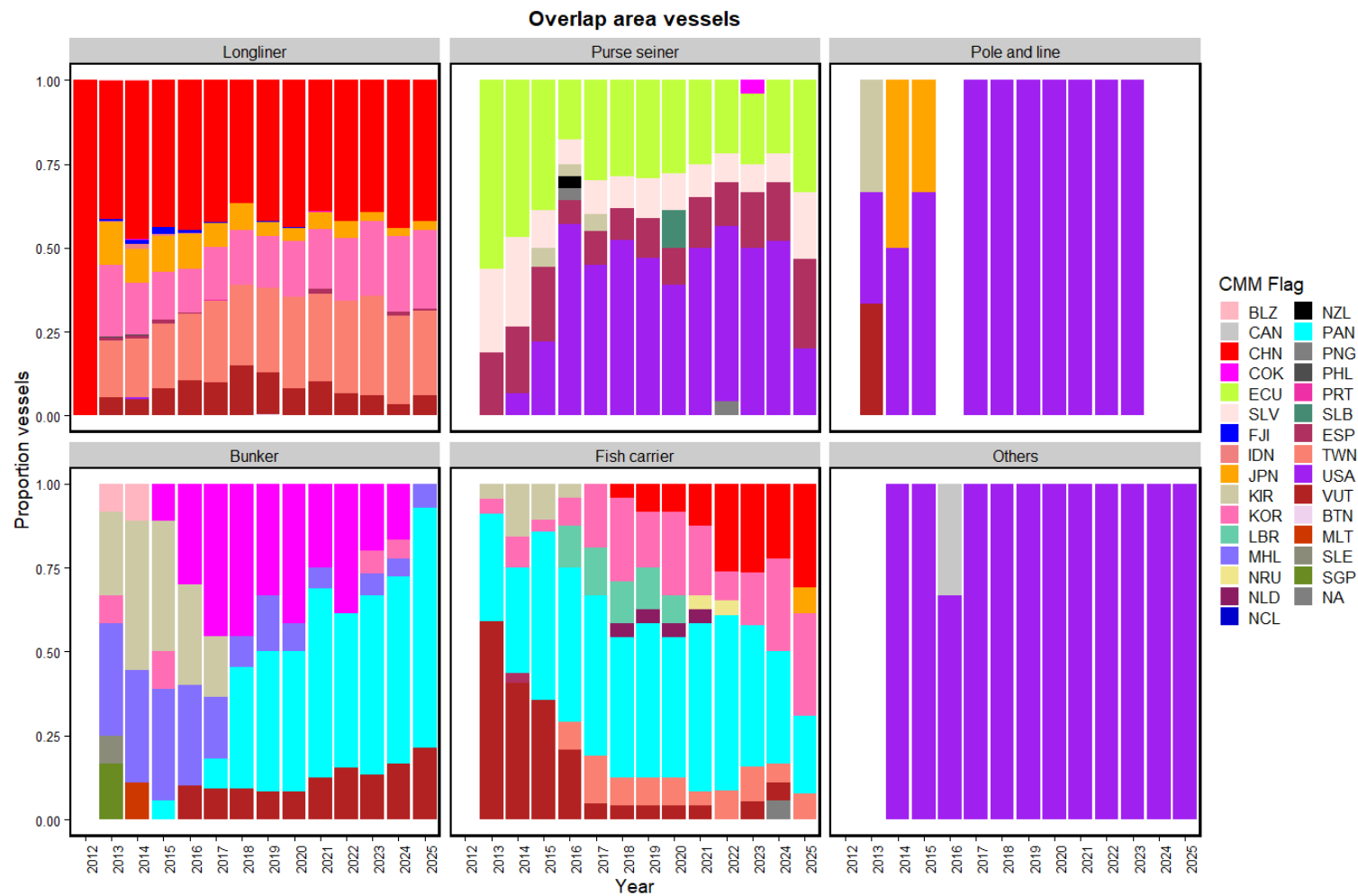


Figure 3: The proportion of vessels reporting to the WCPFC VMS in the WCPFC-IATTC overlap area.

Catch and effort

12. Table 2 presents reported WCPFC VMS effort in the high seas overlap area from 2019 to 2025, expressed as percentage of months active, aggregated by vessel type and flag CCM. As noted above, this data set only includes WCPFC data. For longline vessels, VMS-based effort estimates are generally similar to the aggregated estimates.

