



TRAFFIC[®]

the wildlife trade monitoring network

WWF – TRAFFIC STATEMENT TO WCPFC – 7 Regular Session
Honolulu, Hawaii, 6 – 10 December 2010

Introduction

Recognizing that the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) is now in its seventh year of existence, WWF and TRAFFIC believe that the time for significant action is urgently overdue in collectively agreeing to and implementing conservation and management measures for the sustainable exploitation of the Pacific's tuna resources and associated bycatch.

WWF and TRAFFIC recognize and applaud the significant efforts that the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) have instigated with regard to management reform within their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ's). WWF and TRAFFIC support many of these initiatives that begin the journey toward sustainable tuna resources within the region. However, the concern over the decline in bigeye tuna in particular is not yet fully reflected in the management decisions that have been taken or translated into fishing behavior that can be considered responsible or sustainable for this species. The WCPFC will be judged as to its competency on the basic facts of whether it has enacted in a timely manner, meaningful management measures that contain fishing effort within sustainable limits. While some believe seven years is a short time for a management regime to show achievement we believe the honeymoon is over, the WCPFC needs to show measurable achievements and the performance review needs to be prioritized to help guide positive action for the future.

WWF and TRAFFIC consider that the WCPFC needs to improve its performance to ensure the sustainable management of tuna stocks within its mandate. This means adopting truly precautionary conservation measures that are based on precautionary limit and target reference points for tuna stocks. Furthermore the WCPFC needs to adopt comprehensive and consistent best practices to mitigate bycatch associated with tuna fishing and as a basic requirement not allow for the setting of purse seine nets associated with marine mammals or whale or basking sharks. There are a number of underlying issues that WCPFC needs to address in order to strengthen the platform for effective management of both bycatch and target species, including:

- Mandating the submission of bycatch data by members and co-operating non-members. In the absence of reliable data, and hence in an environment of uncertainty about the

nature and extent of the bycatch problem, a more precautionary approach to management is required.

- Developing science based observer programmes with clearly specified objectives that:
 - validate data submitted;
 - are designed to provide statistically robust estimates of the extent of bycatch by species across the temporal and spatial distribution of the fleet; and
 - allow for observers to play a role in monitoring the implementation of bycatch mitigation measures.
- Adopting ecological risk assessment as a means to ensure that available scientific and management resources are targeted to the most vulnerable species.
- Implementing effective means of monitoring compliance with all aspects of Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) by individual members.
- Introducing a system of stringent penalties for failure to comply with those CMMs, in particular, failure to comply with data submission (bycatch and target species) requirements.

Bigeye and Yellowfin tuna

The purse seine fishery catch of bigeye (BET) and yellowfin (YFT) tuna is comprised mainly of juveniles of these species, well below both the size of first reproduction and that which would maximize yield per recruit. As a result, the impacts of associated purse seine sets on BET and YFT are out of proportion with catches (Molony, 2007). Associated purse seine sets are estimated to have been responsible for reducing the total biomass of BET by more than 20% and of YFT by more than 10% (Molony 2007). Harley *et al.* (2010) conclude that the purse seine and other surface fisheries have an equal or greater impact on the BET biomass than longline fisheries and that the purse seine and Philippines/Indonesian domestic fisheries also have a substantial impact on region 3 and to a lesser extent region 4.

The WCPFC has recognized that a reduction in the purse seine catch of juvenile BET and YFT is required to reduce the impact of the fishery on these stocks. This is reflected in CMM 2008-01, but its effectiveness is questionable at best.

In addition to the WCPFC measures, PNA members recognized in 2009 the “serious impact on the bigeye stock from fishing by distant water longliners and purse seiners in the high seas and that the high seas continue to provide a safe haven for IUU fishing”. The PNA Group subsequently adopted the Koror Declaration in February 2010, which, expressing concern about the status of BET and YFT and the increasing growth of capacity and effort in the region, closed those additional high seas areas (PNA, 2010).

