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High Seas Catch Attribution for Chartered Vessels

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Submitted by the Secretariat

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to highlight potential inaccuracies in current catch and effort attribution for chartered vessels caused by spatial data gaps. This paper seeks a recommendation from TCC22 to the Commission for approval to integrate spatial data derived from logbook entries and improved charter notification procedures to ensure accurate flag CCM attribution for all future charter activities, and to retroactively correct attribution of historical catch data where viable.

Introduction

2. The Chartering [CMM 2024-03](#) sets out arrangements for CCMs to notify when they are entering into chartering arrangements with eligible vessels flagged to other CCMs. The purpose of the measure is to acknowledge the role that vessel charters play in promoting the development of domestic fisheries in SIDS and Participating Territories, particularly when chartered vessels operate as an integral part of the domestic fleet of SIDS and Participating Territories, and ensure that attribution of catch by notified chartered vessels is accurate.
3. Under CMM 2024-03, charter arrangements must be notified to the Executive Director and certain information provided, including “the area of application (i.e., the chartering CCM’s EEZ and/or high seas)”.
4. Paragraph 7 of the CMM provides, *inter alia*, that “Unless specifically provided in other CMMs, catches and effort of vessels notified as chartered under this CMM shall be attributed to the chartering Member or Participating Territory.” Therefore, unless catch and effort attribution is specifically modified by another CMM, when a chartered vessel is fishing in the EEZ of the chartering CCM or on the high seas, paragraph 7 applies, and catch will be attributed to the chartering CMM or Participating Territory.
5. The Tropical Tuna [CMM 2025-02](#) contains specific provisions for SIDS and Participating Territories to develop domestic fisheries through chartering arrangements. Therefore, in accordance with CMM

2024-03 paragraph 7, these provisions determine the attribution of catch of tropical tuna caught by chartered vessels.

6. CMM 2025-02 paragraph 8 provides that for the purposes of certain provisions, the catch of chartered vessels is attributed to the chartering CCM. This applies to paragraphs 38-39 concerning high seas longline catch limits, in which case catch attribution is to the chartering CCM. Conversely, following lengthy discussions, the Commission decided not to specifically include a provision in CMM 2017-01 (and subsequently, CMM 2025-02) providing for high seas purse seine catch to be attributed to the chartering CCM. Therefore, high seas purse seine catch and effort for chartered vessels is attributed to the chartered vessel's flag CCM.

Discussion

7. Presently, the charter notification scheme captures the following information from relevant CCMs:
 - a. Name of the vessel and WCPFC identification number
 - b. Flag CCM and chartering CCM
 - c. Charter start and end dates
 - d. Any notified and updated dates of the chartering arrangement
 - e. Notifier of the chartering arrangement
 - f. Name and address of the owner of the vessel
 - g. Name and address of the charterer of the vessel
 - h. Area of application (ie EEZ and/or high seas, in a free text field)
8. The notification system meets the requirements contained in CMM 2024-03 paragraph 2. However, whilst the notification provides strong temporal parameters, it does not provide the necessary level of spatial precision to adequately attribute catch caught in EEZs and high seas to the relevant CCM. This problem is compounded by the different treatment of chartering arrangements contained in individual CMMs.
9. In practice, this may have resulted in some of the catch by chartered vessels being attributed to the wrong CCM, and a subsequent loss of accuracy in Annual Catch and Effort (ACE) by EEZ and aggregate catch and effort tables and in the calculation of logbook coverage. This situation could occur when the entire catch of a chartered purse seine vessel which fishes in both the EEZ and the high seas during the chartering period is attributed to a chartering CCM, where the high seas component of that catch should have been attributed to the chartered vessel's flag CCM.
10. Currently, only the temporal component of a chartering arrangement is considered. This means that logbook catch has been assigned to the vessel's flag or chartering CCM based entirely on the charter start and end date. The impact of this is that some of the logbook catch and effort of the flag CCM may have been attributed to the chartering CCM by the SSP as part of the data management process. This matters because each CCM must also submit annual catch estimates (ACE) to the Commission by 30 April of each year. The ACE should represent the total logbook data (raised/adjusted if applicable).

Therefore, there may be discrepancies between the ACE and the sum of the logbook data due to this flag-attribution process.