Table 2: The number of vessels by vessel flag operating in the WCPFC - IATTC Overlap Area from 2012-2025, derived from the WCPFC VMS.

CMM Flag	Longliner	Purse seiner	Pole and line	Bunker	Fish carrier	Others
Belize	2	0	0	2	0	0
Canada	0	0	0	0	0	1
China	1836	0	0	0	27	0
Cook Islands	2	1	0	39	0	0
Ecuador	0	75	0	0	0	0
El Salvador	0	31	0	0	0	0
Fiji	21	0	0	0	0	0
Indonesia	10	0	0	0	0	0
Japan	296	0	2	0	1	0
Kiribati	0	3	1	19	10	0
Korea (Republic of)	769	0	0	5	46	0
Liberia	0	0	0	0	14	0
Marshall Islands	0	0	0	26	0	0
Nauru	0	0	0	0	2	0
Netherlands	0	0	0	0	4	0
New Caledonia	1	0	0	0	0	0
New Zealand	0	1	0	0	0	0
Panama	0	0	0	59	124	0
Papua New Guinea	0	1	0	0	0	0
Philippines	2	0	0	0	0	0
Portugal	1	0	0	0	0	0
Solomon Islands	0	2	0	0	0	0
Spain	23	38	0	0	1	0
Chinese Taipei	1019	0	0	0	18	0
United States of America	3	105	54	0	0	53
Vanuatu	359	0	1	17	48	0
Bhutan	1	0	0	0	0	0
Malta	0	0	0	1	0	0
Nicaragua	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sierra Leone	0	0	0	1	0	0
Singapore	0	0	0	2	0	0

13. Purse seine effort in the overlap area remains low across all data sources in most years, though the WCPFC VMS-derived estimate for 2024 was notably elevated at 16.6%. However, as effort is generally low for purse seine vessels in the overlap area, small changes to vessel numbers can make large changes to the percentages.
14. Longline catch from the high seas overlap area has accounted for between approximately 4% and 8% of total WCPFC-wide longline catch over the review period (2015–2025), with the proportion generally higher in 2020–2021 and 2023–2024. Purse seine catch from the OL-HS area has remained below 2% of the WCPFC total in all years, though the proportion reached 1.7% in 2024, the highest value in the series.

Table 3: The proportion of purse seine catch in the WCPFC and WCPFC - IATTC Overlap Area by year. OL-EZ = EEZs within the overlap area; OL-HS = high seas within the overlap area; WP-EZ = EEZs within the WCPFC area; WP-HS = high seas within the WCPFC area.

Purse seine				
Year	OL-EZ	OL-HS	WP-EZ	WP-HS
2015	0.57	0.86	80.51	18.06
2016	0.15	2.33	88.13	9.38
2017	0.03	0.36	91.59	8.02
2018	0.01	0.51	89.8	9.68
2019	0.17	0.38	85.35	14.1
2020	0	0.34	87.37	12.29
2021	0.05	0.51	90.48	8.96
2022	0	0.34	93.35	6.31
2023	0.01	1.4	85.2	13.38
2024	0.08	1.72	92.44	5.76
2025	0	0.25	89.47	10.28

Table 4: The proportion of longline catch in the WCPFC and WCPFC - IATTC Overlap Area by year. OL-EZ = EEZs within the overlap area; OL-HS = high seas within the overlap area; WP-EZ = EEZs within the WCPFC area; WP-HS = high seas within the WCPFC area.

Longline				
Year	OL-EZ	OL-HS	WP-EZ	WP-HS
2015	3.18	4.1	58.75	33.97
2016	1.99	6.32	57.09	34.61
2017	0.94	4.32	47.26	47.49
2018	0.75	4.31	41.02	53.91
2019	0.73	4.27	43.05	51.95
2020	0.96	6.83	29.47	62.75
2021	2.16	7.94	28.74	61.17
2022	0.88	3.89	43.25	51.98
2023	1	7.29	25.65	66.06
2024	2.18	7.46	38.48	51.88
2025	5.89	5.96	58.39	29.76

15. Figure 4 presents the proportions of longline fishing effort derived from the operational level data set and Figure 5 presents the same data for purse seine but separated by set type. These data show the for the longline fishery the distribution of fishing effort is relatively consistent through time, particularly within the overlap area, with one distinct difference which is a marked switch in the WCPO from the high seas into EEZs in 2025, a trend that was also seen within the overlap area. coven the 2025 operational data are provisional future reports may clarify the reason for this. The purse seine data show that associated (FAD) sets are much more prevalent in the overlap area than the in WCPO and they are more prevalent in the WCPO high seas compared to the EEZs although to a lesser extent than the overlap area.

