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**Report to WCPFC on Progress of the Project Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and
Biodiversity Conservation in the ABNJ**

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Background

The Project “Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction” also referred to as the ABNJ Tuna Project, is one of the four projects funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) under the umbrella of the [Common Oceans Program](#), which brings together governments, regional management bodies, civil society, the private sector, academia and industry to work towards ensuring the sustainable use and conservation of ABNJ biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The five-year ABNJ Tuna project, supported by a 27 million USD GEF grant in addition to partners co-financing, is the largest of the Common Oceans projects, with FAO as the implementing agency and working with 19 partners, including the five tuna RFMOs, encompassing 90 different countries as members of the various organizations, sub-regional organizations, environmental community and private sector.

The main guiding principles of the Project, discussed and agreed with partners at the Inception Workshop, help in March 2014, include:

1. Extending the global benefits of the Project to as many members and tuna RFMOs as possible. As this is a global project, we need to ensure that the direct benefits or the lessons learned in one region extend to as many tuna RFMOs as possible
2. Promote the cooperation and exchange of experiences between t-RFMOs. There are few opportunities to share the results of experiences in one RFMO with the other RFMOs
3. Facilitate the implementation of existing initiatives. The Project has no intention to impose anything on the partners, it is simply to assist in, and accelerate existing initiatives that were decided and agreed by the members of RFMOs.
4. Recognition of the need to support developing coastal States in the tuna RFMOs to become more effective members.

The emphasis on sharing experiences between t-RFMO processes links the Project to the spirit of the Kobe process, in serving as a forum for cooperation in the scientific and technical communities of the t-RFMOs, therefore learning from the collective experience and improving the effectiveness of the various processes.

The Project is structured around a hierarchy of three components, each composed of outcomes that will contribute towards the objective of the component, and each outcome being the result of a number of outputs. The basic structure of the project is shown in Figure 1 below.

Project Progress

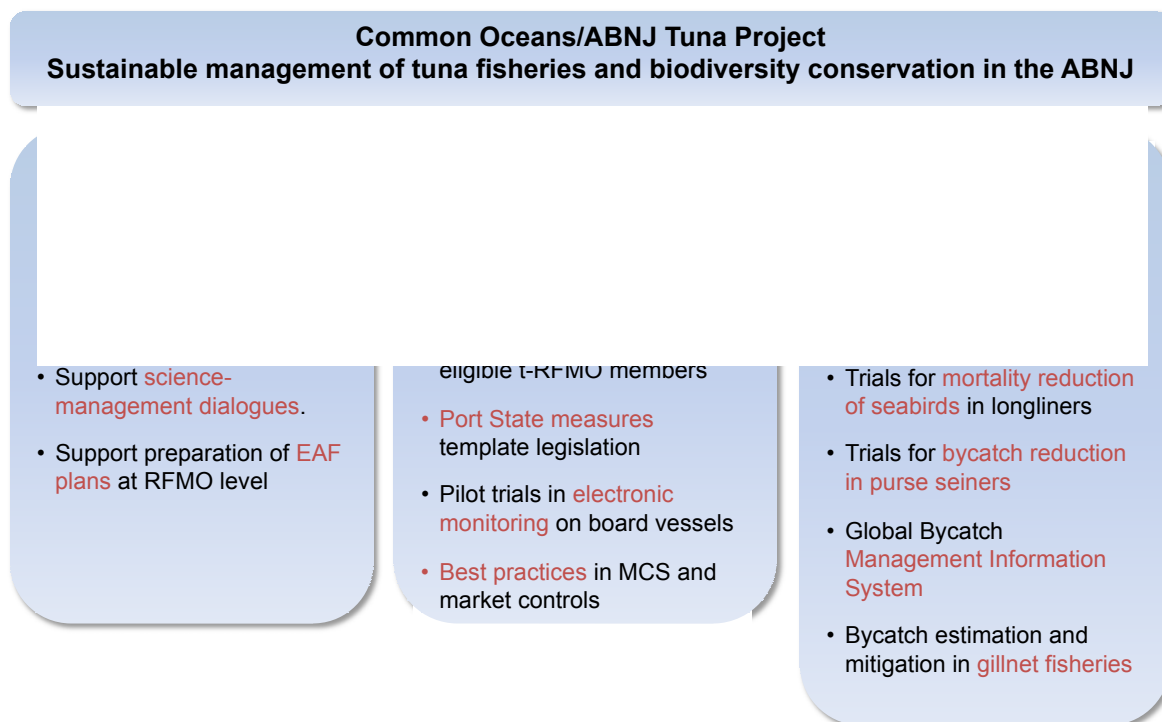
Project Magement Unit and Project Management

