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PROGRESS OF THE PROJECT SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF TUNA FISHERIES AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE ABNJ

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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 Common Oceans/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 project started in 2014 and is supported by a 27 million USD GEF grant in addition to partners co-financing. It is the largest of the Common Oceans projects, with FAO as the implementing agency and working with a wide range of 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.

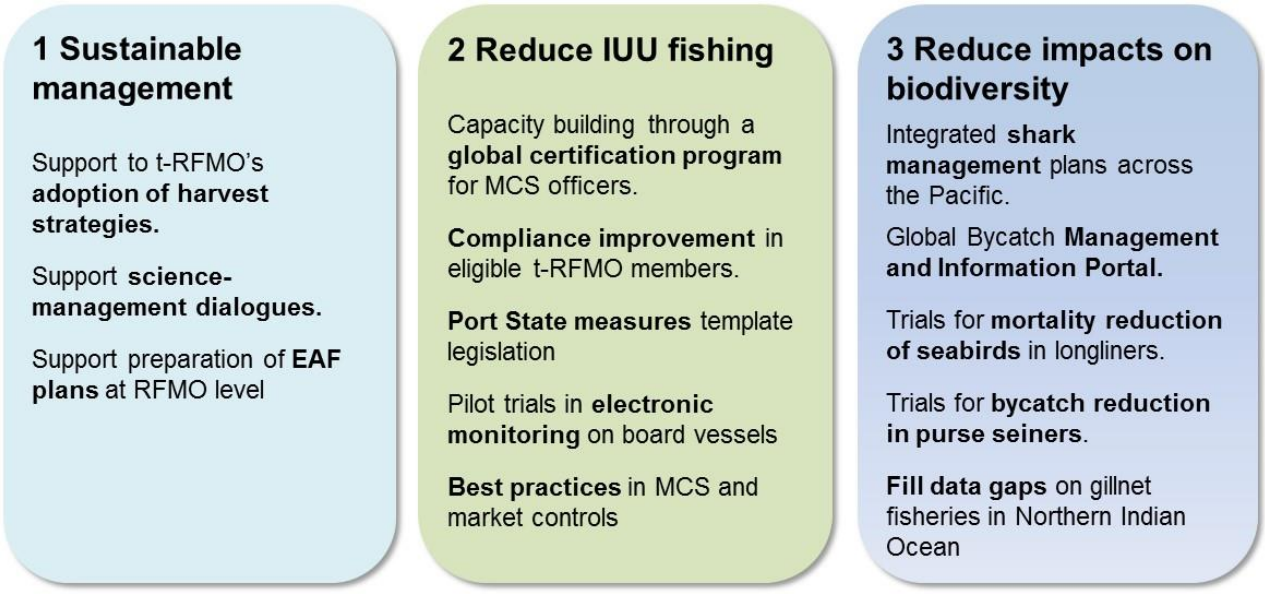

Figure 1. *Structure of the Common Oceans/ABNJ Tuna Project*

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 above.

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.

Project Progress

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, and adoption of harvest strategies

This is probably the most transformational of all activities under the Project, bringing a new level of cooperation and dialogue between science and management. These activities aim to change the way of using science in the decision making process, but need the managers to lead the process.

However, often managers are not familiar with Management Strategy Evaluation and Management Procedure/Harvest Control Rule, which is why capacity building as well as better dialogue between managers and scientists are needed. This is following a two-pronged approach with

- Capacity building workshops led by WWF for officials from t-RFMO member countries are helping to increase the familiarity and confidence with the process of Management Strategy Evaluation (first workshops held in Sri Lanka for officials of IOTC countries in 2014, and in Panamá for IATTC countries in 2015).
- Support to the science-management dialogues and to the scientific processes in the four tuna RFMOs that have not yet adopted a harvest strategy (led by FAO). Support was provided for meetings or meeting participants in WCPFC, IOTC and IATTC.

The Project is also supporting the collaboration between t-RFMOs and their memberships, and would like to try to revive the KOBE Process, in particular in relation to Management Strategy Evaluation. There have been discussions with the scientific community who requested support for a meeting of the global Joint Working Group on Management Strategy Evaluation.

Support to implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries

The Project is promoting and supporting the preparation of long-term plans for operationalizing the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) in each of the t-RFMO, encouraging consideration of the impacts of fishing activities. Not all t-RFMOs are at a similar level of development of such plans, and ICCAT was considering to invite a global meeting of technical people involved in the development of EAF plans from all t-RFMOs

Rights Based Management work

No VDS review is being conducted through the Project as originally foreseen as the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) has already done a comprehensive review. The Project will however participate to the dissemination of the review and of the lessons from the VDS experience in the Pacific, in cooperation with the Ocean Partnerships Project from World Bank, under the Common Oceans Program.

Component 2 – Reducing IUU fishing and improving compliance

Addressing IUU fishing is supported through a number of strategies. To a large extent, these are based on empowering officials from t-RFMO member countries through capacity building of enforcement and compliance officers by establishing, for the first time in the world, a certification-based training program.

