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**ISSF POSITION STATEMENT**

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**WCPFC8-2011-OP/03**

**Paper prepared by ISSF**



## ISSF POSITION STATEMENT

Presented during the 8<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the  
Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission  
Guam  
26-30 March 2012

The **International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)** is a global partnership among the tuna industry, science and WWF, the global conservation organization. Our mission is to work toward the science-based conservation and management of tuna stocks and the protection of ocean health by supporting regional fisheries management organizations and advocating for the recommendations of each organization's scientific advisory body.

ISSF would like to thank the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission for the opportunity to present this position statement supporting decisive action based on the research compiled by the WCPFC Scientific Committee.

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### BACKGROUND

**Bigeye.** According to an updated assessment completed in 2011 and reported to the 7<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee (SC7), the fishing mortality for bigeye tuna is well in excess of the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) level (average  $F$  2006-2009 is about 41% higher than  $F_{MSY}$ ). Analyses presented by SPC at SC7 indicate that CMM 2008-01 has been unable to limit the total amount of purse seine fishing effort as intended. While the catch of bigeye has been reduced during the months of the FAD closure in CMM-2008-01, it is evident that such a seasonal reduction is insufficient to stop overfishing of the stock in the near future given the overall annual level of fishing effort; other fisheries need to be limited as well. Projections made with alternative management scenarios presented by SPC at TCC7 indicate that closures of the entire purse seine fishery would have somewhat greater conservation benefits for bigeye (although the catches of skipjack and yellowfin would be reduced).

**Yellowfin and skipjack.** The populations of yellowfin and skipjack in the WCPO are not estimated to be in an overfished state nor are they being overfished. However, it should be noted that in the equatorial region - where about 90% of the yellowfin catch is taken - the stock may be fully exploited. For this reason, it is desirable to limit fishing mortality on yellowfin in the western equatorial region. Furthermore, the skipjack continues to experience high exploitation rates and several CCMS have expressed worry about possible range contractions if fishing mortality were to increase. SC7 recommended that the Commission consider developing limits on fishing for skipjack to limit the declines in catch rate associated with further declines in biomass.

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### ACTION NEEDED

#### 1. WCPO Closures

As stated above, it is clear that a seasonal FAD closure is insufficient to reduce the fishing mortality of bigeye to  $F_{MSY}$  or below in the short term. The WCPFC's monitoring and observer programs, including debriefing, are not sufficiently developed to ensure that the FAD closure is fully respected. Furthermore, the many exemptions present in CMM-2008-01 allow for a substantial amount of FAD fishing, and fishing by gears other than purse seining contributes to overfishing.

**Recognizing this, ISSF urges the WCPFC to implement a complete closure of the purse seine fishery in lieu of a FAD closure.<sup>1</sup> As indicated above, such a closure would have somewhat greater conservation benefits**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://iss-foundation.org/2011/01/15/resolution-11-02-wcpfc-purse-seine-tuna-catches/>

**accrued to bigeye tuna and – particularly if coordinated with similar closures in the IATTC convention area – increased ease of monitoring and control of the measure.** At the same time, the longline fishery for bigeye needs to continue to be capped. Further, ISSF urges individual participating States to collaborate with each other in order to plan for a voluntary complete purse seine closure that will reduce fishing mortality on bigeye tuna, should the WCPFC fail to adopt such a meaningful bigeye conservation measure. ISSF will revisit this issue at its next Board of Directors meeting following the 8<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the WCPFC with a view to formulating and adopting its own scientific conservation measures necessary to ensure the conservation of the bigeye tuna resource in the WCPO.

## ***2. Transshipments at Sea***

ISSF is concerned that, if not properly monitored, at-sea transshipments can create a fertile environment for IUU fishing activities to go undetected. For this reason, *ISSF has issued a conservation measure that calls upon processors, traders, importers, transporters and others involved in the seafood industry to refrain from transactions with purse seine vessels that transship at-sea, including archipelagic waters and EEZs.*

WCPFC's regulation of transshipment in the Convention Area allows for differences in the regulation of transshipments between archipelagic waters on the one hand, and EEZs and the high seas on the other. In the event that archipelagic waters of a WCPFC member are not covered by a comparable transshipment regulation, **ISSF urges States to take compatible measures to regulate, monitor and report transshipments in those waters.**

## ***3. Vessel Registry and Capacity Limitation***

The first step towards managing capacity is to establish limited entry via a closed vessel registry, after which reductions in the number of vessels can be negotiated. In a fully exploited fishery, coastal states' rights to expand their participation in a tuna fishery must be accommodated by mechanisms for reducing the participation of others.

**ISSF calls upon the WCPFC and member nations to develop a record of tuna fishing vessels with unique identifiers<sup>2</sup> (e.g., IMO numbers), and to adopt a limited entry, closed vessel registry with an eye towards ultimately reducing the number of fishing vessels to a level that is commensurate with the productivity of the WCPO fisheries.**

To that end, ISSF supports both Japan's WCPFC7 proposal to limit further increases in purse seine capacity, and the Kobe III call for a freeze in fishing capacity by developed fishing nations and creating mechanisms to transfer capacity to those developing countries with aspirations.

## ***4. Continued Progress on Sharks***

ISSF recognizes the important joint efforts of the WCPFC Scientific Committee, Secretariat and SPC to improve fishery statistics on sharks that would allow for their management by the Commission on a species-by-species basis. ISSF encourages CCMs to make this issue a priority. ISSF strongly supports the SC7 recommendation to adopt mitigation measures for oceanic whitetip sharks in the Convention Area and blue sharks in the north Pacific. In addition, **ISSF urges the Commission to mandate that fins remain naturally attached for any sharks retained onboard.** ISSF is also asking all RFMOs, including the WCPFC, to adopt a prohibition on deliberate purse seine setting around whale sharks.

## ***5. Reference Points***

Though seven years have passed since the Convention entered into force, the Commission has yet to adopt any reference points in accordance with Article 6. Despite some progress at the scientific level towards the study of potential reference points, **ISSF is disappointed with the lack of forward movement at the policy level, highlighted by the TCC7's inability to recommend any action. ISSF urges CCMs to give this matter a high priority in 2012.**

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<sup>2</sup> This includes participation in the global Consolidated List of Authorized Vessels (CLAV).