The project started on January 15, 2014. The Project Management Unit (PMU) was set up and now consists of the Global Project Coordinator, a Budget and Operations Officer, a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer and an Administrative Assistant.

The Project Inception Workshop ([Report](#)) was held in FAO HQ (Rome, Italy) on March 10-12, 2014 and had representation from 12 project partners including the Executive Secretaries of all five t-RFMOs, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Birdlife International, International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, Govt of Fiji, Fiji Tuna Boat Owners Association, Secretariat of the Pacific Community and Marine Stewardship Council. In addition, representatives from the GEF Secretariat participated in the meeting.

During the Inception Workshop, the participants revised the project outputs to take into account changes in the baseline situation that required a new approach to the activities, or to remove activities that had been implemented using alternative resources. Based on the revised outputs, the overall work plans,

Figure 1. Structure of the ABNJ Tuna Project.



indicators and target values were, or are currently being adjusted and the Annual Work Plan and Budget for the first year of the Project was developed.

As a follow up, the first meeting of the Project Steering Committee ([Report](#)) took place on June 10, 2014, taking advantage of the presence of most project partners in Rome for FAO's Committee on Fisheries. As agreed, the meeting was very short, focusing on reviewing the progress on the various activities as well as agreeing on the Annual Work Plan and Budget for Project Year 1. Potential sources of savings were identified which could fund new activities, in support of achieving the outcomes by addressing specific risks or challenges.

Progress in administrative arrangements with partners

The partnerships established under the Project represent a new modality of operation for FAO, and, therefore, new administrative and contractual arrangements had to be developed. In particular, those partners that were delegated the responsibility of execution of significant portions of the Project, had to establish an Execution Agreement with FAO, following fiduciary assessments when required.

On October 25th 2014 the Execution Agreement with WCPFC was signed for a total of 3,245,500 USD, to cover activities related to the establishment of pan-Pacific shark management plans in cooperation with IATTC, as well as the development of the Global Bycatch Management Information System, in cooperation with SPC.

An Letter of Agreement was signed with IATTC on September 24th 2014 to provide additional support to the preparation of shark management plans on both sides of the Pacific.

Other Agreements have been completed with WWF for the execution of four outputs of the Project, and BirdLife International, and similar Agreements are being prepared with the government of Fiji and ICCAT.

Progress in the implementation of Project activities

Component 1: Promotion of Sustainable Management (including Rights-Based Management) of Tuna Fisheries, in Accordance with an Ecosystem Approach

This component includes a number of activities that would facilitate the incorporation into the management framework of the tuna RFMOs of principles that have been identified as important elements in sustainable management, such as the precautionary approach, and an ecosystem approach to fisheries.

Implementation of the precautionary approach. (Outputs 1.1.1 and 1.1.4)

These two outputs contain activities designed to facilitate the development and adoption of harvest strategies, based on harvest control rules and associated reference points, through a management strategy evaluation process. Output 1.1.1 aims at increasing the familiarity of RFMO members with the elements of the process so that they can participate more effectively in it, while Output 1.1.4 supports the MSE process by facilitating dialogues between scientists and commissioners essential during the development of the MSE.

In the activities related to Output 1.1.1, lead by WWF, the first of the capacity building workshops, designed to assist officials to become more familiar with the process leading to an implementation of the precautionary approach, took place in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on April 22-23, 2014 ([Report](#)) with the participation of 54 participants from 18 countries. An Advisory Board composed of experts on the subject from around the world was set up to provide advice and guidance during the preparation of the material for the workshop. As a result of the workshop, IOTC members adopted a CMM at the next Session of the Commission reinforcing the MSE process.

