NORTHERN COMMITTEE

RESUMED MEETING OF THE TWENTY-SECOND REGULAR SESSION (NC22-2)

10:00 am – 14:00 pm (Pohnpei Time), 11 November 2026

Online

Australia submission to the Resumed NC22 meeting regarding Pacific bluefin tuna bycatch limits

WCPFC-NC22(2)-2026-DP03

4 November 2026

Submitted by Australia

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Recommendation

- **Note** the increased bycatch of Pacific bluefin tuna in Australia's longline tuna fishery resulting from stock rebuilding, specifically the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF).
- **Recommend** amending paragraph 4 of CMM 2024-01 as follows:

  " 4. CCMs with a base line catch (2002-2004 average annual level) of 10 tons or less of Pacific bluefin tuna 30 kg or larger may increase their catch as long as it does not exceed 10 metric tons per year. The catch limit of Pacific bluefin tuna 30 kg or larger for New Zealand and Australia shall be 200 metric tonnes per year each ~~and for Australia 40 metric tonnes per year~~, taking into account their nature as bycatch fisheries conducted in their waters in the Southern hemisphere.[~~1~~]

  ~~Footnote 1: New Zealand and Australia may carry forward up to 35 tonnes per year and 10 tonnes per year, respectively, from 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 to 2023 and 2024. This special arrangement does not create any precedent in future management.~~

Key points

- As flagged in Australia's submission to the JWG11 meeting (IATTC-NC-JWG11-2026-00 Att D) and reiterated at the resumed JWG11 (IATTC-NC-JWG11(2)-2026-00, para 22), Australia does not target Pacific bluefin tuna, however, has seen a very significant increase in incidental catch of this stock by vessels targeting other highly migratory stocks (primarily vessels targeting yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna and swordfish, with some take associated with southern bluefin tuna).
  - Australia's catch of Pacific bluefin tuna was around 0-5t consistently for many years, increased to ~27t in 2023 and 2024 and now 44t in 2025. Provisional catch figures and projections suggest 2026 catch will be around 72t.
- Australia recalls the JWG co-chair's request that "any CCM with significant bycatch should request their preferred (bycatch) catch limit with written justification" to the NC Chair ahead of the resumed NC-22 meeting (IATTC-NC-JWG11(2)-2026-00, para 25).
- Australia has reviewed effort patterns and catch rates, as well as consulted industry, to ascertain if any of this increase could be attributed to a change in fleet behaviour or shift in targeting patterns.
  - There has been an overall decrease in effort (measured by hooks) in Australian eastern longline effort since its peak in the mid-1990s, however effort in this fishery is variable and has increased in recent years (from a low point in 2021) – see Figure 1.
  - Despite variable effort, nominal CPUE for Pacific bluefin tuna in the ETBF was stable and very low until 2021. Since then we have seen a very significant increase in CPUE – see Figure 2.
  - Data indicates that while there has been an increase in southern bluefin targeting in the ETBF, this is occurring in southern waters (from Ulladulla), whilst Pacific bluefin catch is dispersed throughout the entire fishery area[1].