Bigeye tuna

In 2010, the Scientific Committee of the WCPFC:

- concluded that “overfishing is occurring in the bigeye stock but possibly at a lower level than previously estimated” and “approaching an overfished state, if it is not already slightly overfished”;
- recent catches are well above the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) level, and the Committee concluded that current catch levels are unlikely to be sustainable in the longer term even the recent [high] levels of recruitment estimated for the last decade.
- noted “the continued high fishing mortality on juvenile bigeye due to associated purse seine sets and the fisheries of Indonesia and the Philippines”;
- recommended that a 29% reduction in fishing mortality from the average levels for 2005 – 2008 (equivalent to a minimum 31% reduction in fishing mortality from the 2004 levels) was required in order to return fishing mortality to MSY levels;
- advised that the management measures for bigeye tuna established in 2008 (for both the purse seine and longline fleets) will not achieve the targeted reduction in fishing mortality.

WWF and TRAFFIC believe that the effort reduction measures in place under the Vessel Day Scheme (VDS), and reflected in CMM 2008-01 are inadequate and that much greater reductions in vessel days are required in order to place BET on the path to sustainability. Further, should fishing effort from the closed high seas areas be transferred to archipelagic waters which are excluded from the CMM, and further East, additional pressure may be placed on BET. WWF and TRAFFIC consider that the BET stock is not within biologically based limits and the management measures in place are considered unlikely to ensure recovery or rebuilding of the stock.

Yellowfin tuna

No new information on the stock status of YFT was presented to Scientific Committee 6 (SC6) and therefore the Committee recommended that the management recommendations from the previous (SC5) be maintained. In 2009 the Scientific Committee:

- advised that the YFT stock is not overfished and that overfishing is not occurring;
- recommended that there be no increase in fishing mortality of YFT in the western equatorial region.

WWF and TRAFFIC support the Scientific Committees recommendation to the Commission for BET in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) to reduce fishing mortality by a minimum of 29% from the average levels for 2005 – 2008.

WWF and TRAFFIC support the Scientific Committees recommendation to the Commission for YFT in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) to limit YFT fishing mortality to its 2001-2004 level.

Reference points

The WCPFC has not adopted formal reference points for any tuna or tuna related species under its management within the Convention area.

In 2009 a special workshop on reference points was held by the WCPFC Scientific Committee's Methods Specialist Working Group. WWF and TRAFFIC understand that it was expected that the Scientific Committee would make recommendations on appropriate provisional limit reference points for the key target species to the WCPFC in 2010. The Commission's decisions on reference points will also take into account the outcomes of the Workshop on Management Objectives to be held in 2010. WWF and TRAFFIC notes, however, that reference points have been under consideration in the WCPFC since 2006 and it appears that this vital process has been delayed yet again for another year. While it is now expected that the Scientific Committee may make recommendations to the Commission in 2011 on appropriate reference points, there can be no certainty that this will not be delayed again or the Commission will formally adopt them. As discussed above, the WCPFC has not adopted formal limit or target reference points.

WWF and TRAFFIC strongly urge the WCPFC to formally adopt target reference points. WWF and TRAFFIC believe that the adoption of explicitly determined limit and target reference points for at least the four key tuna species is an absolute priority for the sustainable management of the resource.

Harvest strategy & Harvest control rules

There are no explicit harvest control rules in the WCPFC. Monitoring of the stocks is based on catch and effort data, length-frequency and tagging data. The current rudimentary harvest strategy employed in the WCPFC does not contain any harvest control rules and as such does not reflect best practice. The primary management action involves limiting fishing effort via an array of input controls such as the PNA's VDS, closure of high seas pockets, FAD closures, and implementation of capacity limits (driven by concerns for BET and YFT).

The Convention for the WCPFC includes default target and limit reference points and the management objective for all target stocks is to maintain stocks at or above MSY-based reference points. The absence of harvest control rules that provide for immediate and effective action to reduce exploitation rates, when and as required, is a serious concern.

While the WCPFC could argue that it is capable of implementing management action in response to scientific advice on stock status (for example BET and YFT), the effectiveness of this action is questionable and this underlines the importance of well defined harvest control rules to ensure timely and adequate management.

