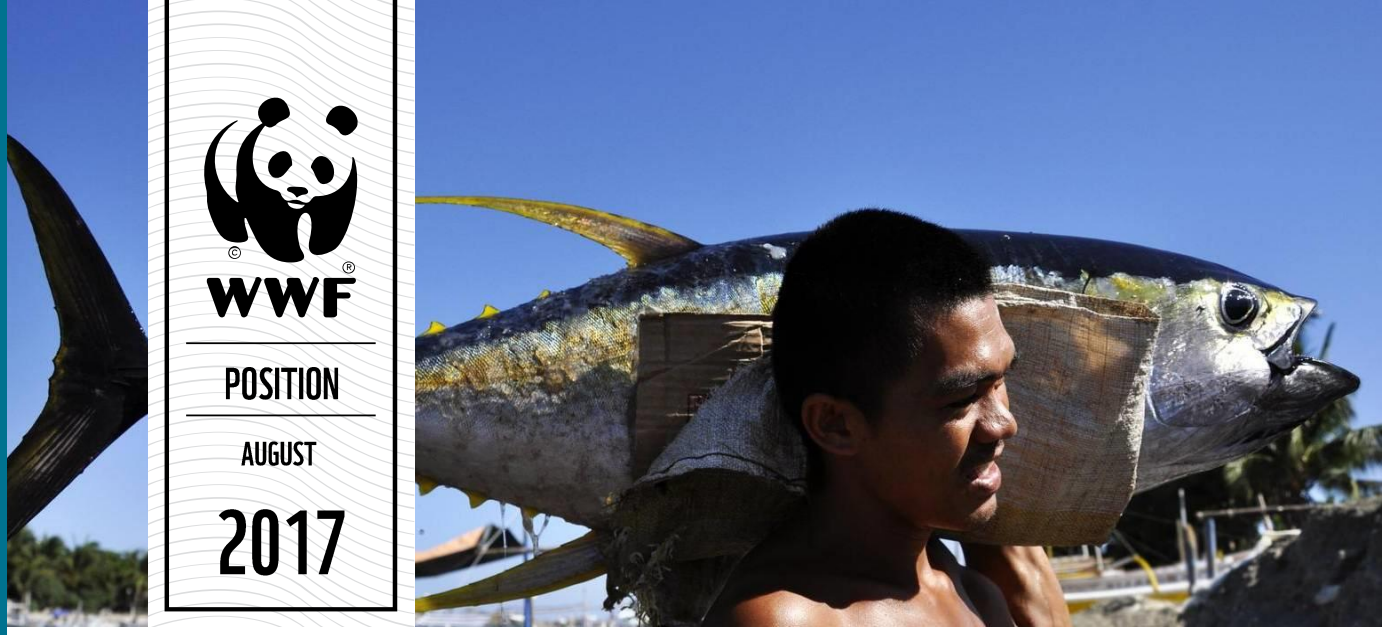

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13th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee (SC) of the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC): Rarotonga, Cook Islands – August 9-17, 2017

Introduction

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) would like to once again thank the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Scientific Committee (SC) for the opportunity to attend the 13th Regular Session of the SC (SC13) 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 would like to offer the following position and recommendations to the SC regarding significant scientific issues that WWF deems important.

Reference Points, Harvest Control Rules, and Harvest Strategies

WWF remains strongly supportive of the continued work of the WCPFC and subsidiary bodies in pursuing the implementation of the Harvest Strategy (HS) policy established under *Conservation and Management Measure* (*CMM) 2014-06: Conservation and Management Measure to develop and implement a harvest strategy approach for key fisheries and stocks in the WCPO*[1]. WWF encourages members to remain firmly committed to the timelines for development and implementation of Reference Points (RPs) and Harvest Control Rules (HCRs) described in the workplan. At this meeting, WWF encourages SC13 to further endorse and support the adoption of explicit Target Reference Points (TRPs) for all WCPO fishery stocks under WCPFC's authority as well as consider further steps toward implementation of effective HCRs in accordance with the agreed workplan.

WWF again acknowledges the complexity of establishing TRPs, noting that TRPs require additional consideration of social and economic factors. However, WWF again notes that these complex factors did not prevent the implementation of sufficiently precautionary *interim* TRP for SKJ at WCPFC12. WWF encourages the further implementation of similarly precautionary interim TRP's based on bioeconomic factors, particularly for South Pacific albacore at WCPFC14.

