



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
FIFTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**

Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia
12-20 August 2019

INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

WCPFC-SC15-2019/GN-IP-04

Secretariat

Introduction

This purpose of this paper is to inform the Scientific Committee (SC) of the relevant science-related activities undertaken since SC14.

I. Summary Report of the 14th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee

1. The Secretariat posted on the SC14 website the SC14 Outcome Document on 27 August 2018 and the intersessionally adopted SC14 Summary Report and its Executive Summary on 27 November 2017.

II. Science Services from the SPC-OFP

2. In 2006, the Commission signed the first memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Commission's scientific services provider (SPC-OFP) to provide scientific and data management services. The MOU is composed of two sections: 1) general scientific, financial and administrative agreement which will be updated every three years, and 2) Annex I (*Agreement for the Provision of Scientific Services to the Commission and Assistance to Members by the Pacific Community*) of the MOU which will be updated each year to accommodate scientific services as requested by the Commission for each calendar year. In December 2009, the Commission and the SPC agreed to revise the MOU to provide for a three-year arrangement as directed by the Commission. The revision of the MOU was made in 2010, 2013 and 2016, which included implementation of the Shark Research Plan and development of management strategy evaluation to support the implementation of the harvest strategy framework. In 2019, the term MOU was changed to the MOA (Memorandum of Agreement)

3. The SPC-OFP produced or involved in producing 47 papers and reports, covering all four theme issues of the SC plenary agenda, and provided *ad hoc* advice and support throughout the year. In addition, SPC-OFP assisted the following activities:

- Participated in TCC14 and WCPFC15, producing several key scientific papers and presentations for each meeting;

- Assisted the WPEA Project by supporting Tuna Data Review and Annual Tuna Catch Estimates Workshops hosted by the Project participating countries (Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam), and ongoing database system and data management support;
- Supported the WCPFC Bycatch Mitigation Problem-Solving Workshop;
- Conducted the Pacific Tuna Tagging Project (PTTP) and coordinated the PTTP Steering Committee Meeting;
- Continued the Biological Sampling Programme and hosted the WCPFC Tuna Tissue bank;
- Hosted the Tuna Data Workshop to assist compilation of CCM's tuna fishery data;
- Participated in the IATTC's Workshop on Age and Growth of Bigeye and Yellowfin Tunas in the Pacific Ocean;
- Participated in the 2nd Joint t-RFMO FAD Working Group Meeting; and
- Hosted the Preparatory Workshop for 2019 Stock Assessments.

III. Progress of SC Work Programme Activities

4. SC work programmes conducted in 2018-2019 include, with Commission budgets in parenthesis:
- a) (Project 35b) WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank (\$ 97,200)
The WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank (TTB) project has been continued since 2016. In 2018-19, there has been one new request to withdraw samples from the TTB. The first TTB Steering Committee will be convened during SC15. CCMs are requested to visit TTB website: www.spc.int/ofp/PacificSpecimenBank. SC15 will review recommendations in the TTB report (SC15-RP-P35b-01).
 - b) (Project 42) Pacific-wide tagging project (\$ 645,000)
WCPFC15 agreed 2019-2021 PTTP Work Plan, and allocated funding of \$650,000 for 2019. In addition to the Korea's contribution of around \$170,000/year, unspent Korea's contribution in 2018 was also reallocated to 2019 and 2020 (\$85,000 each year). Two tagging experiments were planned since SC14: 1) CP13, which was implemented in July – August 2018, and 2) WP5, which has just commenced in July 2019. Target fish is skipjack, with secondary target of yellowfin tuna in 2019 and 2021. Details are available in the PTTP report (SC15- RP-PTTP-02), and SC15 will review recommendations in the document.
 - c) (Project 60) Further paired sampling and unloading data comparisons (\$ 0)
SPC-OPF published a meeting paper SC15-ST-WP-02 using funding from other sources in 2019.
 - d) (Project 68) Estimation of seabird mortality across the WCPO Convention Area (\$ 17,500)
With the co-funding from the FAO ABNJ Tuna Project, SPC-OPF published a project paper SC15-ST-WP-03 (Estimates of Seabird Mortality) after a short note at SC14 on seabird bycatch estimates (SC14-EB-WP-03).
 - e) (Project 82) Yellowfin tuna age and growth (\$ 85,000)
Following the progress report on yellowfin tuna age and growth work (SC14-SA-WP-13), another progress report will be presented at SC15 (SC15-SA-WP-03). Although the final results were planned to be presented at SC15, this was not possible due to the postponement of the inter-laboratory ageing work and technical meeting with IATTC. It is anticipated that the work can be completed and final report can be submitted to the WCPFC within the project timelines (by 31 December 2019) and will be presented at SPC's Pre-Assessment Workshop in 2020.