WWF and TRAFFIC call on the WCPFC to adopt harvest control rules that are well-defined, pre-agreed and contain mandatory actions for an agreed and determined course of management action in response to changes in indicators of stock status with respect to reference points.

Proposed Participation Fee

WWF and TRAFFIC appreciates the concerns expressed by some member countries regarding ever increasing costs and budget demands associated with tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO) meetings. However, the proposal to introduce a participation or registration fee of US\$500 – 700 per delegate to cost recover observer attendance, particularly Non Government Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), at the Commission and its subsidiary meetings is iniquitous and misguided.

NGOs and CSOs represent, not just their respective organizations, but the entire external general public, providing an insight and voice for the broader community who are also key stakeholders concerned with the sustainable management and utilization of tuna and related marine resources. For many, the people they represent rely upon the sustainability of these resources for their daily livelihoods. In this sense, NGOs and CSOs provide significant benefits for governments, industry, and scientists in terms of education and awareness of resource issues and thus are essential to build trust and confidence within the general community and amongst consumers.

If such a fee were to be introduced, this would result in reduced and restricted participation by many NGOs and CSOs alike, and an immediate eroding effect on the Commissions' current open, transparent and inclusive approach. This would absolutely undermine the trust and confidence that the general community and consumers have in their governments representatives ability to be responsible stewards of the tuna resources.

WWF and TRAFFIC strongly oppose any fee being introduced for the participation of NGOs or CSOs at any meeting concerning this RFMO.

Regional Observer Program (ROP)

There is no current impediment for all support vessels to have 100% observer coverage such as that currently in place on purse seine vessels, while 100% observer coverage for longliners should be phased in. WWF and TRAFFIC suggests the following timetable for a 3-year phase-in of 100% ROP coverage for all fishing vessels:

- 2011 All support vessels (resupply, refueling, reefers) for all high seas fishing have 100% ROP coverage;
- 2011 20% of all longliners (including at least one from each flag state) have an ROP observer on board;
- 2012 50% of all longliners (including more than half of all vessels from each flag state) have an ROP observer on board;
- 2013 100% of all longliners have an ROP observer on board.

WWF and TRAFFIC call for a comprehensive and strong Regional Observer Program with 100% coverage of all fishing vessels (including both catching and support vessels).

Catch Documentation Scheme

WWF and TRAFFIC consider the failure to implement a catch documentation scheme (CDS) as a significant problem. It is time for the WCPFC to take urgent action to address overfishing and to support and enforce that action by introducing a CDS. WWF and TRAFFIC recognize that the introduction of a CDS will pose some challenges to the WCPFC given the nature of tuna fisheries. However, WCPFC needs to ensure that all fish stocks managed by this RFMO are subject to the CDS as a proactive precautionary measure. WWF and TRAFFIC recommend that the WCPFC must:

1. Agree at its December 2010 meeting to adopt a CDS measure for at least the four¹ key tuna species with a date of implementation starting from 1 July 2011;
2. Implement a CDS that requires documentation to accompany all catch harvested, landed, transshipped, traded domestically, exported, processed, imported and re-exported and which relies on electronic documentation. The CDS should not exclude any catches, landings or trade as is common in schemes which are trade based rather than catch document schemes. One only has to look to the lessons learnt by the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) which has switched from a trade based scheme to a CDS due to the trade scheme allowing for substantial over catches by one of its members as a result of the trade scheme not being inclusive of all catches, landings or trade;
3. Ensure that complementary measures are in place to maximize the effectiveness of the CDS by:
 - ensuring that transshipment at sea does not compromise the effectiveness of the CDS;
 - adopting Port State measures (consistent with global agreement) to take effect at the same time as the tuna CDS; and
 - adopting measures that provide for trade-restrictions to be used against flag States with vessels on the IUU list.
4. Acknowledge the need to implement CDS for other species of tunas, billfish and sharks managed by the Commission;
5. Commit to continuous improvement of the CDS by investigating the benefits and feasibility of verification systems such as tagging and the use of biotechnology;
6. Establish a capacity development fund to act as a cost-sharing mechanism to enable for cross subsidising across wealthy and less-wealthy members to ensure effective implementation and administration of the CDS; and
7. Maximize retailer and public access to CDS data through modern online tools.