MCS best Practices

Under the Project, a compilation of Global Best Practices for MCS in tuna fisheries will be developed by ISSF to facilitate adoption and implementation of harmonized MCS practices in tuna fisheries. A draft is expected by the end of 2015, and will then be reviewed by the compliance/MCS sections from the t-RFMOs, as well as international MCS experts.

Tuna iMCS Network

Also related to capacity building, the Project has contacted the International MCS Network, through its Executive Director, to discuss opportunities for creating a 'sub-network' focused on exchanged of information on MCS issues associated with tuna fisheries. This 'sub-network' will be constituted of people associated with compliance in the t-RFMOs, as well as of national MCS officers, and will constitute a vehicle for exchange of lessons learned, and information relevant to monitoring of tuna fisheries.

MCS Certification course

Capacity building activities are planned through a certification-based course to be conducted in the areas of the various t-RFMOs. A certification course of 6-8 weeks would become the seed for more academic programmes and would offer young officials a career path in areas not covered so far by formal training. A consultant is currently developing a curriculum and a training strategy that would have a core global component of basic MCS skills, supplemented by regional issues (such as CMMs specific for the region).FFA has conducted a course of this nature in association with the University of the South Pacific and experiences gained during that course will be fully taken into account.

The project supported FFA and The University of the South Pacific to carry out the second MCS training from 05-30 October 2015. In total, 16 fisheries MCS and/or surveillance officers from eight FFA Member countries were trained.

PSM legislative template

The FAO Port States Measures Agreement is one of the major international instruments to combat Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. The original plan to develop individual legislation for ten countries in the Indian Ocean was replaced by the development of a legislative template framework to facilitate incorporation of provisions of the 2009 FAO Port State Measures (PSM) Agreement and the (almost identical) IOTC Resolution 10/11 on PSM into national legislation of t-RFMO members. A first draft of the legislative template has been finalized and is currently under review by external legal experts. The template has already been successfully trialed during national workshops in Tonga and the Philippines (March and June 2015), in a regional workshops in Sri Lanka (June 2015) and in Cape Verde and for the development of new fisheries regulations in Thailand.

CLAV work

This activity was successfully completed in its core functionality, and the latest version of the Consolidated List of Authorized Vessel is now available on the tuna-org.org website[1]. While the CLAV has been developed by the five t-RFMOs starting in 2009, in order to merge their lists of authorized vessels, it is now daily updated through an automatized process that directly links the t-RFMOs authorized vessels databases to the CLAV database.

In addition, the Project also provided expertise to analyse the data contained in the CLAV and identify some data inconsistencies, including possible duplicate records. These issues are reported to the t-RFMOs for further investigation and correction by the reporting member States. In the future, the CLAV could host additional information, *e.g.* linkages to report of IUU activities, port inspection reports, *etc.* and mobile applications for fisheries inspectors could be developed.

Pilot trials of electronic observer systems on longline verssels in Fiji and purse seiner vessel in Ghana

The pilot programs in Fiji and Ghana provide an opportunity for both countries to test the use of EMS as an MCS tool to better assess compliance of fishing fleets as well as to collect observer data. Both pilots are implemented with the participation of the private sector and should evolve in business models that would allow a sustainable use of the EMS in the long term.

During the months of October and November, a first batch of equipment has been installed on four longliners in Fiji (one fifth one will be installed in December) and on five purse seiners in Ghana, and training has been provided to dry observers from the Fiji Department of Fisheries and the Fisheries Commission of Ghana in the use of the review hardware and softwareto analyse the video footage collected by the EMS. The first fishing trips have now been completed, and analyses of the collected data is starting. In total 17 EMS will be deployed on the purse seine fleet in Ghana, and 50 in the Fijian longline fleet.

During the last meeting of the Steering Committee, the government of Seychelles requested support for EMS trials on two of their own purse seine fleet in Seychelles in collaboration with the industry. In addition, Birdlife is proposing to revised some of its activities to include two small-scale EMS pilots specifically to monitor seabird bycatch and the use of bycatch mitigation measures in South Africa and Brazil. These proposals are currently under review.

Integrated MCS system in FFA

Assessing the risk of IUU fishing associated with certain operations and vessels provides an opportunity to use limited enforcement assets in a more efficient and cost-effective way in combatting IUU. To do this, FFA has created an MCS system that integrates information coming from multiple data sources and that is used to create intelligence reports by a dedicated unit. The Project is supporting a Data Analyst working on this system, and will assist in disseminating the lessons learned to other regions.

Best practices in Catch Documentation Schemes (CDS)

Catch Documentation Schemes are considered a valuable tool in the MCS toolbox, and for a number of years several instances have been implemented as part of RFMO regulations or other traceability schemes developed by main markets to ascertain the provenance of fish products entered into a market. To be successful in preventing IUU tuna products from entering into the supply chains, CDS should fulfill a number of requirements.