The next workshop, this time for the eastern Pacific, in collaboration with IATTC, is planned for February 24-27, 2015 in Panama.

The science-management dialogues in the context of the MSE are supported by output 1.1.4. In this respect, the Project supported the ICCAT dialogue (May 24-26, 2014), which was planned already before the beginning of the Project, by supporting the participation of two officials from a developing ICCAT member State.

For IOTC, the first dialogue between science and management took place on May 31st, 2014, in conjunction with the Annual Session of IOTC, with the participation of 106 officials from 31 Member countries, 10 of whom were supported by the Project. These dialogues incorporate all RFMO Members and touch on issues relevant for the implementation of the precautionary approach, and will, in the future, provide a forum for the presentation of the results from the MSE process.

The Project is supporting exchange of officials involved in the MSE process of the various t-RFMOs, to provide a mechanism for sharing of experiences.

The Project is also contemplating the possibility of supporting a meeting of the Kobe Joint WG on Management Strategy Evaluation during the second half of 2015, to bring practitioners around the world to discuss the lessons learned during the first round of work on MSE.

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Integrated Ecosystem Evaluations and Plans prepared for each t-RFMO to support an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) (Output 1.1.5)

The consideration of an ecosystem-based approach in the context of t-RFMOs has been focused mainly on the mitigation of the impacts on biodiversity of the bycatch of non-target species. However, there have been other approaches considered. ICCAT is beginning to discuss the elements of an EAF plan, and possible ways to operationalize. The Project is considering organizing a global Working Group of the relevant technical bodies of all t-RFMOs in the second half of 2015 to discuss common elements on EAF plans. At the same time, it is working with FAO officers to prepare an introductory document that could accompany a presentation of the issue to all t-RFMOs.

Pilot enhanced Rights Based Management system in the Western Pacific Ocean (PNA Vessel Day Scheme) implemented (Output 1.2.1)

The original activity planned for this output was provide an independent assessment and performance review of the PNA Vessel-Day Scheme (VDS). Possible areas for improvement to be identified during the assessment would assist PNA members to determine additional measures that need to be implemented in order to improve upon the current VDS. However, PNA preferred to enter into an arrangement that does not include the Project to conduct the review. During the Inception Workshop, it was suggested that the PMU maintains contacts with PNA to understand the best way to support the current review or the post-review activities.

The Project remains open as to how best to disseminate the lessons from the VDS experience and the review to other areas. In this respect, the Project is also in contact with the Ocean Partnerships Project, executed by the World Bank under the ABNJ Common Oceans Program.

Ensuring continuity of RBM discussions at the t-RFMO-level (Output 1.2.2)

As in the previous case, the original plan was linked to the completion of the VDS review. Since the review, and the possible implementation of the review recommendations, are not involving directly the Project, this activity has been refocused to provide a general background on rights-based management to members of all the t-RFMOs. This activity, lead by WWF, will include workshops on the concept of developing states. Development of a curriculum for this course has taken into account previous experiences of similar initiatives, and included consultation with t-RFMOs to avoid duplication of efforts and contradictory messages. The activities under this Output will be implemented, to the extent possible, in conjunction with Output 1.1.1; For example, the first workshop on rights-based management ([Report](#)) took place on April 24, 2014, in Beruwela, Sri Lanka, back-to-back with the workshop on the implementation of the precautionary approach.

Component 2 – Reducing IUU fishing and improving compliance

Global Best practices for MCS in tuna fisheries prepared and agreed by the five t-RFMOs (Output 2.1.1)

This FAO-led output, with support of all partners, is an effort to harmonize and document best practices for monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) in tuna fisheries (including everything covered by regulations). The current plan of implementation contemplates conducting a study that would analyze the current MCS tools and their implementation in tuna fisheries, and propose a set of best practices. The second stage would include gathering current practitioners of MCS activities, including compliance personnel working in the t-RFMO Secretariats and members, and internationally recognized experts in the field, sharing their experience and reviewing the proposed set of best practices.