11. Whilst it is common practice to raise logbook catch and effort data in order to produce the raised aggregate catch and effort and the ACE by EEZ (if the ACE is higher than the sum of the logbook catch), it is not common practice to “down-weight” logbook data if the ACE is lower. Since the current process may be mis-attributing flag CCM catches to the chartering CCM in the logbook data, the chartering CCM’s aggregate catch and effort estimates may be inflated. For the flag CCM, it would mean that overall logbook coverage would be estimated to be lower than the reality, and those catches would be raised to the level of the ACE, which could create spatial and temporal biases in the raised data, and result in an overestimation of total catch and effort in some data products when combined with the charter CCM catch and effort.

Integration of spatial data and proposed database changes

12. It is possible to consistently and transparently determine the correct attribution of catch by intersecting the logbook positional data already held by the SSP with the area of application notified in the Record of Fishing Vessels (RFV) and the chartering notification.
13. By evaluating a chartered vessel's logbook coordinates at the time of a fishing set, catch and effort can be dynamically assigned to either the chartering CCM or the flag CCM, depending on whether the vessel was operating within an EEZ or on the high seas. For this to be possible, this would require CCMs when notifying of charter arrangements to include gear type, target species, and to specifically nominate either host EEZ for the charter, high seas, and/or 3rd party EEZs in order to permit spatio-temporal catch attribution. Confirmation of this information as part of charter notification will assist the Secretariat and SPC with more efficient tracking to support accurate catch attribution outcomes.
14. The Secretariat is proposing that enhancements be made to the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) database to implement a spatio-temporal metric for assessing logbook coverage. The proposed changes would add relevant data fields to the charter notification page, which would require CCMs to include gear type, target species, and to specifically nominate either host EEZ for the charter, high seas, and/or 3rd party EEZs in order to permit spatio-temporal catch attribution. The Secretariat has obtained a preliminary cost estimate of USD2,550 to make this change to the existing database. Further authorisation will be required to allow the Secretariat and the SSP to process the relevant data workflows.

Historical Data Limitations

15. While historical charter data is captured within the RFV, the completeness and spatial accuracy of these records prior to 2023 are severely limited.
16. Attempting to apply the spatial intersection to legacy data before 2023 risks introducing further anomalies into historical catch estimates. Consequently, it is recommended that retroactive corrections to logbooks be strictly limited to data from 2023 onwards, where both RFV spatial notifications and corresponding logbook data are robust.

17. CCMs should be aware that whilst this proposal aims to properly align catch and effort attribution with Commission chartering arrangements, in doing so it has the potential to create additional challenges. Specifically, the SSP has historically managed logbook data at the trip-level, where each trip is associated with a single vessel, flag, and fleet (where applicable). The proposed change to allow for a vessel flag to change within a trip, decreases the ability to summarise trip-level data by vessel flag. This may not necessarily be an obstacle, but it will require careful consideration of the downstream impacts on catch statistics.

Conclusion

18. The current reliance on purely temporal parameters to attribute catches by chartered vessels fails to reflect the spatial complexities of charter arrangements and individual CMM requirements. This systemic mismatch introduces inaccuracies into catch and effort aggregate tables, artificially inflates chartering CCM purse seine logbook totals through compounding weighting processes, and distorts the data products underpinning management decisions.
19. Integrating logbook positional data into the logbook coverage framework provides a transparent, consistent, and data-driven mechanism to resolve these spatial data gaps. While data limitations restrict the feasibility of comprehensive historical corrections prior to 2023, implementing a targeted spatio-temporal correction from 2023 onwards may restore data integrity to the Commission's core datasets.

Recommendations

20. TCC22 is invited to recommend to the Commission that it:
 - a. **note** the potential data inaccuracies and systemic inflation of chartering CCM catch records caused by the current temporal-only charter data processing method;
 - b. **note** the potential for changes to how some CCMs currently summarise trip-level data by vessel flag;
 - c. **approve** the development and implementation of a spatio-temporal catch attribution pipeline and the associated budget, that integrates logbook spatial data with the Record of Fishing Vessels (RFV) to ensure accurate CCM attribution at the set-level for all future data arising out of notified charter arrangements, and **approve** the necessary enhancements to the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) online system to support this ongoing data integration; and
 - d. **task** the Secretariat and the Scientific Service Provider (SSP) to apply this spatially-integrated correction retroactively to historical data from 2023 onwards, where both RFV and logbook data completeness allow.