



**COMMISSION
FIFTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**
Honolulu, Hawaii, USA
10 – 14 December 2018

**PROPOSAL ON BIGEYE TUNA CATCH LIMITS IN LONGLINE FISHERIES:
CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURE ON TROPICAL TUNAS**

**WCPFC15-2018-DP04
13 November 2018**

United States of America

**CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURE ON TROPICAL TUNAS:
BIGEYE TUNA CATCH LIMITS IN LONGLINE FISHERIES**

**Proposal by the United States of America
to the
Fifteenth Regular Session of the
Commission for the Conservation and Management of
Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean**

Explanatory Note

Convention Article 10.3, on criteria for the allocation of catches and fishing effort, states that among other factors, the following shall be taken into account: “the respective contributions of participants to conservation and management of the stocks, including the provision by them of accurate data and their contribution to the conduct of scientific research in the Convention Area.”

Convention Article 29.1 states, “In order to support efforts to ensure accurate reporting of catches, the members of the Commission shall encourage their fishing vessels, to the extent practicable, to conduct transshipment in port.”

CMM 2017-01, paragraph 40, states: “The Commission shall review the bigeye catch limits specified in Table 3 in 2018 and 2019 based on any revised stock assessments and the recommendations of the Scientific Committee. The Commission may also take into account in setting any bigeye catch limits any plan submitted to the Secretariat by a CCM listed in Attachment 1, Table 3 to increase the level of monitoring and control of its longline vessels fishing in the Convention Area.”

The United States submits a plan on the monitoring and control of its Hawaii longline fishery (Attachment 1), which highlights the significant levels of monitoring and control, including through fisheries observers (about 20% coverage in the deep-set fishery and 100% in the shallow-set fishery) and in-port monitoring (about 95% of trips end in Honolulu), as well as the fact that essentially no at-sea transshipments take place in the fishery. As a result of this high level of monitoring and control, the United States has been contributing highly certain catch data and other fisheries information, and making important contributions to research and management of bigeye tuna and other highly migratory fish stocks for decades.

Taking into account the relevant Convention provisions and paragraph 40 of CMM 2017-01, the United States proposes an objective method to adjust CCMs’ longline bigeye tuna catch limits to account for their respective levels of monitoring and control, particularly with respect to observer coverage levels and at-sea transshipment activity. As reflected in the proposal proper, the United States is the only CCM that would benefit from the adjustments, because the United States is the only CCM that has consistently met the minimum required coverage level for longline fisheries, 5 percent. The United States emphasizes that that requirement has been in place since 2012.

Adoption of this proposal will encourage other CCMs to implement appropriate measures to improve monitoring and reporting of their fishing vessels, and thereby deter IUU fishing and improve the reliability of the data upon which Commission decisions are based.

CMM 2013-06 Criteria

a. Who is required to implement the proposal?

The proposal would revise CMM 2017-01, which applies to all CCMs. It would only adjust longline bigeye tuna catch limits, specifically those of the United States.

b. Which CCMs would this proposal impact and in what way(s) and what proportion?

This proposal would revise CMM 2017-01, which applies to all CCMs. It would directly impact only the United States initially, but it would encourage other CCMs to implement appropriate measures to improve monitoring and control of their fishing vessels.

c. Are there linkages with other proposals or instruments in other regional fisheries management organizations or international organizations that reduce the burden of implementation?

No conservation burden is anticipated.

d. Does the proposal affect development opportunities for SIDS?

No, this proposal would not affect development opportunities for SIDS. It would increase the incentive for CCMs to improve monitoring and control of their fishing vessels.

e. Does the proposal affect SIDS domestic access to resources and development aspirations?

No such effects are expected.

f. What resources, including financial and human capacity, are needed by SIDS to implement the proposal?

None; no SIDS would need to implement the proposal.

g. What mitigation measures are included in the proposal?

None.

h. What assistance mechanisms and associated timeframe, including training and financial support, are included in the proposal to avoid a disproportionate burden on SIDS?

None.