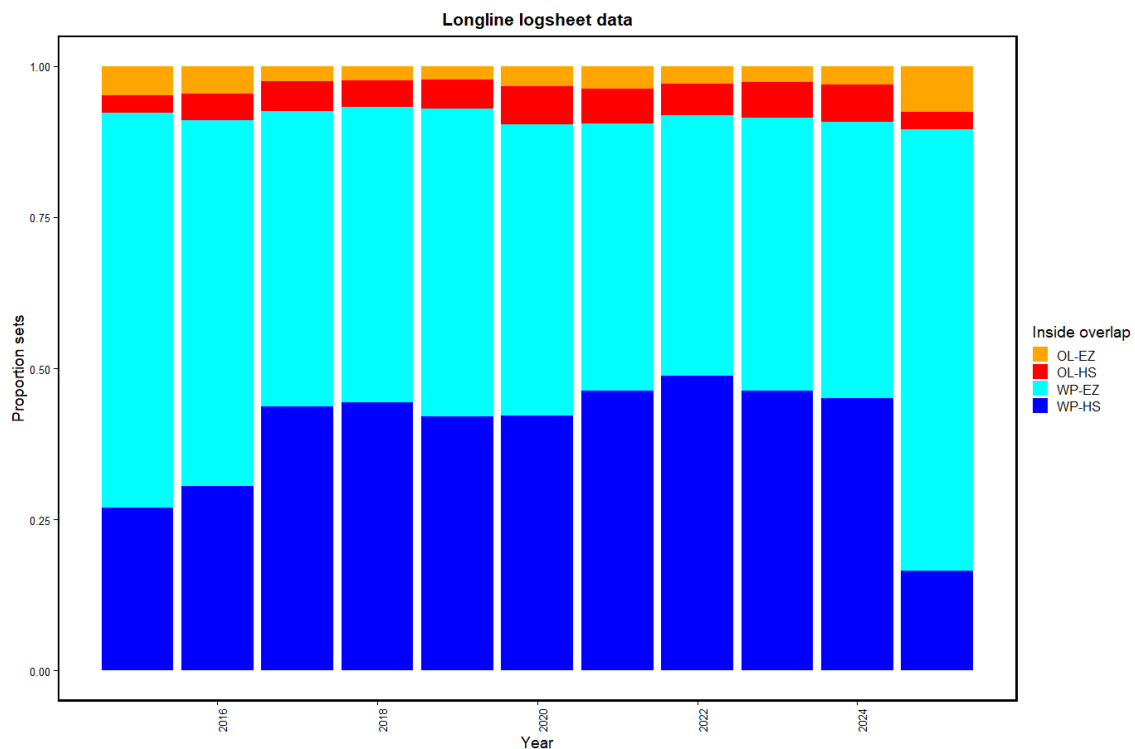


Figure 4: The proportion of longline vessel logsheet effort in the WCPFC regions.

16. Figure 6 show the reported catch proportions by species group in the longline fishery separated by area. The data show that, within the longline fishery, the tuna catch is split almost evenly between the WCPO high seas and EEZs, but within the overlap area the high seas catch is almost double that of the EEZ catch. Sharks on the other hand are disproportionately reported on the high seas in both the WCPO and the overlap area. Billfish are also caught in larger proportions on the high seas in both the WCPO and overlap area. it is not known if these trends are a result of variations in reporting of bycatch, requirements of coastal States in their EEZs, or a real biological trend.
17. The detailed catch distributions for the longline fishery are shown in Figure 7. Within the overlap area albacore make up the highest catch proportion, and the catch distribution is relatively consistent in the overlap high seas but more variable within EEZs. Within the overlap EEZs yellowfin tuna periodically occur in the catch in large proportions and are usually the second most abundant catch. Bigeye tuna make up a much higher catch proportion in the overlap area than in other areas. The WCPO longline catch in the EEZs is dominated by albacore and yellowfin with a small amount of bigeye. In the WCPO high seas, the catch proportions are more variable with albacore, bigeye and blue sharks making up the bulk of the catch but also with higher catch proportions of swordfish.
18. Figure 8 show the reported catch proportions by species group in the purse seine fishery separated by area. The data show that, overwhelmingly, the catch is caught in the WCPO EEZs. Within the

