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OPPORTUNITIES IN PORTS TO IMPROVE DATA COLLECTION IN ORDER TO MONITOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SEABIRD CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

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Agenda Item 13 Other Matters Requiring TCC Advice

Opportunities in ports to improve data collection in order to monitor the effectiveness of seabird conservation and management measures

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SUMMARY

This paper highlights the importance of expanding the sources of data on implementation of seabird bycatch mitigation measures via port inspection. Globally, reviews of the effectiveness of tuna RFMO conservation and management measures for seabirds have been severely hampered by a lack of data. Recognising the future entry into force of the Port State Measures Agreement, and ongoing discussions within WCPFC on port inspection, the addition of elements relevant to seabird CMMs into port inspection protocols would provide a valuable supplementary data source on the nature and extent of the use of various measures mandated under CMM 2015-03, with limited additional effort. We make suggestions of the data fields that could be used in port inspection, and could be incorporated, for example, into the BOJACK app that is being trialled by FFA.

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of seabird bycatch from tuna longline operations in driving several seabird species towards extinction is well established (e.g. Robertson & Gales 1988; Tuck et al. 2001; Croxall et al. 2012). The WCPFC area is globally important for a suite of albatross species (BirdLife International 2004) and Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) have been put in place by WCPFC to reduce the impact of bycatch on seabird populations (e.g. CMM 2007-04; CMM 2012-07; CMM 2015-03).

However, low levels of pelagic longline observer data collection and reporting is widely acknowledged as a severe shortcoming for assessing seabird bycatch rates and the impacts of pelagic longline fishing on threatened seabird species. At-sea observer data collection and reporting is also focused on data for scientific purposes, whereas there is also a need to incorporate monitoring of bycatch CMMs into overall RFMO Monitoring and Compliance Systems (MCS). The addition of bycatch monitoring elements to port inspection and transhipment monitoring is important if RFMOs are to increase the effectiveness of their bycatch CMMs. During SC 13 members expressed concern at reported high levels of bycatch and the meeting recommended that TCC and the Commission both review observer coverage rates and the application of mitigation by fleets. Port inspections offer an opportunity to gather information of mitigation application.

Under the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (PSMA), the tuna RFMOs have duties in relation to enhancing regional and international cooperation on port inspection and other forms of

MCS. The importance of Port State Measures (PSM) and Port State Control (PSC) as tools for delivering sustainable fisheries management is well established.

2. OPPORTUNITY

WCPFC has been supporting a trial Port Coordinators Programmes as a capacity building measure in some Small Island Developing States. The development of 'BOJACK', an App supporting compliance assessment by Port Coordinators, provides an opportunity to include checks for seabird mitigation equipment and practice, where appropriate.

As a minimum, we suggest that the PSC officers should view and collect data on the following when inspecting a pelagic longline vessel:

1. Identify whether the vessel has fished in an area to which the WCPFC Seabird CMM (2015-03) applies

2. Verify evidence that the vessel has been using the required seabird bycatch mitigation measures when fishing in the areas to which CMM 2015-03 applies (at least two of the following when fishing south of 30°S, and at least one of the following when fishing north of 23°N):

    a. Verify if the vessel has the equipment necessary for deploying one or two tori lines, and whether this complies with the recommended specifications in CMM 2015-03. Priorities for verification are (i) presence of tori pole(s), (ii) overall length of bird scaring line, and (iii) spacing and length of streamers.

    b. Examine the logbook to establish the vessel's setting start and end times, to ascertain if the vessel is undertaking night setting (as defined by CMM 2015-03 as being between completed between nautical dusk and nautical dawn).

    c. Verify if weights are attached to the branch lines and if they comply with the weight and distance from the hook as required under CMM 2015-03 (greater than a 40g within 50cm of the hook; greater than a total of 45 g attached within 1 m of the hook or; greater than a total of 60 g attached within 3.5 m of the hook or greater than a total of 98 g weight attached within 4 m of the hook).

    d. [For vessels fishing north of 23°N only] Verify if the vessel uses side setting with a bird curtain and weighted branch lines.

Such data would complement and supplement scientific data gathered via the observer programme, and could be made subject to existing confidentiality rules. Improved data on bycatch CMMs via port inspection could also benefit assessments related to other non-target taxa, for example inspection of line cutters, de-hookers and dip-nets necessary for the implementation of Rec. 10-09 on bycatch of sea turtles in ICCAT fisheries and in CMM 2008-03 CMM for sea turtles in WCPFC.

This approach is being promoted for bycatch CMMs within IOTC through port inspection procedures (e.g. IOTC 2013) and training, and IOTC has developed a secondary inspection report form to record compliance with technical management measures including bycatch measures. The 12th meeting of CCSBT's Ecologically Related Species Working Group (ERSWG) has asked the CCSBT Compliance

Committee to consider ways to effectively monitor seabird mitigation measures in relation to port inspection and transhipment inspection.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The tuna RFMOs play an important role in ensuring that port inspection measures are effective and harmonised. Port inspection provides a valuable mechanism to provide supplementary data to evaluate mitigation efforts for bycaught species. We believe such data would provide a useful complement to existing data collecting processes within WCPFC, which are primarily via scientific observers.

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