¹ Bigeye, Yellowfin, skipjack, albacore

Bycatch Conservation Management Measures

WWF and TRAFFIC believe that WCPFC must:

- take immediate management action to avoid bycatch interactions and to mitigate the impact of those interactions;
- task the relevant scientific/ecosystem body to improve bycatch related information and strengthen the long-term management about bycatch levels and mitigation options;
- review and revise management actions on bycatch as information increases; and
- take action to strengthen their capacity to manage and monitor compliance with conservation and management measures.

The recent Kobe II Bycatch workshop held in Australia produced a number of key outcomes including:

- highlighting the need for urgent action and the insufficiency of available information to dictate the need for and underpin immediate management action;
- emphasising that the tuna RFMOs must act to address bycatch across the five key taxonomic groups affected;
- failing to identify best practice bycatch management techniques but instead recommending a set of principles for developing best practice bycatch avoidance and mitigation measures; and
- most significantly recommending the formation of a Joint Tuna RFMO Technical Working Group (TWG) on Bycatch.

The Technical Working Group (TWG) provides a unique opportunity to bring together experts to share the latest available information and develop coherent, consistent and comprehensive measures to minimise and mitigate the impacts of tuna fisheries on bycatch species. However, there is no formal agreement to endorse and support the TWGs establishment and operation, nor a proposed time frame for its work to be completed within. Consequently, and being aware of the need to maintain the momentum on this initiative, a number of environmental NGOs (including WWF and TRAFFIC) have developed a Compendium best practice of Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) for the bycatch species taxonomic groups. Four CMMs (please refer to '*bycatch Conservation and Management Measures*' document) have been prepared, on the basis of the best available scientific advice and taking into account current practice within tuna RFMOs. The CMMs cover the following four taxonomic groups:

- Seabirds
- Sharks
- Sea turtles
- Marine mammals

WCPFC must take responsibility for species bycatch and act immediately. This Compendium provides WCPFC with advice on the best practice, precautionary measures that must be implemented on an interim basis pending the advice of the TWG. These actions can be reviewed and revised to reflect that advice when it becomes available.

WWF and TRAFFIC are calling for these CMMs to enter into force by 1 January in the year following adoption of the CMMs. Further, we call for the endorsement, and urgent establishment of the Joint Tuna RFMO Technical Working Group on Bycatch by the tuna RFMOs. These actions are required to demonstrate the commitment of the WCPFC to addressing bycatch impacts associated with their fisheries.

CONCLUSION

WWF and TRAFFIC call on the Commission to take the hard decisions now to prevent future fisheries collapse. Scientists have been calling for large reductions in BET catch for over a decade. Past performance of the Commission is, at best; slow to respond to such advice. This wavering seriously jeopardises the commercial viability of the BET and YFT fishery in the WCPO into the future. Effective management action must be adopted at this year's Commission meeting. If the Commission doesn't move fast to restore stocks and implement appropriate reference points and harvest strategies, including moving toward rights based management regime, it will directly impact the viability of the region's tuna fisheries, and the economies of developing countries.

References

- Harley, S. Hoyle, S., Williams, P., Hampton, J. and Kleiber, P. (2010). *Stock assessment of Bigeye tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean*. WCPFC-SC6-2010/SA-WP-04
- Molony (2007). *Overview of purse-seine and longline bycatch issues in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean*. Paper prepared for the Inaugural Meeting of the Asia and Pacific Islands Bycatch Consortium, Honolulu, 15–16 February 2007
- PNA (2010b). *Koror declaration committing parties to the Nauru Agreement to joint efforts to increase the economic value and derive greater benefits from the tuna resource*. <http://www.ffa.int/system/files/Signed%20KOROR%20DECLARATION.pdf>
- WCPFC Scientific Committee (2009). *Summary Report, Fifth Regular Session, Scientific Committee*, WCPFC. Port Vila, Vanuatu, 10-21 August 2009