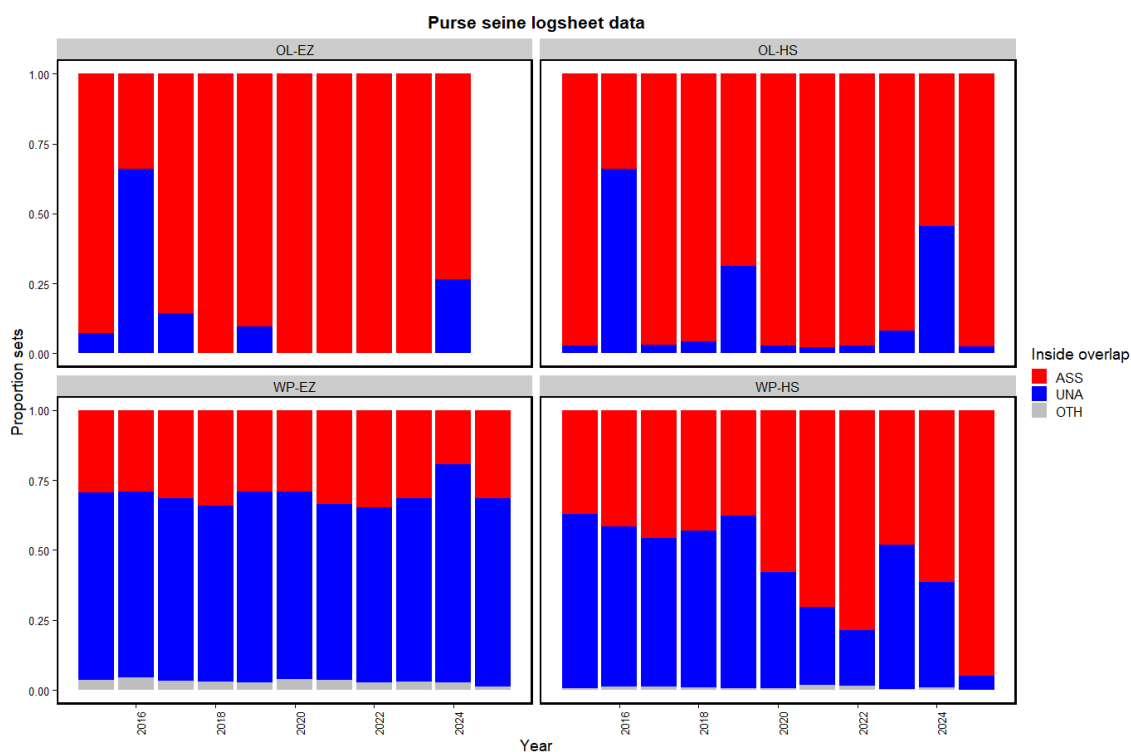


Figure 5: The proportion of purse seine vessel logsheet effort in the WCPFC regions separated by set type.