The adoption of explicit TRPs for at least the four key tuna species, namely skipjack (SKJ), albacore (ALB), yellowfin (YFT), and bigeye (BET), must be considered an absolute priority for the sustainable management of these resources in the WCPO. Additional steps should also be taken by the SC to establish RPs for other non-tuna species as well. Consistent with previous WCPFC advice, WWF encourages SC13 to review available information on this topic and provide advice on the progress on RPs and HCRs for the WCPFC's consideration.

WWF recommends the SC:

- **Supports the designation of TRPs as a priority for proper management of all stocks under WCPFC authority;**
- **Recommends interim precautionary Target Reference Points as a benchmark for further consideration by the WCPFC in 2017;**
- **Further recommends proposed HCRs for consideration by the TCC and WCPFC; and**
- **Considers the probability of breaching the Limit Reference Points and limiting this to 10% or less as a precautionary measure.[2]**

Sharks and Rays

Many shark species in the WCPO remain subject to high levels of fishing mortality that current stock assessment trends suggest could be unsustainable.[3] Sharks play a critical role in the WCPO marine ecosystem as apex predators and indicators of ecosystem health.[4] 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.

Although WWF supports the previous minor action taken by the WCPFC in *CMM 2014-05 Conservation and Management Measure for Sharks*[5] and the efforts of some members to further improve the CMM, WWF continues to support recommendations made previously by the SC and drawn from the discussion regarding a proposed comprehensive and integrated shark CMM.[6] By way of reference, we again endorse the recommendations contained in sections 4.1 and 4.2 of the paper previously presented by Dr. Shelley Clarke in addition to measures recommended below.[7]

Furthermore, WWF endorses the recent action taken by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) to support best practices for safe handling and release manta rays (genus *Mobula* and *Manta*) aboard purse seiners. WWF encourages the WCPFC to pursue equivalent or consistent measures for manta rays in the WCPFC.

Reports from the WCPFC Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC12) indicated that finning is still rife within WCPO waters, with many CCMs failing to comply with existing shark CMMs. It is imperative that action is taken to end the wasteful practice of shark finning and associated lack of accounting of shark mortality that results.

Last October, silky sharks, three species of thresher sharks, and all nine species of mobula rays were included within Appendix II of CITES, which places a greater emphasis on RFMOs to ensure catches are reported accurately to meet CITES reporting obligations. Thus, there is increased urgency for the WCPFC to diligently and assertively address this issue.

WWF recommends the SC:

- **Develops, endorses, and recommends adoption of a Comprehensive Shark CMM that includes efforts to:**
    - **Mandates 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;**
    - **Implements 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;**
    - **Requires, 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;**
    - **Reviews and amends CMM 2014-05 to prohibit vessels carrying wire trace and the use of wire trace branch lines; and**
    - **Requires, through observer 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;**
- **Provides updates on the progress of including mobula and manta rays to be considered as a key shark species;**
- **Encourages the development of reference points and management for non-target species, including all shark and ray species, as envisaged under Articles 5 and 10 of the WCPF Convention;**
- **Considers developing CMMs to improve the conservation status of threatened shark and ray species resulting from the recent IUCN Red List Oceania workshop, including development of bycatch reduction gear trials;**
- **CCMs fully support proposals to land sharks with fins naturally attached as the only way to ensure shark finning does not occur; and**
- **Encourages CCMs to report all shark and ray catches from domestic fleets operating in territorial and archipelagic waters to assist CCMs to meet obligations for shark and ray species incorporated under CITES Appendix II, including making any non-detriment finding publicly available.**

Pacific Bluefin Tuna

Technical reports of all scientific and management bodies responsible for management of the Pacific bluefin tuna stock, including the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) and the IATTC, indicate that the Pacific Bluefin tuna stock remains in extremely poor condition. The ISC confirmed that overfishing continues, even though the stock is heavily overfished, and its spawning stock biomass has declined to as low as 2.6% of its unfished level.[8] This is a clear indicator that the stock is no longer in the status to support industrial fisheries and the management measures taken both in the Western and Central Pacific and in the Eastern Pacific have proven insufficient to conserve the biological integrity of this stock in timely manner. The IATTC and WCPFC must take immediate actions and assume their share of responsibility.

The latest assessment conducted by ISC confirms that the stock is highly depleted, that fishing mortality exceeds all reasonable proxies for F_{msy}. Without the robust and precautionary long-term rebuilding target, the recovery of the stock may be further delayed if the current scenario of low recruitment continues which is heavily reliant on a major adult cohort in the population. While the

WCPFC adopted conservation measures calling for reductions in catch for Pacific bluefin tuna of <30 kg in size, the stock requires conservation of *all size classes* of Pacific bluefin tuna, in particular the spawning stocks. Thus, WWF supports raising the minimum size restriction to <85kg based on the best available scientific information and consideration of the precautionary principle.