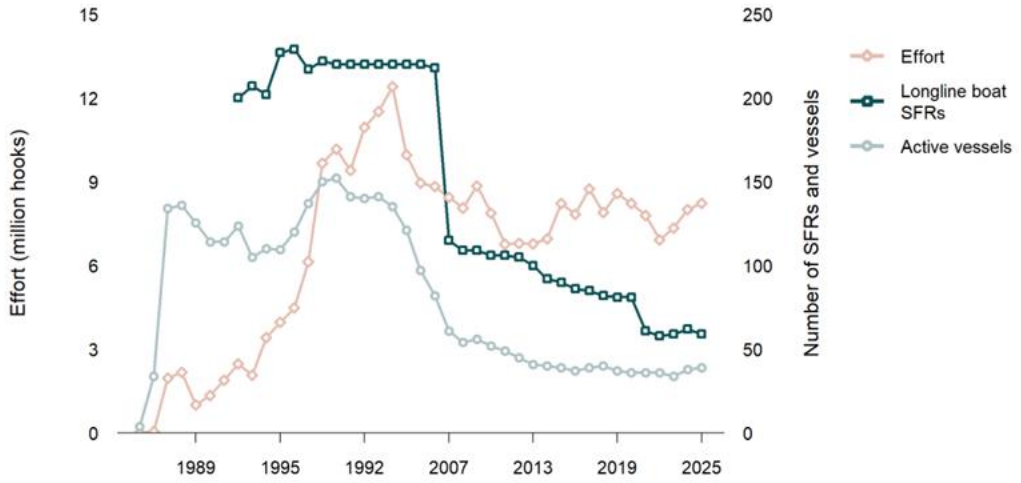
[1] Note that spatial data is provided by individual vessels and hence cannot be released publicly.

- Industry has confirmed that there has not been any shift towards targeting of Pacific bluefin tuna, nor is there interest in developing a targeted fishery for this stock.

Based on this information, **Australia reaffirms its view that the increased bycatch of Pacific bluefin tuna is a direct result of the stock rebuilding (likely influenced by climate factors).**

- In recent years, Australia has put in place additional measures that take effect once Australia's limit is reached requiring vessels to release any Pacific bluefin tuna that are alive at the time of haul.
    - Logbook reporting indicates that this has resulted in an uptick of live release, as well as an increase in discards of dead fish – see Figure 3.
    - The increase in live release indicates that this management measure has some effectiveness in reducing Pacific bluefin tuna mortality, but this is not enough to offset the increasing incidental catch related to increased availability of this stock in Australian waters.
- Australia has consulted New Zealand and we note that the catch and CPUE trajectories that we are seeing in our domestic ETBF longline fleet are similar to those experienced by New Zealand that led to the 2024 adjustment to establish a 200t bycatch limit.
- Australia recognises the concern (most recently expressed at JWG11) regarding open-ended bycatch provisions creating loopholes that allow for uncontrolled exploitation, and the need for all mortality to be accounted for in setting a global TAC (derived from a management procedure). At the same time, we note that there are limited options available to Australia to limit the take of Pacific bluefin tuna without having a disproportionate impact on the fishery and/or simply driving discarding.
    - Note that Australia has comprehensive monitoring of its domestic longline fisheries including 100% e-monitoring installation rate, landing record requirements, ban on high seas transhipment (and generally limited transhipment within our fleet). These measures provide high confidence that Australia can effectively monitor bycatch limits and associated measures (such as mandatory live release triggers).
- Hence, **we request the NC-22 consider amending Australia's bycatch limit to be consistent with New Zealand's limit (i.e. 200t)**.
    - Australia considers this revised limit will appropriately provide for increased bycatch associated with continued stock rebuilding in the coming years.
    - We also consider this will appropriately recognise the functional similarities of our fisheries and will simplify Commission management arrangements.
- Australia is open to further discussions with NC members related to further steps, including earlier triggers for mandatory live release.

Figure 1: Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery – longline fishing effort, number of boat SFRs and active vessels, 1985-2025.



SFR Statutory fishing right.
Source: AFMA

Figure 2: Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery – Pacific bluefin tuna nominal CPUE (kg per 1,000 hooks) 2006-2026. Source: AFMA logbooks.

