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**Operation Antares 2026: Operational Observations on the Implementation of Key WCPFC
Conservation and Management Measures**

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Submitted by Australia

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Overview

Operation Antares is a new multilateral monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) operation in the high seas areas of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Convention Area. Held from 8 to 24 July 2026, the operation assessed compliance with WCPFC Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) through aerial surveillance and boarding and inspection activities. Operation Antares was led by Australia in partnership with Naoero, New Zealand, Solomon Islands and with support from Vanuatu and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency.

The operation's objective is to enhance maritime surveillance within the WCPO and monitor compliance with WCPFC CMMs, contributing to the long-term sustainability of tuna fisheries within the region.

The area of operation focused on fishing activity in high seas areas with one aerial patrol and one surface patrol undertaken. Three high seas boardings and inspections were completed under the WCPFC High Seas Boarding and Inspection (HSBI) Scheme (CMM 2025-07). Particular attention was given to WCPFC measures that have recently been updated or are currently under review, including those relating to sea turtles and seabirds. The vessels inspected were also operating under the Convention for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) with Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) catch on board. Due to the presence of SBT the respective HSBI reports were forwarded to the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) in accordance with the CCSBT MCS information collection and sharing Compliance Policy Guideline 4.

Operation Antares also provided an opportunity to consider elements of the Crew Labour Standards Measure (CMM 2024-04) and collect operational insights that may assist the ongoing work of the WCPFC High Seas Boarding and Inspection Working Group.

This paper presents observations from the HSBI and identifies areas where additional clarification of certain CMM provisions may support more consistent interpretation, application and compliance assessments. The observations are provided for the consideration of TCC and do not represent findings regarding the compliance status of any vessel inspected.

Observations

Sea turtles CMM 2018-04

Authorised Inspectors reviewed longline vessel compliance with CMM 2018-04 for sea turtle mitigation requirements, including sea turtle handling equipment, interaction reporting, hook type, bait type and fishing methods.

Paragraph 6 requires longline vessels to carry and use line cutters and de-hookers and, "where appropriate", dip nets. While the presence of line cutters and de-hookers can be readily verified during a HSBI, the phrase "where appropriate" introduces a degree of subjectivity regarding the applicability of the dip-net requirement.



Figure 1 Dip-net

Paragraph 7 (a-d) establishes mitigation and interaction reporting requirements for longline vessels that are operating in a shallow-set manner.

The measure provides a general description of shallow-set fisheries as those in which the majority of hooks fish at depths shallower than 100 metres. However, paragraph 7(c) requires CCMs to establish and enforce their own operational definitions of shallow-set fisheries, while paragraph 7(b) provides exemptions for certain shallow-set fisheries based on Scientific Committee determinations (SC5, 2010).

Additionally, information that may assist in determining whether a vessel is operating in a shallow-set manner is captured through voluntary reporting fields and is not required to be recorded in vessel log sheets. As a result, information that could assist inspectors in applying the general description of a shallow-set fishery is not consistently available during a HSBI.

Seabirds CMM 2025-05

Authorised Inspectors reviewed compliance with seabird mitigation requirements, including night setting, branch line weighting arrangements and associated gear and reporting requirements.

Paragraph 1 establishes a set-level obligation requiring vessels to employ at least two of the three prescribed mitigation measures on each set. Where a vessel was actively setting gear at the time of boarding, Authorised Inspectors were able to directly verify the mitigation measures being used.

Where a vessel was not actively setting gear, Authorised Inspectors assess compliance through the mitigation equipment carried onboard and discussions with the vessel master regarding the mitigation measures used during previous sets.

During this operation, Authorised Inspectors also observed that mitigation measures were being recorded on a set-by-set basis in the vessel logbooks, providing additional information on the mitigation measures employed.

While paragraph 1 creates a set-level obligation, there is no corresponding set-level declaration or reporting requirement. As a result, information on the mitigation measures used for individual sets may not be consistently available to Authorised Inspectors during HSBI activities.

Paragraph 4 prescribes night-setting requirements. Where a vessel was not actively setting gear at the time of boarding, Authorised Inspectors assessed the use of night setting through discussions with the vessel master and examination of onboard records relating to individual sets. Authorised Inspectors observed that, while information on the commencement of individual sets is available, there is no corresponding requirement to record the completion time of those sets. As a result, onboard records may not provide sufficient set-level information to readily determine whether individual sets were conducted entirely between nautical dusk and nautical dawn.

This operation highlighted two related information gaps affecting set-level verification of night setting. First, where vessel masters advise that night setting was used, there is no set-level declaration identifying which individual sets relied on night setting. Second, while the commencement time of individual sets is recorded, there is no corresponding requirement to record set completion times. Together, these limitations reduce the set-level information available to inspectors when determining whether individual sets satisfied the night-setting requirement.

Assessments of whether setting activity occurred entirely during the prescribed hours of darkness, i.e., compliant with night setting, therefore relied on the interpretation of additional information sources.

Paragraph 5 prescribes branch line weighting requirements. Authorised Inspectors observed various branch line configurations, including the use of multiple weights and LED light devices.

Paragraph 5 provides prescribed weight thresholds but does not define what constitutes a "weight". Ambiguity also exists as to whether multiple weighted components may be combined to achieve the prescribed weight, or whether LED light devices may be considered part of the weighting configuration. The measure does not specify any physical characteristics, density, or sink-rate performance associated with the weighting requirement. An LED light, with air pocket and a liquid battery pack, may weigh within the prescribed weight thresholds but may not have the same negative buoyancy as a solid lead weight. This could result in these LED configurations not achieving an equivalent sink rate to standard weights.

As a result, the branch line configurations observed during this operation may be subject to differing interpretations when assessing compliance with the prescribed weighting requirements. Inspectors, vessel operators and flag States may therefore reach different conclusions as to whether particular configurations satisfy the requirement.



Figure 2 a, LED lights



2b: LED light used with 10-12g weights

The observations arising from Operation Antares 2026 demonstrate how HSBIs can provide insights into the practical assessment of WCPFC CMMs at sea. The operation highlighted a number of provisions where compliance assessments may be influenced by ambiguity, information gaps, or differing interpretations. In particular, the observations identified instances where inspectors may have limited set-level information available to determine applicable requirements, or where the text of a measure may support more than one interpretation when assessing compliance.

These observations are offered to support future discussions within TCC and ongoing efforts to ensure that CMM requirements can be applied and assessed consistently during HSBI activities.

Australia welcomes further consideration of these observations by TCC.