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PILOTING DATA COLLECTION THROUGH TRANSHIPMENT MONITORING AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WCPFC SEABIRD CMM

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Agenda Item 8.3 High Seas Transhipment Monitoring

Piloting data collection through transhipment monitoring as an opportunity for monitoring the implementation of the WCPFC seabird CMM

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Abstract

The role of seabird bycatch from tuna longline operations in driving several seabird species, particularly albatrosses, towards extinction is very well established. Low levels of data on longline at-sea activities is widely acknowledged as a severe shortcoming for assessing seabird bycatch rates, the level of use of bycatch mitigation measures, and the impacts of tuna longline fishing on threatened seabird species.

The WCPFC transshipment observer programme could, with very minor additional effort, provide a valuable additional data source on the nature and extent of the use of various measures mandated under CMM 2015-03 to prevent seabird bycatch. Such data (including digital images) that WCPFC observers could be mandated to collect under this pilot proposal could be
1. subject to the WCPFC confidentiality rules
2. captured/curated by the WCPFC science provider (SPC)
3. analysed by SPC under direction of the WCPFC and its subsidiary bodies to provide information to assist with improving seabird bycatch management

Introduction

The role of seabird bycatch from tuna longline operations in driving several seabird species, particularly albatrosses, towards extinction is very well established (Anderson et al. 2011, Croxall et al. 2012). Numerous papers presented to WCPFC SC and TCC show the overlap risk with vulnerable seabirds and risk from longline fisheries (WCPFC-SC5-2009/EB-WP-06; WCPFC-TCC8-2012/OP-01; WCPFC-SC9-2013/EB-WP-14; WCPFC-SC11-2015/EB-WP-09). More recently at SC 13, risk to specific albatrosses from South Georgia and the New Zealand Antipodean Albatross have been identified to be of high concern (WCPFC-SC-13-2017/EB-IP-03 and WCPFC-SC13-2017/EB-IP-11).

In addition at SC13 members expressed concern about the high bycatch rates, particularly south of 30^{o}S and tasked TCC and the Commission to review both observer coverage rates and the application of mitigation by fleets operating south of 30^{o}S. BirdLife International also expressed concern at the potentially high bycatch rates also in the north Pacific and the very low observer coverage.

To date, CPCs have not reported on use of mitigation, as collected by observers, in Part 1 reports to WCPFC, although this is required by CMM 2015-03 in para 9. However in many cases observer coverage is so low that little information may be available this way.

Opportunity

CMM 2009-06 requires all transhipments (other than purse seine which is prohibited) to be 100% monitored on the high seas by Regional Observers.

At TCC 12 it was reported (WCPFC-TCC12-2016-RP03_Rev1) that 2267 of 4590 vessels (49.3%) on the RFV have a positive determination of authorisation to tranship on the high seas. The majority are longliners. Since June 2010, WCPFC has received reporting for over 3760 transhipment events.

Proposal

Recognising that the primary duties of the transshipment observer is to monitor the transshipping activities, but that this may include accessing data in logbooks, we propose that observers be mandated to collect, as part of their regular inspection duties during transshipment events, the following information. We acknowledge, however, that it may not always be possible to collect some or any of these images. The collection should therefore be done on the basis of whenever practical and possible:

1. **Stern shots**: Photos of the stern of the vessel (also showing vessel name/identifying features) to ascertain the nature of any bird-scaring line poles (or 'Tori poles'), to estimate the attachment height above sea level and whether the pole is sufficiently robust to support a BSL with 100 m aerial extent during setting operations
2. **Night setting**: 10-15 photographs taken at random, of non-consecutive pages of logbooks from the past three months, to check for fishing effort south of 30^{o}S and north of 23^{o}N, whether or not gear was set at night
3. **Line weighting**: Photos of a subset of fishing gear (in baskets, coils or boxes) to check if vessels are using line weighting or not
4. **Bird scaring lines**: Where possible, photos of bird-scaring lines if any are present/visible

At a minimum, for each relevant transshipment event there should be a digital photograph taken of the stern of the vessel. We note that some longline vessels move from southern (or Northern) latitudes (where fishing requires that CMM 2015-03 is implemented) towards the tropics, but also note that some longliners may never operate south of 30°S or north of 23^{o}N. For example, there is little purpose in collecting stern shots of transshipment events in the tropical Pacific Ocean, where vessels are unlikely ever to have implemented CMM 2015-03. A pragmatic discussion is needed as to when observers should attempt to collect this information.

The agencies responsible for managing the observer scheme should establish a simple data management protocol to allow digital images and other information to be stored in association with other relevant details of each vessel inspected, ready for any analyses which might be requested by SC, TCC or the Commission.

It is noted that a level of expertise is required to assess line weighting and bird scaring line features that might be present in photographs, we suggest that WCPFC Secretariat consider how best to establish a mechanism to share the information with participants of the Scientific Committee with seabird expertise, or other seabird bycatch experts, intersessionally. The purpose is to have experts capture and analyse data appropriately and to prepare a report on which measures and how much they are used by the various fleets, to be presented annually to the Scientific Committee, either by the expert(s) or by the Secretariat in association with the experts.

We believe such data would provide a useful complement to existing data-collecting processes (primarily the Regional Observer Programme for scientific observers). Data from scientific observers and logbooks, and responses to specific calls for data from WCPFC, should remain the primary sources of information for assessing the use and effectiveness of various seabird bycatch mitigation measures.

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