NORTHERN COMMITTEE
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WWF Position Statement

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[1] The World Wide Fund for Nature

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Smart Fishing Initiative

WWF POSITION

9th Regular Session of the Nothern Committee (NC) of the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) September 2-5, 2013

Introduction

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) would like to thank the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee (NC) for the opportunity to attend the 9th Regular Session of the NC (NC9) as an observer and to address the critically important role that it plays in the proper management of the Western Central Pacific Ocean(WCPO) fisheries.

Conservation of these ecologically and economically important fishery resources ultimately depends on the adoption of science based and precautionary management measures for tuna and tuna-like species. This is the greatest challenge that the WCPFC faces, and the greatest responsibility that it must meet.

WWF would like to call on members, participating territories and cooperating non-members of WCPFC to take heed to the issues and recommendations raised at International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the Northern Pacific Oceans (ISC) and from meetings of the other WCPFC Committees.

Reference Points

WWF remains supportive of the work of the WCPFC and subsidiary bodies in pursuing the implementation of Reference Points (RP). WWF encourages NC9 to further endorse and support the adoption of explicit Limit and Target Reference Points (LRP/TRP) for all WCPO fishery stocks under WCPFC authority.

While the uncertainties associated with biomass (B-based) Limit Reference Points make them a less attractive option to some stakeholders, they constitute a critical tool to ensure that stock sustainability is ensured. F-based Limit Reference Points are important and useful, but not as critical as a B-based limit because a B-based limit ensures a biological floor that the fishery cannot go below.

WWF acknowledges the complexity of establishing TRPs, given the multiple factors that go into their consideration. However, while T R Ps require additional consideration of socio-economic considerations, current understanding of the biological and socio-economic conditions does not prevent the implementation of sufficiently precautionary interim TRP at this time. WWF encourages the NC to recommend a precautionary interim TRP. The interim TRP would serve as an advisory benchmark under which a more refined TRP could be established. Most significantly, all the necessary information to implement such a benchmark TRP currently exists.

Harvest Control Rules

In addition to implementation of LRP/TRPs, WWF recommends the NC support fisheries management through pre-agreed management actions, or specifically, Harvest Control Rules (HCR), that trigger management actions when stock status indicators reach pre-defined Reference Points.

At its most basic, an HCR is simply a pre-agreed action, or set of actions, to be taken by a management body that are designed to achieve a medium or long-term Target Reference Point while avoiding reaching a Limit Reference Point. Simple Harvest Control Rules can be described as an "*if, then*" statement. An example of a very simple Harvest Control Rule would be "*if* the fishery stock level falls below the target level, *then* the level of fishing must be reduced by 20%." Managers may also agree in advance what the specific management actions are to reach that 20% reduction in the level of fishing, such as a regional closure or gear restriction.

Implementing Reference Points as part of Harvest Control Rules puts in place clear decision rules which minimize excessive debate and allow managers to act quickly and decisively when the fishery reaches a pre-defined threshold (e.g. Limit or Target Reference Point). Furthermore, Harvest Control Rules lay the foundation for developing well-defined fisheries management plans that are grounded in sound science.

WWF strongly urges the NC to recommend the adoption of limit and target reference points for all species and stocks under its jurisdiction. The adoption of explicitly determined limit and target reference points for at least the two key northern tuna species, namely Pacific Bluefin tuna, and Northern Albacore is an absolute priority for the sustainable management of these resources in the Northern Pacific Ocean. WWF further recommends the development and implementation of Harvest

Control Rules that ensure the transparent and efficient management of stocks in relation to LTRPs.

Northern Stocks

Taking note that ISC reported that the stock of North Pacific bluefin is in extremely poor condition, i.e. overfishing is occurring, the stock is heavily overfished, and its spawning stock biomass has declined by as much as 96%.

WWF maintains strong concerns on rebuilding this ecologically, sociologically, and economically important fishery resource. The NC must recommend that fishing mortality on Pacific bluefin be urgently reduced, especially on juveniles, in order to reduce the risk of recruitment collapse and allow spawning stock to rebuild.

Pacific Bluefin tuna

- **WWF calls on the NC to recommend adoption of a long-term Pacific bluefin recovery plan, candidate limit and target reference points, and harvest control rules that are well-defined, pre-agreed and contain mandatory actions for a determined course of management action in response to changes in indicators of stock status with respect to reference points.**

- **WWF urges the NC to recommend removal of all current exemptions from implementation of revised CMM-2012-06.**

- **WWF recommends the NC to recommend science based and perceptional regional catch limit for Pacific bluefin caught by purse seine to ensure the reduction of juvenile harvesting.**

- **WWF recommends WCPFC to encourage additional research and analysis to ensure proper assessment of the Pacific bluefin caged at farms.**

- **WWF calls on the NC of WCPFC to recommend development of a catch documentation scheme for Pacific bluefin to ensure monitoring and control in the Pacific bluefin catch through traceability.**

North Pacific Albacore

Taking note that ISC indicates that the stock is not being overfished nor is it in an overfished state, but also acknowledging the very important economic value of the North Pacific albacore fishery:

- **WWF urges the NC to recommend adoption of science based reference points and harvest control rules for North Pacific albacore.**

- **WWF recommends that the NC recommend that the total level of fishing mortality for North Pacific albacore tuna in the Northern**

Pacific Ocean not be increased beyond current levels, and that the CCMs shall take necessary measures to ensure that the level of fishing mortality exerted by their vessels fishing for North Pacific albacore tuna is not increased.