f) (Project 90) Fish weights/lengths for scientific analysis (\$ 60,000)

Project 90 is currently a 3-year project and indicative budgets for 2020-21 were endorsed by the Commission. Outputs from 2019 work will be the submission of a preliminary report to SC15 (SC15-ST-WP-03) and an annual report for 2019 to the Secretariat by 30 November 2019.

g) (Project 94) WS on YF and BE age and growth (\$ 15,000)

A small technical workshop was convened among CSIRO, Fish Ageing Services (FAS) and the IATTC to assess and improve consistency in ageing methods using otoliths for bigeye and yellowfin (SC15- SA-WP-02), which was presented at the IATTC's Workshop on Age and Growth of Bigeye and Yellowfin Tunas in the Pacific Ocean (SC15- SA-IP-19).

IV. Cooperation with other organizations

5. The Secretariat was represented at the following science-related meetings during the last 12 months:

- The 4th North Pacific Albacore MSE Workshop, 5-7 March 2019, Yokohama, Japan
- The 2nd Joint t-RFMO FAD Working Group Meeting. 8-11 March 2019, La Jolla, USA
- SPC Pre-Assessment Workshop, 2-5 April 2019, Noumea, New Caledonia;
- The 19th ISC Plenary Meeting, 9-15 July 2019, Taipei, Taiwan; and
- WPEA Project related workshops and meetings for the review of project consultancies, data review and annual catch estimates workshops, three-country workshops and project board meetings.

V. Research Projects

ABNJ (Common Oceans) Tuna Project-Shark and Bycatch Components

6. The Common Oceans (ABNJ) Tuna Project activities are comprised of shark data improvement and harmonization, shark stock status assessment, and bycatch information and management. Under the original programming the project was designed to run through 14 January 2019. However, the funding agency (The GEF) granted a no-cost extension to 30 September 2019. Several activities were conducted during the last one year for SC15, includes shark post-release mortality tagging project; an update on the Bycatch Management Information System; operational planning for the collection of shark biological samples; etc. Details are described in ABNJ Project report (SC15-RP-ABNJ-01).

Japanese Trust Fund Project

7. The Japanese Government supported the first year of JTF Phase 3 with a total budget of \$232,821, including WCPFC's 7.5% administration fee. Five project proposals were endorsed: two from Cook Islands and three from Tonga. The Steering Committee will be held during SC15 to review the progress of each project. Details are described in JTF Status Report (SC15-RP-JTF-01).

WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank (TTB)

8. Refer to Paragraph 4.a) *Project 35b* above.

West Pacific East Asia Project

9. During the last one year, WPEA-SM project continued its activities in Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam. Key activities include tuna catch data collection from port sampling; three country workshop; project activities review workshops; and project board meetings. The WPEA-SM Project, which commenced on 28 October 2014, was officially terminated on 27 April 2019. The Secretariat is preparing the Project Terminal Evaluation process, which will be implemented during August – September 2019. Details are described in the WPEA Project Progress Report (SC15-RP-WPEA-01).

VI. Voluntary Contributions from Members and Observers

10. Members and Observers of the Commission have voluntarily provided funding supports for the scientific work of the Commission. The European Union has made available to WCPFC in 2017 – 2019 over EUR 1 million for two research projects: 1) Mitigating bycatch of bigeye and yellowfin juveniles by purse seine fisheries through tagging (EUR 700,000; Dec. 2017 – Nov. 2019) and 2) Estimation of post-release shark and rays survival on longline fisheries (EUR 400,000; Jan. 2017 – Dec. 2019). The third 5-year programme of the Korean government to support the SPC's Pacific Tuna Tagging Project started in 2019, providing about USD 170,000 per year.