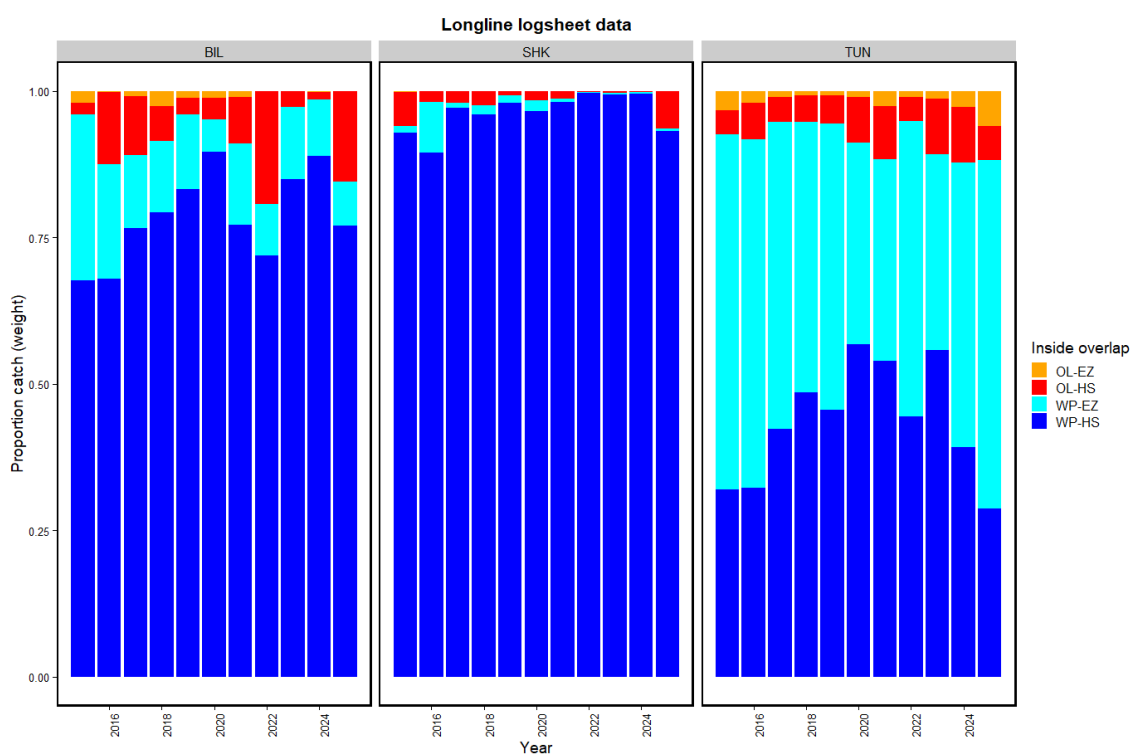


Figure 6: The proportion of longline vessel logsheet catch in the WCPFC regions separated by species group. BIL = billfish; SHK = Sharks; TUN = tuna.

overlap area, most of the catch is caught on the high seas. Unlike with respect to longline data, the purse seine report catch proportions are very similar for tuna, billfish and sharks.

