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WWF WCPFC11 Position Statement 2014

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Smart Fishing Initiative

WWF POSITION

11th Regular Session of the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC): Apia, Samoa – December 1-5, 2014

Introduction

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) would like to again thank the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) for the opportunity to attend the 11th Regular Session 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.

WWF once again calls on members of the WCPFC to address the issues and recommendations raised at SC10, TCC10, and WCPFC10 as well as observe the experience of other RFMOs in their own efforts to achieve and maintain improved measures for monitoring and surveillance. WWF wishes to reiterate its position offered in Cairns in December 2013 (WCPFC10) and, taking into account the WCPFC-related meetings held since, the recommendations listed below as well as other documents submitted to the WCPFC for review as Observer Papers.

Reference Points, Harvest Control Rules, and Harvest Strategies

WWF remains supportive of the work of the WCPFC and subsidiary bodies in pursuing the implementation of Reference Points (RP), Harvest Control Rules (HCR), and Harvest Strategies (HS). Consistent with previous WWF position statements and recommendations, WWF encourages the WCPFC11 to develop and implement the adoption of explicit Limit and Target Reference Points (LRP/TRP), HCRs, and HSs for all WCPO fishery stocks under WCPFC authority.

Therefore, WWF welcomes the proposal by Australia for a CMM on establishing a harvest strategy for key tuna species in the WCPO. We support the approach that the draft CMM will seek the Commission's agreement to formally develop a HS approach to fisheries for the major tuna stocks under the Commission's purview with a goal toward achieving individual harvest strategies for specific fisheries developed in accordance with this CMM that, in turn, set out the management actions necessary to achieve defined biological, economic, and social objectives for each fishery. If WCPFC11 takes appropriate action on this CMM, it will provide a sufficient framework for moving forward management in a methodical way to result in valid and effective LTRPs and HCRs.

WWF strongly commends the initiative of the PNA to establish and implement a TRP for the SKJ stock in PNA waters. WWF also supports Japan's development of an alternative CMM for an SKJ TRP

recently presented for review by the WCPFC. Both proposals present valuable perspectives and strong commitments to sustainability and precaution. We encourage a robust discussion about the proposed levels for the TRPs in the different proposals and, upon compromising and selecting a candidate TRP at this meeting, support the application of that TRP throughout the WCPO. Lastly, WWF notes the SC10 and TCC10 support for the analyses of these important management measures as well as their recommendation that WCPFC11 take the results of the papers presented at this meeting into consideration when considering the adoption of TRPs and HCRs for the key target species.

WWF recommends that the WCPFC:

- **Adopt and implement the proposed CMM on Establishing a Harvest Strategy for Key Tuna Species in the WCPO;**
- **Adopt and Implement a CMM consistent with proposed recommendations on a TRP for Skipjack Tuna at a level of $0.50SSB_{F=0,t1-t2}$ or higher;**
- **Support the continued development and implementation of LRPs and TRPs as a priority for proper management of all stocks;**
- **Support interim precautionary TRPs as a benchmark for further consideration by the WCPFC in 2014; and**
- **Support the continued development and implementation of HCRs that ensure the transparent and efficient management of stocks in relation to LRPs and TRPs.**

Sharks

Many shark species in the WCPO remain subject to high levels of fishing mortality that current stock assessment trends suggest could be unsustainable. Sharks play a critical role in the WCPO marine ecosystem as apex predators and indicators of ecosystem health. WWF is concerned with shark conservation and sustainability in the WCPFC region as a whole and considers responsible management, trade, and consumption where shark mortality occurs in all fishing activities, not just in circumstances where tuna fishing is occurring. Therefore, WCPFC must also recognise the needs of coastal States in the WCPFC region to manage their shark populations.

WWF recommends the WCPFC adopt and implement measures proposed during 2013 to ensure that sharks stocks are not adversely impacted in the region, while also ensuring that some key shark species are not being substantially depleted. Therefore, we encourage the WCPFC to adopt precautionary measures to reduce fishing mortality consistent with recommendations made previously by the SC and drawn from the discussion regarding a proposed integrated shark CMM. By way of reference, we again endorse the recommendations contained in sections 4.1 and 4.2 of the paper presented by Dr. Shelley Clarke to the WCPFC in 2013 in addition to measures recommended below.