Commission Decision

In accordance with Convention article 10.3, the Commission agrees that allocations of catches should take into account CCMs' levels of monitoring and control of their fisheries, since higher levels of monitoring and control result in more accurate fishing-related data and lower risk of IUU fishing. Incorporating such factors into its allocation decisions also would provide an important incentives for CCMs to improve the monitoring and control of their fishing vessels and thereby deter IUU fishing and improve the reliability of the data upon which Commission decisions are based.

After taking into account the latest recommendations of the Scientific Committee and reviewing the levels of monitoring and control in CCMs' longline fisheries, including the monitoring and control plans submitted by CCMs with longline bigeye tuna catch limits, WCPFC15 agrees to apply the following rules to the formulation of bigeye tuna catch limits in longline fisheries for 2019 and 2020:

- A flag CCM's catch limit shall be increased by one percent (relative to its 2018 limit under CMM 2017-01) for every percent in excess of five percent that its applicable longline fisheries' observer coverage rate achieved, on average, in 2015-2017; and
- A flag CCM's catch limit shall be increased by 10 percent (relative to its 2018 limit under CMM 2017-01) if its longline fishery had zero at-sea transshipments (other than emergency transshipments duly notified in advance) in 2015-2017, and it met the minimum required observer coverage level in each of the years 2015-2017.

Based on the information on observer coverage levels provided in the most recent TCC documents (see Attachment 2), and after application of the rules above, the Commission agrees to revise Attachment 1, Table 3, of CMM 2017-01 as follows:

Table 3. Bigeye Longline Catch Limits [paragraphs 39-42]

CCM	CATCH LIMIT (METRIC TONNES)
CHINA	8,224
INDONESIA	5,889*
JAPAN	18,265
KOREA	13,942
CHINESE TAIPEI	10,481
USA	4,624

* Provisional and maybe subject to revision following data analysis and verification

Attachment 1. Monitoring and Control Plan for the United States Tropical Tuna Longline Fishery

Objective

To provide a plan to increase the level of monitoring and control of U.S. longline vessels fishing for tropical tunas in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) for consideration by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC or Commission) in setting bigeye tuna catch limits.

Background

Conservation and management measure (CMM) 2017-01 contains bigeye catch limits and directs the Commission to review these catch limits at WCPFC15, including the provision that “*the Commission may also take into account in setting any bigeye catch limits any plan submitted to the Secretariat by a CCM listed in Attachment 1, Table 3 to increase the level of monitoring and control of its longline vessels fishing in the Convention Area.*”

This document provides such a plan for the U.S. longline vessels fishing for tropical tunas in the WCPFC Area (Convention Area).

The fleet operates out of Hawaii (within the U.S. EEZ and on adjacent high seas) and targets principally bigeye and occasionally yellowfin tuna on deep-set longline fishing trips. Fishing trips average between 18 and 24 days and the fleet exclusively lands fresh, ice-chilled fish. Approximately 80% of the fish landed in Hawaii is sold and consumed in Hawaii. Around 18% of the fish landed in Hawaii is transported for consumption on the U.S. mainland and about 2% is exported from the United States to overseas markets.

Management Framework

The United States has comprehensive domestic regulations to implement management measures related to monitoring and control of its longline fishery in the WCPO. The following section describes various Commission standards and the management framework that the United States has in place that meets or exceeds those standards, and plans for the future to continue to exceed those standards.

Capacity Management for Longline Fisheries

WCPFC Obligation: CMM 2017-01 requires that CCMs not increase the number of their ice-chilled longline vessels targeting bigeye tuna and landing exclusively fresh fish above the applicable level under CMM 2013-01, or above the number of licenses under established limited entry programs applying during the operation of CMM 2013-01.

U.S. Plan: The U.S. longline fishery targeting bigeye tuna involves only ice-chilled longline vessels and lands exclusively fresh fish. The United States has established a limited entry program and participation in the longline fleet is capped at 164 permits – the level in place since 1994. The number of active vessels has varied and in 2017, 143 vessels participated in the U.S.

longline fishery. The United States will continue to ensure that no more than 164 permits are issued and no more than 164 longline vessels are authorized to fish in the WCPFC area.