19. The purse seine catch proportions are also similar in all areas at a species level (Figure 9). Skipjack

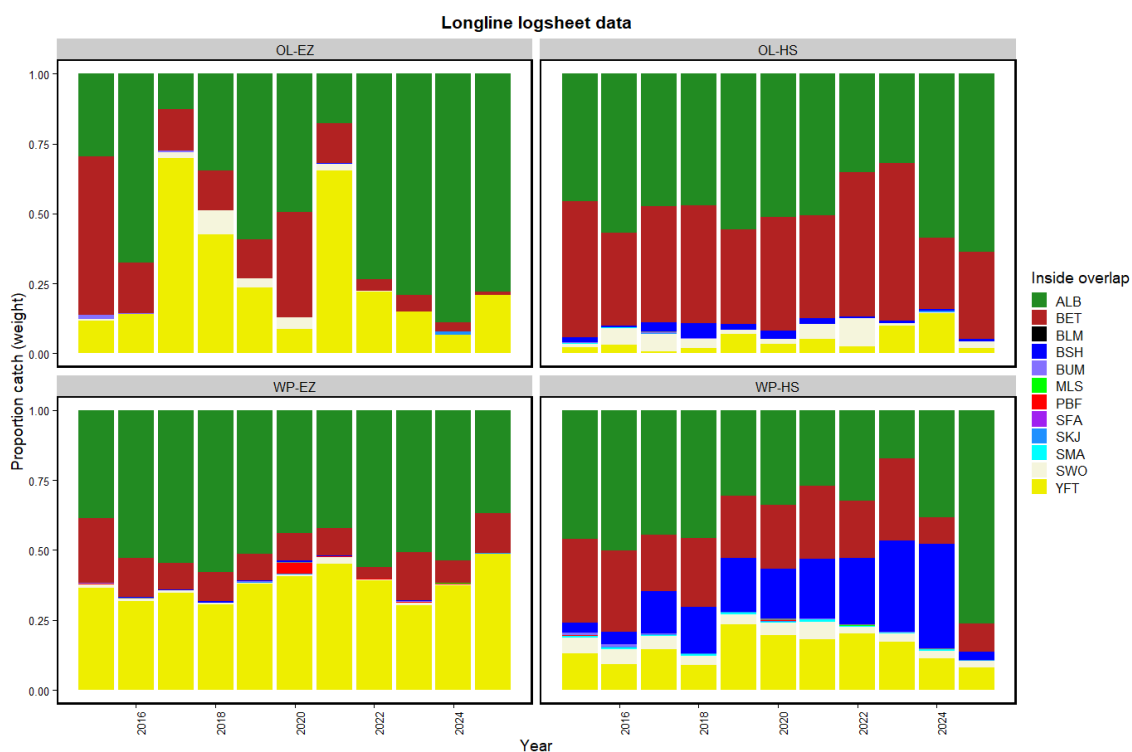


Figure 7: The proportion of longline vessel logsheet catch in the WCPFC regions separated by area.

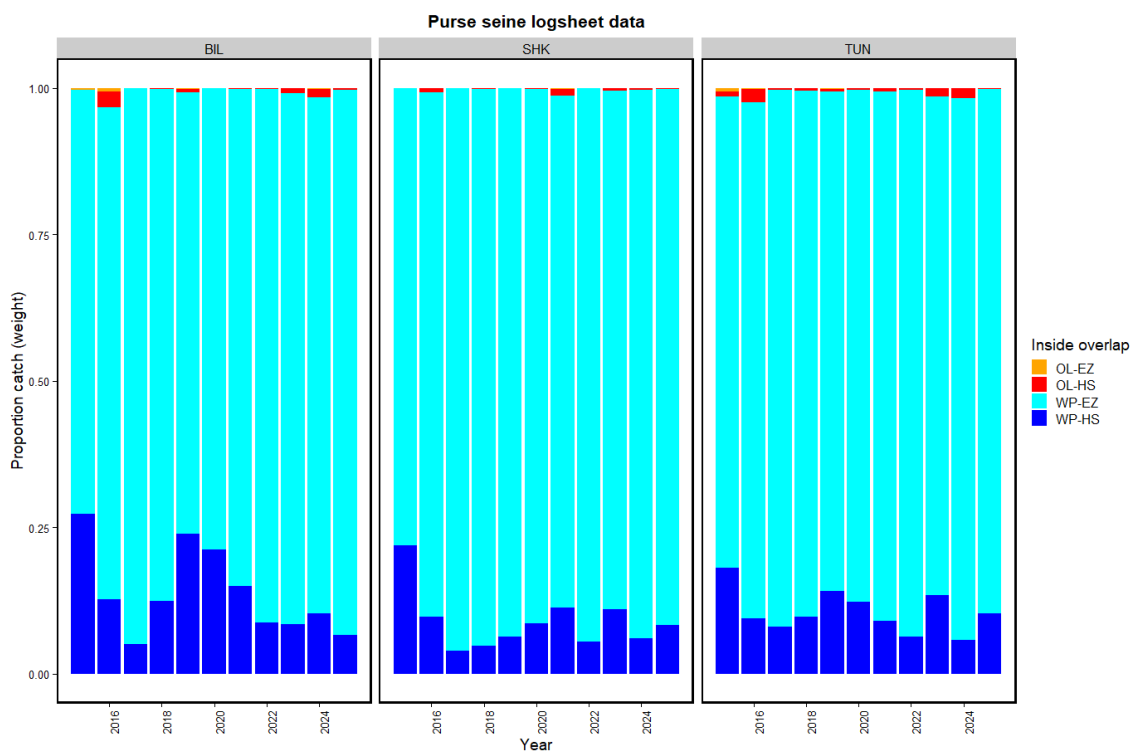


Figure 8: The proportion of purse seine vessel logsheet catch in the WCPFC regions separated by species group. BIL = billfish; SHK = Sharks; TUN = tuna.

tuna is the most frequently landed catch in all areas followed by yellowfin tuna in all areas except the high seas in the overlap area. The overlap area EEZs also have a higher bigeye catch than the WCPO. The higher bigeye catch in the overlap area is likely a result of the high prevalence of FAD

sets compared to the WCPO.