WWF maintains deep 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. 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.

WWF encourages close monitoring of fisheries and catch as well as completion of a revised stock assessment for Pacific bluefin in 2016. WWF urges both IATTC and WCPFC to adopt a long-term Pacific bluefin tuna recovery plan targeting at least $20\%SSB_0$, 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.

The SC, consistent with the best scientific information, must recommend that fishing mortality on Pacific bluefin tuna be urgently and substantially reduced in both juveniles and adults in order to reduce the risk of recruitment collapse and allow spawning stock to rebuild. Absent urgent action, WWF recommends a moratorium on all harvest of Pacific bluefin until such measures are agreed and implemented, which represents the only practical option to protect the stock from collapse.

WWF recommends that the SC:

- **Supports establishing a precautionary Limit and Target Reference Point for Pacific bluefin tuna;**
- **Supports a long-term Pacific bluefin tuna recovery plan targeting at least $20\%SSB_0$ by 2030;**
- **Recommends expanding the target size of juvenile Pacific bluefin tuna conservation measures from the current under 30kg requirement to under 85kg;**
- **Establishes a Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS) for the thorough monitoring of Pacific bluefin tuna to ensure proper stock assessment; and**
- **In the absence of meaningful progress toward effective management measures, recommends a moratorium on all harvest of Pacific bluefin until such time as those measures are agreed and implemented.**

Conclusion

WWF calls on SC13 to continue to address scientific issues in the WCPFC CA such that they ensure the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information. With respect to each of the agenda items addressed at the SC13 meeting, we call on the SC members to carefully and genuinely address each issue with logic, intellectual rigor, personal integrity, and an uncompromising respect for the scientific process and the truth.

The WCPFC currently maintains the ability and opportunity to chart the course towards sustainable fishery resources in the WCPO. Science plays an irreplaceable role in the WCPFC process by representing the foundation of all decision making by the WCPFC.[9,10] The WCPFC and its subsidiary bodies must continually promote and adopt strong and effective conservation and management action to maintain and rebuild tuna stocks, implement appropriate monitoring and enforcement measures, promote a viable tuna industry, and support vibrant coastal communities throughout the South Pacific.

For more information

Alfred "Bubba" Cook
WCP Tuna Program Manager
acook@wwf.panda.org
Tel: +64 (0)27 833 0537

WWF-New Zealand
PO Box 11514 Marion Square
Wellington 6141, New Zealand
Tel. +64 (0) 4 499 2930

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[1] WCPFC (2014) Summary Report of the Eleventh Regular Session of the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (Adopted version) – 29 July 2015, WCPFC, Apia, Samoa, 1-5 December 2014. Attachment T. p.264.
[2] United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement, 34 ILM 1542 (1995); 2167 UNTS 88. (Fishery management strategies shall ensure that the risk of exceeding limit reference points is very low. If a stock falls below a limit reference point or is at risk of falling below such a reference point, conservation and management action should be initiated to facilitate stock recovery. Fishery management strategies shall ensure that target reference points are not exceeded on average. (Annex II UNFSA 1995)).
[3] Clarke, Shelley C., *et al.* (2013). Population Trends in Pacific Oceanic Sharks and the Utility of Regulations on Shark Finning. Conservation Biology, Volume 27, Issue 4, pages 197–209, February.
[4] *See* Stevenson, C., *et al.* (2007). High apex predator biomass on remote Pacific islands. Coral Reefs 26: 47-51; *See also* Friedlander, A.M. and DeMartini, E.E. (2002). Contrasts on density, size, and biomass of reef fishes between the northwestern and the main Hawaiian islands: the effects of fishing down apex predators. Marine Ecology Progress Series 230: 253-264.
[5] WCPFC (2014) Summary Report of the Eleventh Regular Session of the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (Adopted version) – 29 July 2015, WCPFC, Apia, Samoa, 1-5 December 2014. Attachment S. p.262.
[6] Clarke, Shelley C. (2013). Towards an Integrated Shark Conservation and Management Measure for the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. WCPFC-SC9-2013/ EB-WP-08. WCPFC-SC, Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, 6-14 August 2013.
[7] *Id* at 24-27.
[8] Yukio Takeuchi, *et al.*, 2014, Updated future projections of Pacific bluefin tuna with draft results to answer the requests from NC9.ISC/14/PBFWG-1/10re.
[9] WCPFC, Resolution 2012–01, Resolution on the Best Available Science (2012).
[10] *See also* Chris Wold, Emi Kondo, & Erika Hamilton, A Review of the Provision of Scientific Advice in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, WCPFC-SC10-2014/ MI-IP-03 (2014).