The Project has identified a consultant with experience in the compliance processes of the various t-RFMOs and has initiated contacts to assess her availability to prepare the first draft of a document describing best

practices in MCS related to tuna fisheries. This document will be then reviewed and revised as necessary by an expert group before submitting it to the RFMOs for their eventual endorsement.

MCS practitioners IUU reporting capacity is enhanced through training in regional cooperation, coordination, information collection and exchange of 100 MCS professionals (Output 2.1.2)

During the Inception Workshop, it was agreed that the Project would develop proposals that would look at the best ways of exchanging information between compliance personnel, at the t-RFMOs secretariat levels and at the regional level.

This output is closely related to the previous output as the tuna fisheries MCS and compliance officials who are expected to be the main contributors to the formulation of the MCS best practices document to be prepared under output 2.1.1, will then constitute the starting point for a network which should facilitate sharing of experiences in MCS.

Training in a competency-based certification program for MCS officers (Output 2.1.3)

During the Inception Workshop, the partners agreed to explore possibilities to develop a certification program that would benefit compliance officers from developing states in all RFMOs, extending the original plan that was focused on IOTC and WCPFC areas only.

With the help of Prof. Martin Tsamenyi, the Project is working on developing a core curriculum with regional elements for each RFMO to be developed in consultation with compliance personnel of the RFMOs involved, describing possible strategies for delivering the course in each region, and discussing the challenges and opportunities of running the training programme as a University certification course, as opposed to a professional training short course.

Of fundamental importance to this output is the contribution and experience of the FFA on the subject, especially thanks to the recent establishment of a course for MCS practitioners in the University of South Pacific. The Project is in contact with FFA to find the best way to assist in this effort and, at the same time, apply the experience of FFA to the benefit of other regions. Unfortunately, funding available under this output, will not be sufficient to cover the actual implementation of courses for every region and, therefore, there will be a need to seek additional sponsors to conduct these additional courses.

Support to improve compliance by t-RFMO members (Output 1.1.2)

This output is originally listed under the first component, although it is more relevant to the outcomes under the second component and, therefore, is reviewed here. The output is designed to supplement capacity building efforts in the t-RFMOs to improve compliance of Members with t-RFMO rules and all the other international rules applying to fisheries.

During the inception workshop, IOTC presented a proposal based on its Compliance Support Missions by which they assist IOTC developing members to assess their compliance status and needs, and to develop a strategy on how to improve their compliance record, including a description of the institutional responsibilities and a timeline for completion. IOTC also expressed its wish to present a proposal in the future to develop online software to facilitate reporting of compliance issues by the RFMO members.

IOTC presented the first request for support of a Compliance Support Mission in Maldives. ICCAT members have also expressed interest in the concept, with the possibility of conducting joint missions in South Africa, a country that participates in both Commissions.

PSM Agreement legislation drafted for ten coastal developing states (Output 2.1.4)

During the inception Workshop, it was agreed that, rather than developing legislation that would be specific to ten countries in the Indian Ocean, it would be equally effective to develop a template for legislation with alternative formulations to account for country specificities. This work should be completed by the second quarter of 2015, and it will assist countries in implementing the Port State Measures Agreement, once it enters into force, as well as facilitating the implementation of similar PSM Resolutions where appropriate.

CLAV and GR are harmonized to provide a complete record and search tool for tuna vessels authorized to fish in all t-RFMO regions (Output 2.1.5)

By 2007, the Secretariats of the tuna RFMOs had already merged their records of authorized vessels into a single list called the Consolidated List of Authorized Vessels (CLAV), closely related to the Global Vessel Record proposed by FAO, which represents a single, consolidated list of all vessels authorized to fish for tunas by the t-RFMO member states. However, the process of updating the CLAV requires almost continuous communications between the Secretariats as the individual registries are often updated.