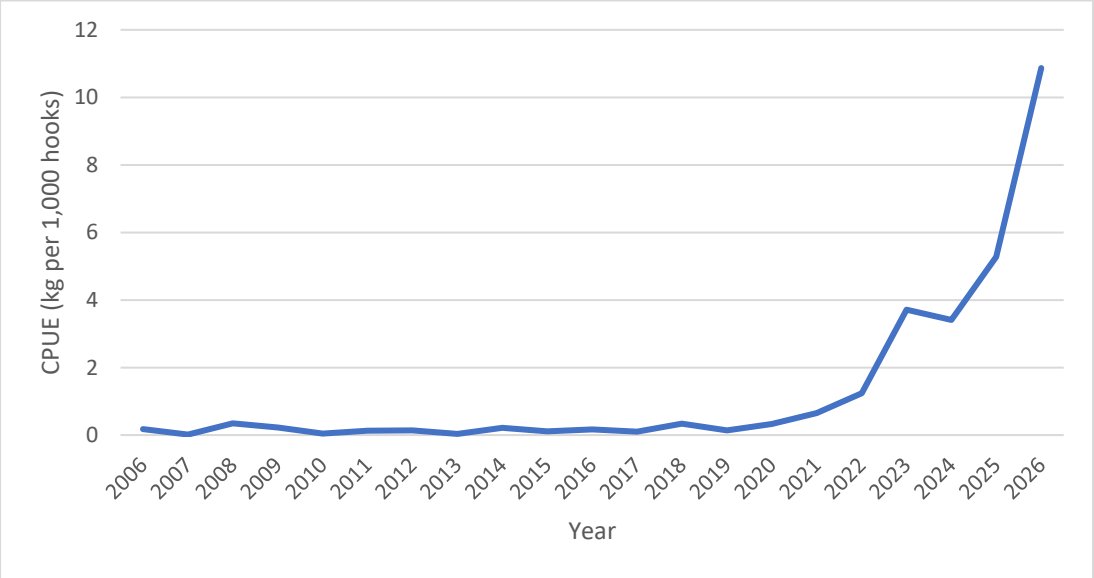
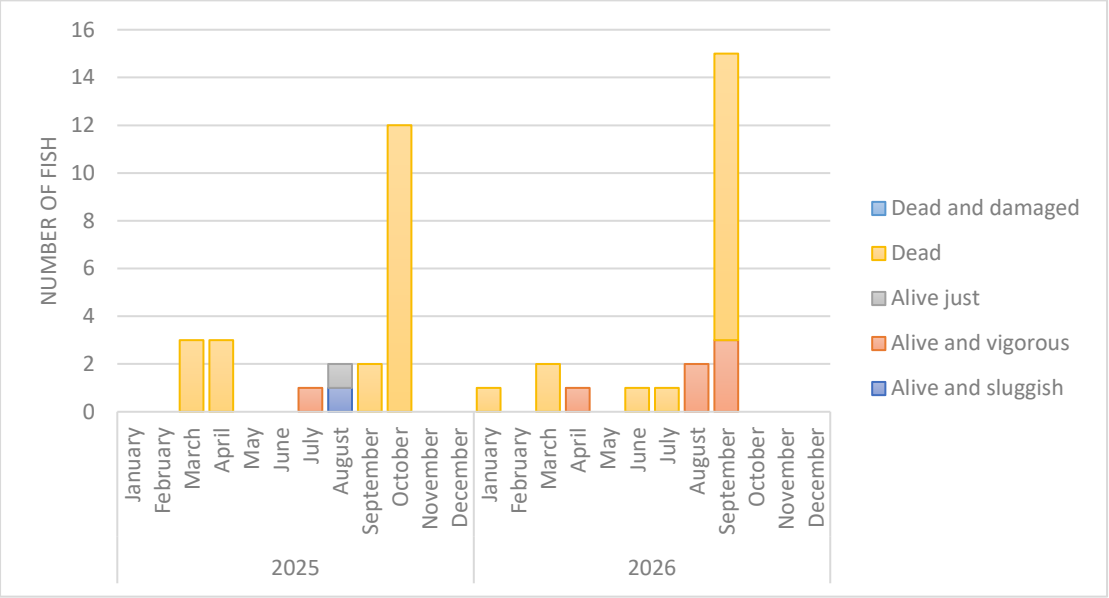



Figure 3: Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery – total number and life status of discarded Pacific bluefin tuna per month in 2025 and 2026. Source: AFMA logbooks