[1] http://tuna-org.org/GlobalTVR.htm

A Project expert has conducted a year-long study in the field, visiting more than 20 countries, to identify those best practices and lessons learned from existing CDS that would be integrated into a number of regional initiatives as well as feed into FAO similar global work.

Support to improve compliance

Although the original plan was limited to support participation of national officials into technical and scientific meetings, the implementation has been extended to focus on innovative ways of supporting members of t-RFMOs to improve their compliance performance.

For example, the close work of the Secretariat of IOTC with its membership in what is termed Compliance Support Mission offers an example of a way to improve, not only the compliance of the member in question, but to empower members with information that enhances their level of participation as well. The lessons learned from these type of initiatives are being shared across t-RFMOs and it could be further extended through mechanisms such as the IMCS network.

Component 3 – Reducing ecosystem impacts of tuna fishing

The third component addresses the ecosystem impacts of tuna fisheries. The Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Project is supporting the collaboration between the WCPFC and IATTC to develop integrated and consistent management plans for sharks in both sides of the Pacific. The Project is also supporting the development and dissemination of mitigation techniques for by-catch of small tuna and sharks in purse-seiners and incidental seabird mortality in long-line fleets, including the development of a global portal to access information on the success of various techniques. The Project is also working towards fill bycatch and catch data gaps in the gillnet fisheries from the northern part of the Indian Ocean, as the caracteristics of these fisheries and their levels of bycatch are largely unknown.

Shark Data Improvement, Assessment and Management

This work is divided in two different, closely related elements: shark data improvement and shark assessment and management.

The objective of the first element (Shark Data Improvement) is to develop a practical and consistent approach to monitoring the status of sharks caught by ABNJ tuna fisheries. It focuses on identifying the data deficiencies which inhibit management and proposes strategies to obtain more data through field studies and better information return from fisheries. Work is proceeding on cataloguing shark data holdings across the t-RFMOs using public domain data. Based on known data gaps, data improvement efforts have been accomplished in the form of a shark data collection methodology workshop for Latin American countries (IATTC), two proposals for data harmonization and compilation across all t-RFMOs (WCPFC/Kobe), a whale shark post-release mortality tagging program with ABNJ partner NOAA (WCPFC/SPC), and a pan-Pacific expert panel to review shark life history data (WCPFC).

The objective of the second element(Shark Assessment and Management) is to identify risks and priorities for shark conservation through assessment, using new data generated under the first element and improved tools developed under this element as appropriate. It will evaluate the existing management framework and develop measures to strengthen shark management by t-RFMOs. The first of four stock status assessments has been initiated ahead of schedule in response to a request from CCSBT to coordinate a global southern hemisphere porbeagle study. A Pacific-wide bigeye thresher stock status study is being planned for initiation in early 2016 as the second assessment.

A detailed update on the WCPFC led shark work is provided in SC11 EB-IP-06[2].

Development of a global Bycatch Management and Information System (BMIS) and workshops for joint analysis of mitigation effectiveness

This work involves collating, catalysing and disseminating new information that will direct effective management to mitigate impacts on bycatch species including sharks, seabirds, sea turtles and cetaceans. This will help reduce technical uncertainties across a range of stakeholders, allowing t-RFMO discussions to focus on management issues such as cost and feasibility. Re-development of the BMIS is underway and the first bycatch mitigation workshop will be held in the first quarter of 2016. In addition to its own members, WCPFC will seek participation from other t-RFMOs and key data holders. A detailed update is provided in SC11 EB-IP-06 and SC11-EB-07[3].

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

BirdLife International is carrying out various outreach activities to refine and facilitate the understanding of techniques to reduce the incidental mortality of birds during longline operations, as well as collecting information that could lead to monitor the extent of the application of the mitigation techniques in the field.

During the last year, BirdLife has achieved good progress including a CCSBT meeting hosted by Japan to develop measures for assessing the effectiveness of mitigation measures, and workshops for fleet outreach in Korea and China. Two at-sea trials of best practice mitigation measures have been undertaken, and training of Korean fisheries observers successfully completed.

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

This output will be implemented by ISSF and includes 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. Sea trial protocols take into account preceding sea trials. Equipment (satellite linked echo-sounder buoys) procured, contact with vessel owner established and cruise conducted in the Pacific from mid-June, 2015. Analyses of vertical behavior, residency and daily presence/absence patterns of tuna and non-target species at drifting FADs; target strengths of tunas under FADs and analyses of archival tagging data from bigeye and yellowfin are underway.

Filling bycatch and catch data gaps in the northern Indian Ocean tuna-directed gillnet fisheries

This output is 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. Bycatch data and catch data gaps have been identified, and initial data was shared with the IOTC Working Party. Data collection is continuing in Pakistan with new observers being trained and deployed. Moreover, AIS installation on tuna gillnet vessels is in process and will be completed by the end of 2015.

[2] https://www.wcpfc.int/node/21731
[3] https://www.wcpfc.int/node/21732