The objective of the activity is to facilitate the work initiated by the t-RFMOs by providing automatic procedures to send information on the updates of the individual registries directly to a central database, for now located with IOTC, but accessible through the common RFMO website www.tuna-org.org.

An IT-Expert, Fabio Fiorellato, was recruited to set-up procedures at each tuna-RFMO Secretariat to allow for automatic updates of the CLAV database. The IT work is about to be finalized and it is expected that the CLAV database will be fully operational and ready for deployment by the end of 2014.

Another part of the work supported by the Project is to maintain the CLAV database during the first six months of implementation, including identification of inconsistencies in the vessels records, including potential duplicate entries and promote exchange between tuna-RFMOs and its members to address the issues identified. This will improve the quality of the information contained in the CLAV.

Pilot trials of electronic observer systems aboard tuna longline vessels in Fiji (Output 2.2.1) and aboard tuna purse seine vessels in Ghana with lessons learned and best practices disseminated to all t-RFMOs for upscaling (Output 2.2.2)

These two outputs aim at demonstrating how electronic monitoring systems can expand the ability of countries to monitor the activities of their own fleets. The purpose is not to demonstrate the feasibility of the equipment, which has been proven already on these types of vessels, but to develop a process by which the countries can reinforce their compliance and enforcement capabilities using the equipment. In both locations, the initiative counts on the enthusiastic support of the private sector, a key element for its success.

The first output, to be executed by the Government of Fiji in collaboration with the Fiji Tuna Boat Owners Association (FTBOA), focuses on the use of electronic monitoring systems for MCS purposes to verify compliance and to improve on the estimation of catch by species (including bycatch species). The Government of Fiji and FTBOA indicated that they are ready to start the work including assigning staff to the analyses of the data obtained through the activity. Financial arrangements are about to be initiated to complete the procurement and then start the activities.

This output in Ghana will be led by WWF and be executed in collaboration with the Government of Ghana and the private sector. The Government of Ghana reaffirmed its strong commitment to this output during recent meetings. A team of the partners involved in this output travelled to Ghana last May to discuss activities and agree on the institutional set-up of the output. A National Steering Committee has been put in place to improve dialogue on compliance, and the procurement process is being initiated.

Integrated MCS system in FFA (Output 2.2.3)

The objective of this activity is to increase capability to conduct fisheries intelligence analyses. This will increase the ability to complement and better inform, primarily, MCS operational planning, but also science and resource management. This capability becomes increasingly important in situations where MCS resources are limited as is the case in the FFA region.

A technical study will map out how the technical expertise and MCS data / information available at FFA and WCPFC can be integrated to allow coupling of GIS technology into the existing FFA data system. The FFA will take the technical lead in the development of the FFA MCS Information Management System (IMS) and preparation of intelligence reports/threat assessments. WCPFC will be responsible for provision of data.

Best practices on Traceability / CDS systems developed through assessments of tuna fishery supply chains (Output 2.2.4)

This output aims at proposing options for objectives, traceability standards and best practices for CDS systems, specifically applicable to the tuna industry. The creation of a knowledge base will enhance and facilitate the exchange of experiences amongst t-RFMOs and other trade entities, leading to improved CDS standards.

The field work associated with this output, primarily aiming to assess industrial tuna fishing operations, processing and artisanal fisheries dimensions of the global tuna industry from a traceability perspective, has been almost completed. The final deliverable will be a report proposing best practices for current and future tuna CDS systems to ensure that they are effective in preventing the access of IUU products into the main supply chains.

Electronic Bluefin tuna catch document system (e-BCD) Output 2.2.4 (b)

During the inception meeting, ICCAT presented a request to the partners for funding the extension of an electronic catch documentation scheme for Bluefin tuna (eBCD). The scheme would be the first of its kind in tuna fisheries, and, if funding were provided, ICCAT would share the final product with other partners and would share the experience and lessons learnt in the implementation of the system.

The proposal received ample support from other partners who recognized that an electronic catch documentation scheme would address some of the existing concerns about the effectiveness of paper-based systems. Partners emphasized the need to ensure that the system would be flexible enough to allow customization to different fisheries if so required.