WWF recommends the WCPFC:

- **Adopt and implement a Comprehensive Shark CMM that includes efforts 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 all sharks and rays, including the status upon release (dead or alive), and reporting of this information to the WCPFC;**
 - **Require, through observers programs, recording what gear is used in longline activities including the use of wire traces and any multi-monofilament traces in order to avoid bite-off by sharks.**

- **Introduce a scheme to document the capture and trade of sharks whereby it allows for traceability through to the final market state; and**
- **Ensure the implementation requirements for CITES listed sharks are fully understood and planned for in preparation for CITES Parties and Non-Parties trading with CITES Parties needing to make Non-detriment (Sustainability) and legal findings in order to issue export permits for trade in these species by September 2014. Where WCPFC members make non-detriment findings for shark species they should share with the WCPFC details of the basis of those findings.**
- **Encourage the development of reference points and management for non-target species, including all shark species, as envisaged under Articles 5 and 10 of the WCPFC Convention.**
- **Encourage CCM's to report all shark catches from domestic fleets operating in territorial and archipelagic waters.**

Tropical Tunas

In December 2013, WCPFC10 adopted yet another measure, CMM 2013-01, in an attempt to address continuing conservation challenges involving bigeye tuna (BET). The WCP-CA bigeye catch for 2013 (158,662 mt) was only slightly lower than in 2012. The provisional purse seine catch estimate for bigeye tuna for 2013 (82,151 mt) was the highest on record. The record high bigeye tuna catch in 2013 coincides with a continuation of high effort levels and elevated bigeye tuna catch rates for all set types. The number of purse seine vessels in the tropical fishery remains at an all-time high (297 vessels) and total effort (in terms of fishing days estimated from logbook data and VMS data) was also highest. Fishing mortality is currently 1.57 times that which will support the maximum sustained yield. As a result, the BET stock is now at 16% of its historic biomass and is *experiencing overfishing and overfished*. Once again, even the most optimistic interpretation of these results may be characterised by the word “failure.”

While WWF maintains that the policy choices made repeatedly by the WCPFC fail to achieve meaningful conservation of BET, we believe that there could be substantial improvements to the understanding of the impact of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) through the aggressive pursuit of improved monitoring, surveillance, and general research involving FADs followed by appropriately targeted limits or management measures. While there are ongoing efforts within the SPC and PNA to pursue greater understanding of FAD dynamics, we believe that the WCPFC should impose measures in support of FAD research aided by monitoring and surveillance mechanisms which could, for instance, improve the understanding of the impacts on species composition resulting from:

- FAD type/size
- Geographic location
- Drift patterns and prevailing currents
- Ocean depth and depth of FAD materials
- Proximity to benthic relief/hydrogeographic features

The WCPFC absolutely must make effective and enforceable reductions of the catch in all sectors to achieve a meaningful conservation impact for BET. Most importantly, whatever measures the WCPFC selects absolutely must be subject to strong monitoring, control, and surveillance measures

WWF recommends that the WCPFC:

- **Establish and support further research and monitoring of FADs.**
- **Engage in an open and transparent deliberative process based on the best available scientific information to determine the level of reductions in BET catch necessary to achieve meaningful BET conservation.**
- **Revise the current Tropical Tunas CMM to achieve substantial reductions in BET mortality.**

Pacific Bluefin Tuna

Technical reports of both the ISC and the IATTC indicate that the North Pacific Bluefin tuna stock is in extremely poor condition. The ISC confirmed that overfishing is occurring, the stock is heavily overfished, and its spawning stock biomass has declined by as much as 96%. This is a clear indicator that the management measures taken both in the Western and Central Pacific and in the Eastern Pacific are proving insufficient to conserve the biological integrity of this stock. The IATTC and WCPFC must assume their share of responsibility.

WWF maintains strong concerns regarding this stock with an aim of restoring and rebuilding this ecologically, sociologically, and economically important fishery resource. The current science strongly indicates that there is only one reproductive cohort that is reaching the end of its life. Additionally, about 90% of the stock fished are young fish that have not yet reproduced. Thus, the continued reproductive success of the entire stock depends on the reproductive success of a single cohort, leaving the stock in a critical situation that may seriously jeopardize recruitment.

If the WCPFC fails to adopt sufficient management measures, the stock will be subject to potential collapse. Should the WCPFC fail to adopt sufficient management measures that are consistent with scientific advice, the fishery could ultimately be subject to more draconian management measures such as extended closed seasons and areas until such time that managers can prepare a rigorous and scientifically defensible recovery plan.

The WCPFC, consistent with the best scientific information, must adopt and implement measures that urgently reduce fishing mortality on Pacific bluefin tuna, especially on juveniles, in order to reduce the risk of recruitment collapse and allow spawning stock to rebuild. If sufficient management measures cannot be agreed, the WCPFC must recommend that fishing should not be allowed to continue on such a depleted stock.

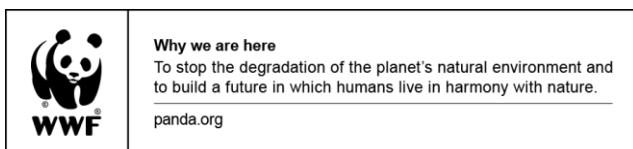
WWF recommends that the WCPFC:

- **Adopt the “ CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURE TO ESTABLISH A MULTI-ANNUAL REBUILDING PLAN FOR PACIFIC BLUEFIN TUNA” agreed by NC10 and recommend to WCPFC11.**
- **Adopt a long-term Pacific bluefin tuna 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 in 2015.**

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.



For more information

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