Vessel Monitoring System (VMS)

WCPFC Obligation: CMM 2014-02 requires that all fishing vessels that fish for highly migratory species on the high seas within the Convention Area are reporting on the Commission VMS.

U.S. Plan: The U.S. longline fishery in the WCPO was the first U.S. fishery to require satellite tracking using a prototype VMS in 1994. Since that time, the United States has provided technical leadership in the implementation of the WCPFC VMS. The United States will continue to require the operation of VMS units on all fishing vessels that fish for highly migratory species on the high seas and when fishing within the U.S. EEZ.

The United States will continue to ensure that U.S. fishing vessels report VMS information directly to the Commission as required. As part of the U.S. VMS, the U.S. Coast Guard and NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) actively monitor the U.S. fishing vessels on a continuous basis (around the clock) to help ensure compliance of U.S. vessels with all applicable regulations.

Catch Monitoring

WCPFC Obligation: CMM 2017-01 requires that the annual catch of bigeye tuna by U.S. longline vessels is restricted to the level specified in Table 3 of Attachment 1 and that monthly reports of bigeye catch are submitted to the Commission. Additionally, CMM 2017-01 references operational level catch and effort data required to be submitted as part of the WCPFC annual data submission.

U.S. Plan: The U.S. longline vessels are required to maintain on board an accurate and complete record of catch, effort, and other data. All information must be recorded on paper or electronically within 24 hours after the completion of each fishing day and must be submitted within 72 hours of the end of each fishing trip.

The United States monitors its longline bigeye tuna catch in the WCPO in order to forecast when the limit is estimated to be reached and close the fishery prior to when the limit is reached. The United States has developed a Fast Track system to monitor catch of bigeye tuna so that the data are entered and bigeye tuna estimates can be derived quickly. The Fast Track system collects logbooks from returning vessels daily and produces a weekly estimate of daily total catch by integrating logbook data with market data. These weekly estimates are then used in a forecast model based on previous catch trends to predict the future dates and probabilities of reaching the catch limits. For annual reporting to the WCPFC, the collected logbook data are subjected to rigorous quality control and review for errors, and are combined with other sources of information (e.g., observer-collected data) to generate total catch estimates. The United States will continue to monitor longline catch in the WCPO relative to any limits adopted by WCPFC.

To further improve longline catch monitoring, the United States is developing electronic reporting with data encryption for the Hawaii-permitted longline fisheries.

Observer Coverage

WCPFC Obligation: CMM 2007-01 requires CCMs to ensure 5% observer coverage in their longline fisheries. This requirement has been in place since 2012.

U.S. plan: The United States will continue to maintain at least 20% observer coverage in the longline fishery targeting tropical tunas.

Fishery observers were first placed on Hawaii-based longline vessels in 1993. The U.S. Pacific Islands Observer Program is accredited as a WCPFC Regional Observer Provider. Placement of observers is based on a random sampling protocol designed to maintain a statistically random coverage of the fleet over the course of the fishing year. If selected for coverage, the fishing vessel cannot depart on its trip without an observer.

All observers collect WCPFC-required and U.S.-required information. All observers are debriefed at the end of an observed fishing trip and observer data undergo a rigorous review to ensure accuracy and precision. U.S. observer data have been used to improve catch and bycatch estimates in the U.S. longline fishery, as well as help inform stock assessments for many highly migratory species. U.S. observer data also have been used to evaluate trends in bycatch and interactions with protected species, and provide economic information on trip costs. The United States has been developing electronic reporting (eReporting) procedures for fisheries observers to increase data quality, consistency and timeliness of observer data. Observers also monitor compliance by the U.S. longline fleet with applicable fisheries and vessel safety regulations.

Transshipment

WCPFC Obligation: CMM 2009-06 requires members of the Commission to compel its offloading and receiving vessels to submit a WCPFC Transshipment Declaration for each transshipment, 100% observer coverage with the observers deployed on either the offloading or receiving vessel, and notification to the Commission prior to any transshipments on the high seas.

U.S. Plan: U.S. longline vessels are required to submit a WCPFC Transshipment Declaration for each transshipment and the U.S. government will ensure that the Commission is notified in a timely manner for transshipments at-sea and emergency transshipments. U.S. longline vessels are also required to have an observer onboard either the offloading or the receiving vessel if engaging in transshipment at sea. Additionally, a valid receiving permit must be held by any vessel that is used to transship longline harvested species on the high seas.