The activities under this output have been agreed with ICCAT and are currently under review by GEF Secretariat in order to get donor support.

Component 3 – Reducing ecosystem impacts of tuna fishing

Harmonized and integrated bycatch data collection on sharks from WCPFC and IATTC regions, including a t-RFMO shark data inventory; and data improvement field studies including tagging (Output 3.1.1) and an assessment methods catalogue prepared for one ocean basin with results made available globally; four additional species assessments (including species risk assessments); and results used for priority setting and development of robust pan-Pacific Conservation and Management Measures (Output 3.1.2)

The work to be carried out under these two outputs will develop a practical and consistent approach to monitoring the status of sharks caught by ABNJ tuna fisheries. It will focus on identifying the data deficiencies which inhibit management and propose strategies to obtain more data through field studies and better information return from fisheries. An assessment methods catalogue will be prepared for one ocean basin with results made available globally. Four additional species assessments (including species risk

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assessments) will provide information for priority setting and development of robust pan-Pacific Conservation and Management Measures. Additional details on the work plan can be found at <https://www.wcpfc.int/node/19021>

WCPFC has recruited Shelley Clarke to join the Secretariat staff as a full-time coordinator for the ABNJ shark and bycatch work.

Development of a global Bycatch Management and Information System (BMIS) (Output 3.1.3)

This component will collate, catalyze and disseminate new information that will direct effective management to mitigate impacts on bycatch species including sharks, seabirds, sea turtles and cetaceans. The global BMIS aims to reduce technical uncertainties across a range of stakeholders, allowing t-RFMO discussions to focus on management issues such as cost and feasibility. This is expected to lead to an increase in the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ. This output encompasses mitigation-themed tasks for all bycatch (sharks, seabirds sea turtles and cetaceans), with additional data improvement and assessment work for non-sharks in order to supplement the shark-specific work in Outputs 3.1.1 and 3.1.2). Additional details on the work plan can be found at <https://www.wcpfc.int/node/19021>.

With the recent signature of the execution agreement between FAO and WCPFC (25 October 2014) these activities are now underway.

Longline sea trials in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans demonstrate the effectiveness of seabird mitigation measures by two different fleets (Output 3.2.1)

This output will conduct sea trials of mitigation measures to reduce incidental mortality of seabirds.

In preparation for the sea trials, BirdLife is undertaking liaison activities with Korean stakeholders. On October, 2014, a one-day Workshop on effective Seabird Bycatch Mitigation in Korean Tuna Fisheries was organized in close collaboration with the Korean National Fisheries Research and Development Institute and the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries.

A [Workshop](#) on approaches for measuring and monitoring the effectiveness of seabird conservation measures in Southern Bluefin Tuna longline fisheries was held in collaboration with with CCSBT from November 04-06, in Tokyo, Japan.

Purse seine sea trials in one ocean basin demonstrate the effectiveness of small tuna/shark mitigation measures and results disseminated to other ocean regions (Output 3.2.2)

This output will be implemented by ISSF, under the Execution Agreement with WWF, and includes incremental research cruises in the Western Central Pacific and Indian Ocean, followed by skipper workshops, and a final workshop to communicate results to all t-RFMOs.

Also related to the objectives of this component, although originally listed under Component 1, is **Output 1.1.3**, aiming at **filling bycatch and catch data gaps in the northern Indian Ocean tuna-directed driftnet fisheries through engagement of fishing communities** and civil society organizations using co-management approaches.

This output will be led by WWF in close collaboration with IOTC, who will assist as necessary in the formulation of the data collection plan. It is mainly aiming at obtaining estimates of catch by species (include bycatch species) in the gillnet fisheries of the northern Indian Ocean through placement of observers. Data and results will be shared directly with the IOTC Scientific Committee.

Following the completion of the Execution Agreement between WWF and FAO, WWF has concluded the necessary arrangements to sign a contract with WWF-Pakistan office that will allow activities to be initiated immediately. The currently planned activities under this output include work with the fishing community to raise awareness of the damage that gillnets can cause to the environment.