REPORT OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE TRP SWG

An informal small working group met on Tuesday 6th and Thursday 8th December 2016 to discuss the proposal in WCPFC13-2016-DP09 for a Conservation and Management Measure to define an interim Target Reference Point for the South Pacific Albacore stock.

The SWG noted from the report of the 12th WCPFC Scientific Committee that the stock was not overfished relative to the 20% SB/SBF=0 LRP and that overfishing was not occurring relative to F/FMSY, but that stock is not in equilibrium. Biomass and CPUE continues to decline and that if current levels of longline effort continue there is a significant probability of the stock breaching its Limit Reference Point within 20 years. The SWG noted the SC12 Management Advice that “longline fishing mortality and longline catch be reduced to avoid further decline in the vulnerable biomass so that economically viable catch rates can be maintained.”

The SWG considered the implications of different options for restoring the stock to the proposed Target Reference Point over a period of up to 20 years, ranging from a large immediate cut in effort to a series of small cuts, informed by a bioeconomic projection analysis presented by SPC and FFA.

A majority of CCMs present indicated their interest in negotiating an interim Target Reference Point for the stock against the starting point proposed by FFA members of 45%SB/SB F=0 ,but China was not yet in a position to enter such a negotiation until the implications of different TRP levels were better understood in terms of the catch or effort changes that would be required to restore and maintain the stock at the TRP and after the TRP of skipjack will be used in real management action.

The SWG was thus unable to recommend that WCPFC13 adopt the interim TRP proposal in DP09 and recommended that the following statement be inserted in the WCPFC13 Record.

“WCPFC requested that existing analyses of the implications of different TRP levels – in terms of total catch and effort changes required – should be recirculated to CCMs by FFA before the end of December 2016, and that the scientific services provider assist CCMs in understanding the economic implications of different TRPs for their vessels before SC13;

WCPFC agreed to defer the possible adoption of an interim Target Reference Point for the South Pacific Albacore stock, which had originally been agreed to take place in 2015 under the Harvest Strategy Workplan, until December 2017 at the latest.

The Commission directed that further discussion of the TRP should take place over the course of 2017 as part of the ongoing consultative process for the development of a Bridging Measure for the Conservation and Management of the South Pacific Albacore stock, and should include a report on progress by the Convenor of that process to the 13th WCPFC Scientific Committee.”

FFA members noted that the interim Target Reference Point for this stock agreed by the Participants to the Tokelau Arrangement remains in effect, and that this iTRP would continue to guide their management measures and actions in areas under their national jurisdiction until superseded by a substantive TRP. TKA Participants or the Parties to the South Pacific Albacore Catch Management Agreement will provide annually to the Commission the Total Allowable Catch of south Pacific albacore in waters under their national jurisdiction guided by this iTRP. They drew the attention of other CCMs to the requirements of Article 8 of the Convention, particularly paragraphs 2b.i, 2c and 2d.”