North Pacific Blue Sharks

Like silky sharks, blue sharks remain subject to high levels of fishing mortality that current stock assessment trends suggest could be unsustainable. [1] WWF would like to encourage the NC to support additional research and analysis of blue shark populations in the WCPO to ensure that the species is not being adversely impacted in the region. Furthermore, we encourage the NC to promote precautionary measures to reduce fishing mortality on blue sharks. With respect to blue sharks, WWF recommends the NC:

- **Encourage and endorse additional research and analysis of the WCPO blue shark stock as well as some precautionary mitigation measures including to:**
  - **Mandate bycatch best practices consistent with those found in the Compendium of Best Practice of Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) for the of Species Bycatch in Tuna RFMOs;**
  - **Implement the recommendations for Bycatch that were endorsed at Kobe III and adopt an annually updated report card system against these recommendations for all of the WCPFC fisheries;**
  - **Require, through data collected from observer programs and other means, estimation of the number of captures and releases of blue sharks, including the status upon release (dead or alive), and reporting of this information to the WCPFC; and**
  - **Observer programs should also be recording what gear is used including in longline activities the use of wire traces and any multi- monofilament traces in order to avoid bite-off by sharks.**
- **Encourage the development of reference points for non-target species, including blue sharks, as envisaged under Articles 5 and 10 of the WCPF Convention.**
- **Ensure the implementation requirements for CITES listed sharks are fully understood and planned for in preparation for CITES Parties needing to make Non-detriment (Sustainability) and legal**

[1] Shelley C. Clarke , Shelton J. Harley, Simon D. Hoyle, Joel S. Rice. 2013. Population Trends in Pacific Oceanic Sharks and the Utility of Regulations on Shark Finning. Conservation Biology, Volume 27, Issue , pages 197–209, February.

findings in order to issue Export permits for trade in these species by September 2014.

Regional Observer Program

Information collected as part of an appropriate observer programme is critically important to the proper management of a fishery. Data collected by observers plays a central role in informing fisheries scientists on everything ranging from stock assessments to non-target species impacts. Furthermore, observers play an indispensable role in monitoring and enforcing very important conservation and management measures in the WCPO. Consequently, observer coverage must be considered a top priority and greater support must be provided to the relevant authority to see that the capacity of the Regional Observer Programme (ROP) is strengthened.

The WCPFC must ensure, through appropriate guidance, that national observer programmes administered under the ROP are fully resourced in terms of human and financial capital as well as governed under appropriate administrative and management structures. Within that consideration, the NC should promote and support analysis that considers and presents not only a cost-benefit analysis of the observer programme in the context of proper management, but also different funding models that CCMs could consider for ensuring proper administration and management of the observer program at a national level. In any event, more attention must be given to the development and full funding of minimum standards that ensure a national programme can perform to ROP standards, including such efforts as annual reviews of the national programs under pre-agreed performance standards.

WWF continues to maintain significant concerns regarding the independence of onboard observers from the perspective of data integrity. The independence and the security of the observer must be paramount to ensure data integrity. Therefore, WWF recommends that any observer funding model considered must avoid even the perception of conflict of interest. This means establishing a 3rd party payment system that insulates the observer from direct payment by the vessel owner or operator, which constitutes an unequivocal financial conflict of interest. WWF suggests that the NC support efforts to carefully research funding models that ensure that observer providers can provide timely and secure payments to observers without having those payments made directly to the observer by the vessel owner or operator as well as measures to ensure the independence of observers as part of the proposed funding model analysis.

WWF generally supports current efforts throughout the WCPO in pursuit of Electronic Monitoring (EM). Other fisheries around the world have demonstrated varying levels of success using EM in limited circumstances, depending on the goal of the observation and data collection program. Therefore, each application of EM is contextual and must be subject to thorough analysis, comprehensive testing, and careful monitoring to ensure the technology and program is functioning as designed.

WWF would like to acknowledge the important role that EM could potentially play in ensuring observer coverage throughout the WCPFC CA, possibly even at a reduced cost, but noting that there will always be a need for human observers to perform certain analytical tasks that a camera, sensor, or computer simply cannot accomplish. WWF recommends that the NC support development of a peer review process for the various EM programs in progress or currently planned for implementation in the WCPO.

With respect to the ROP, the NC should recommend:

- **Further implementation of a binding, consistent, and consolidated set of standards for the ROP;**
- **Developing a cost-benefit analysis of the observer programme in the context of proper management, including an analysis of different funding models;**
    - **Reconstituting the Data Consultative Committee (DCC) to address current data issues in the ROP, including consideration of:**
    - **Revisions of data fields for non-target species to include detailed entries for seabirds, turtles, and sharks, broken out by species, in all observer reporting submissions; and**
- **Developing and implementing a more comprehensive analysis and design plan for spatially and temporally representative observer coverage of each fishery operating in the WCPFC CA., including thorough consideration and assessment of EM as a component of full observer coverage.**

Our Smart Fishing Vision and Goals:

Vision: The world's oceans are healthy, well-managed and full of life, providing valuable resources for the welfare of humanity.

2020 Goals: The responsible management and trade of four key fishery populations results in recovering and resilient marine eco-systems, improved livelihoods for coastal communities and strengthened food security for the Planet.

Why we are here
To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

panda.org

For more information

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