The U.S. longline fleet engages in very low levels of transshipment with less than three transshipments occurring in 2013 and 2014, and no transshipments occurring in 2015-2017.

Protected Species and Bycatch

WCPFC Obligation: There are various conservation and management measures that place obligations on the U.S. longline fishery for tropical tunas to prevent and mitigate interactions with protected species of sea turtles, marine mammals and seabirds and minimize bycatch of key shark species.

U.S. Plan: All owners and operators of a U.S. longline fishing vessel must complete a Protected Species Workshop annually in order to renew their permit, and must have the completion certificate on board at all times while fishing. The operator is required to carry specific gear and follow safe handling and release protocols for sea turtles, marine mammals, seabirds and sharks. These protocols are monitored by onboard observers.

Enforcement

WCPFC Obligation: The WCPF Convention requires each member of the Commission, to the greatest extent possible, to take measures to ensure that its nationals, and fishing vessels owned or controlled by its nationals fishing in the Convention Area, comply with the provisions of the Convention. Each member of the Commission shall, to the greatest extent possible, at the request of any other member, and when provided with the relevant information, investigate any alleged violation by its nationals, or fishing vessels owned or controlled by its nationals, of the provisions of this Convention or any conservation and management measure adopted by the Commission.

U.S. Plan: The United States is committed to ensuring its vessels comply with applicable regulations including those derived from WCPFC decisions. The United States closely monitors the U.S. longline fleet, including through dedicated law enforcement patrols and the facilitation of at-sea boarding and inspections. Both at-sea and dockside operations ensure compliance with catch and effort limits, time and area closures, gear requirements, reporting requirements, bycatch interactions, VMS reporting and observer coverage. As most of the U.S. longline fishery offloads its catch in the port of Honolulu, HI (~95% of trips), the United States is able to closely monitor vessel in the fleet.

The United States has a well-developed enforcement program including graduated levels of enforcement actions to address the gravity level of any violations and repeat violators. This includes a publicly available penalty policy that provides guidance to the public and NOAA's enforcement team on potential penalties for specific violations (*see* <https://www.gc.noaa.gov/enforce-office3.html>). More information on NOAA's enforcement program can be found at: <https://www.gc.noaa.gov/enforce-office.html> and <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/enforcement>).

Summary

The United States has a robust plan to monitor and control its longline fleet targeting tropical tunas in the WCPO. This plan demonstrates that in almost every aspect, the United States exceeds the minimum monitoring and control standards set by the Commission. When reviewing the bigeye catch limits in 2018 and 2019, the United States requests that the Commission consider these additional monitoring and control measures in place for the U.S. longline fleet, along with the revised stock assessments and recommendations from the Scientific Committee, and provide a catch limit increase commensurate with this plan.

Attachment 2. Observer coverage and at-sea transshipment activity in longline fisheries of CCMs with bigeye tuna catch limits

	LONGLINE OBSERVER COVERAGE LEVEL (%)			
	2015	2016	2017	2015-2017 ave
CHINA	1.4	2.7	4.1	2.7
INDONESIA	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.1
JAPAN	5.0	1.5	0.4	2.3
KOREA	5.2	5.2	2.9	4.4
CHINESE TAIPEI	3.8	4.6	3.0	3.8
USA	23.4	27.9	23.9	25.1

Sources: WCPFC-TCC13-2017-IP05_rev1 and WCPFC-TCC14-2018-IP04.

	REPORTED LONGLINE AT-SEA TRANSSHIPMENTS (number)			
	2015	2016	2017	2015-2017 ave
CHINA	268	358	274	300
INDONESIA	0	0	0	0
JAPAN	31	28	21	27
KOREA	108	106	90	101
CHINESE TAIPEI	212	306	539	352
USA	0	0	0	0

Sources: WCPFC-TCC12-2016-RP03_rev1, WCPFC-TCC13-2017-RP03, and WCPFC-TCC14-2018-RP03.