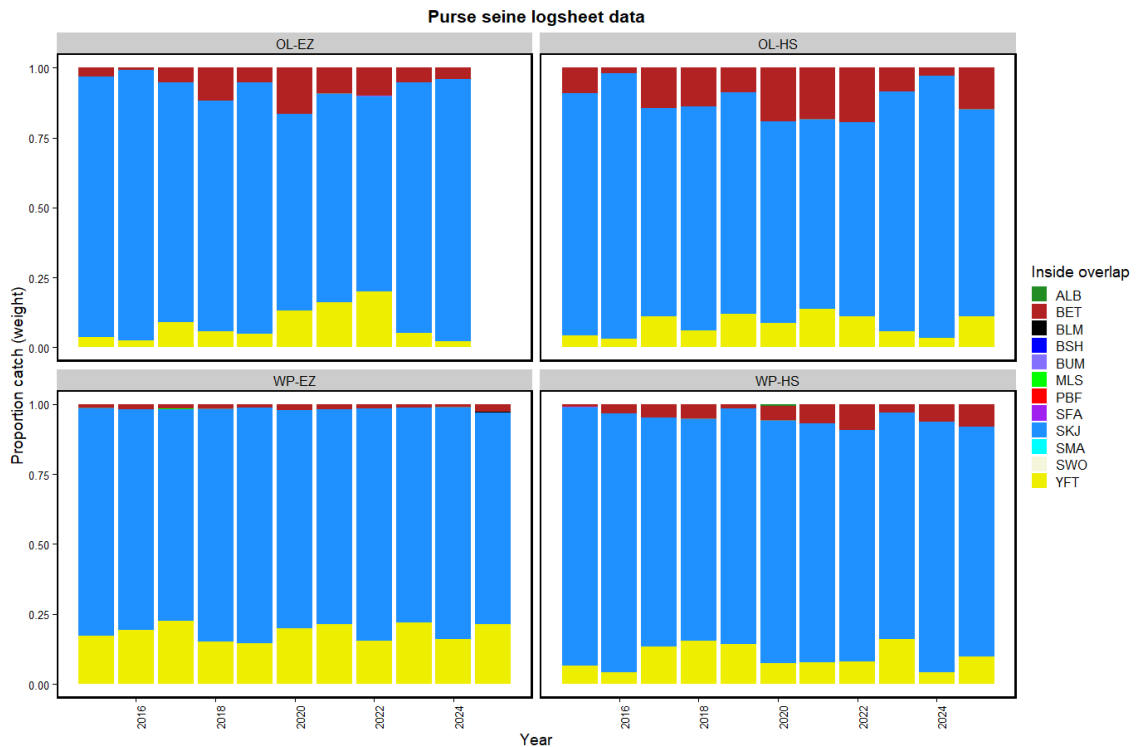


Figure 9: The proportion of purse seine vessel logsheet catch in the WCPFC regions separated by area.

Transshipment

20. The overlap area accounts for 16% of all WCPFC-tracked transshipment events since 2016. Annual proportions rose sharply from 0.9% in 2016 to a peak of 24.7% in 2021, before moderating to around 18–20% in 2022–2024. Partial data for 2026 indicate a proportion of 34.6%, though this figure should be treated with caution given the small number of events recorded to date.
21. This trend indicates that the overlap area has become an increasingly important location for at-sea transshipment by vessels operating within the WCPFC Convention Area. Given the logistical significance of transshipment for the longliner fleet and the compliance implications of at-sea fish transfers, the TCC may wish to consider whether current observer coverage and authorisation requirements for transshipment events in the overlap area are adequate.

Table 5: The number and percentage of transshipment events in the WCPFC/IATTC overlap area.

Year	Transshipment events	In Overlap	Out overlap	Percent in Overlap
2016	1020	9	1011	0.9
2017	1108	69	1039	6.2
2018	1448	60	1388	4.1
2019	1469	241	1228	16.4
2020	1160	254	906	21.9
2021	1007	249	758	24.7
2022	1124	226	898	20.1
2023	916	175	741	19.1
2024	908	166	742	18.3
2025	888	96	792	10.8
2026	159	55	104	34.6

High Seas Boarding and Inspection

22. WCPFC HSBI data confirm that longline vessels are the most frequently boarded vessels in the overlap area, which is probably a reflection of the prevalence of longliners in the area. The HSBI inspection rates on longliners in the overlap area are proportionally higher than those from other vessels in all years from 2019 to 2024 suggesting that inspections are more frequent in this area compared to the WCPO high seas or the higher longline densities on the overlap make finding a vessel easier in the overlap area.