



**COMMISSION
SIXTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**
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2019 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WCPFC16-2019-04

25 October 2019

Paper by the WCPFC Secretariat

1. INTRODUCTION

1. This report is provided pursuant to Rule 13 of the Commission's Rules of Procedure. It highlights the main work programmes and activities of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and its Secretariat in 2019.

2. The absence of a Strategic or Corporate Plan for the Commission makes reporting on accomplishment of strategic priorities of the Commission somewhat unstructured. This annual report, therefore, takes the form of a historical account of the key developments, achievements and challenges of the Commission and its Secretariat as they pertain to the implementation of decisions and agreements of the Commission. The last annual WCPFC15 meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii, United States of America, determined the key priorities and work programmes for the Commission and its Secretariat for 2019 and onward years.

3. The Honolulu WCPFC15 meeting was the last meeting presided over by the outgoing Chair Ms Rhea Moss-Christian (Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)) who chaired the Commission from 2014 to 2018. She was replaced by Ms Jung-re Riley Kim (Korea). WCPFC15 achieved some major outcomes including, inter alia, agreement to continue the application of the multiyear tropical tuna measures adopted at WCPFC14 in Manila, Philippines, in 2017 for its remaining years of 2019 and 2020 without major refinements; the adoption of a new one-year measure for the compliance monitoring scheme (CMS) which included a work plan of tasks designed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the CMS; the adoption of a target reference point (TRP) for the south Pacific albacore which took years to arrive at and was a sensitive and emotional issue for some member States; adoption of a package of measures on bycatch management including revised measures on seabirds and turtles as well as the adoption of best practices for the safe release of sharks; the adoption of a strategic investment plan for the special requirements fund (SRF) designed to match investment with priority needs as identified by developing states; the adoption of a resolution on labour standards for crews on fishing vessels; and continued progress on the development of standards for electronic reporting and monitoring.

4. Despite the achievements of WCPFC15, the Commission was not in a position to agree on terms of reference for a science - management dialogue which was envisaged by WCPFC14 in 2017 as a necessary process to expedite the implementation of the work plan to develop harvest strategy under CMM 2014-06. Instead, the Commission agreed on a 6-day annual meeting for

WCPFC16 from 5 to 11 December 2019 in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea with additional time devoted for the Commission to discuss harvest strategies. Accordingly, the Port Moresby meeting is scheduled for 6 days instead of the usual 5 days and the agenda and schedule for the WCPFC16 meeting will seek to cater for adequate time for the Commission to progress discussion and development of harvest strategies per the work plan under CMM 2014-06.

5. The work of the Commission and its Secretariat for 2019 were, therefore, guided very much by the decisions of WCPFC15 and other ongoing tasks from previous years. As will be further corroborated by this report, the work undertaken by the Commission and its Secretariat in the reporting period were generally satisfactory and delivered on time with the intended objectives and outcomes duly accomplished. Some of the highlight of achievements for 2019 include:

- a) the four key commercial tuna stocks namely bigeye, skipjack, South Pacific albacore and yellowfin for the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) were continued to be assessed to be managed above sustainable limits;
- b) the successful convening of the meetings of the Scientific Committee and the Technical and Compliance Committee;
- c) the timely completion and delivery of the draft full Compliance Monitoring Report which has been forwarded as the provisional Compliance Monitoring Report to WCPFC16;
- d) good progress was made on some of the tasks under CMM 2018-07 to enhance the efficiency of the compliance Monitoring Scheme including the development of audit points and streamlining reporting requirements;
- e) stock assessments were successfully undertaken for skipjack tuna, Southwest Pacific striped marlin, oceanic whitetip shark and North Pacific striped marlin;
- f) good progress achieved on the implementation of the ABNJ, the PTTP, the WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank and the WPEA Projects; and
- g) the Commission continued to receive an unqualified external audit report for its 2018 financial statements and affairs.

2. WORK OF THE COMMISSION SUBSIDIARY BODIES

6. The Commission has four subsidiary bodies through which the bulk of the work of the Commission is transacted. The subsidiary bodies include the Scientific Committee, Northern Committee, Technical and Compliance Committee, and the Finance and Administration Committee. Their annual meetings in 2019, as usual, were scheduled in advance of the annual session of the Commission (WCPFC16). The outcomes and recommendations of the meetings of the subsidiary bodies will be tabled and considered for decision by the Commission at WCPFC16.

2.1 The Scientific Committee

7. The Scientific Committee was established to ensure the Commission obtains for its consideration the best scientific information available. The Fifteenth Regular Session of the Scientific Committee (SC15) was held in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), from 12th to 20th August 2019. The meeting was chaired by Mr Ueta Faasili (Samoa) and was attended by over 150 participants. The meeting agenda continued to be structured around the four key themes with each thematic discussion facilitated by a Theme Convener. The Data and Statistic theme was facilitated by Mr Ueta Faasili on behalf of Dr Valerie Post (USA) for this session only and supported by Mr Peter Williams (SPC); the Stock Assessment theme by Dr Keith Bigelow (USA) and Dr Hiroshi Minami (Japan); the Management Issues theme by Dr Robert Campbell (Australia); and the Ecosystem and Bycatch Mitigation theme by Dr John Annala (New Zealand) and Dr Yonat Swimmer (USA). Pursuant to the direction of WCPFC15, additional sessions were

added to the Management Issues Theme to provide additional time for the consideration of elements of the Work Plan to adopt Harvest Strategies under CMM 2014-06.

8. The SC15 considered the provisional total Western and Central Pacific Convention Area tuna catch for 2018 which was estimated at 2,716,396 metric ton (mt), the second highest on record, which is 81% of the total Pacific Ocean catch of 3,373,512 mt, and 55% of the global tuna catch (the provisional estimate for 2018 is 4,930,621 mt).

9. The SC15 also considered the results of four stock assessments for WCPO skipjack tuna, Southwest Pacific striped marlin, oceanic whitetip shark undertaken by the Commission's Scientific Services Provider the Oceanic Fisheries Programme of the Pacific Community (SPC-OFP) and the North Pacific striped marlin undertaken by the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC). The outcomes of those stock assessments as considered by SC15 are summarized as follow:

- a. SC15 noted that the total provisional catch for skipjack tuna in 2018 was 1,795,048 mt, a 10% increase from 2017 and a 1% decrease from the average of 2013-2017. For the 2019 stock assessment, SC15 agreed to use an 8-region model to describe the stock status of skipjack tuna, which better captures the biology of skipjack tuna. The skipjack stock status was determined over an uncertainty grid of 54 models, where the results of those models were weighted based upon expert opinion. Over the uncertainty grid, the median value of recent (2015–2018) spawning biomass depletion was $SB_{\text{recent}}/SB_{F=0} = 0.44$ with a probable range of 0.37 to 0.53 (80% probability interval); and recent (2014–2017) fishing mortality was $F_{\text{recent}}/F_{\text{MSY}} = 0.45$ with a range of 0.34 to 0.60 (80% probability interval). SC15 noted that the stock was assessed to be above the adopted limit reference point (LRP) and fished at rates below F_{MSY} with 100% probability. Therefore, the skipjack stock is not overfished, nor subject to overfishing. However, since the median spawning biomass has been consistently below the interim TRP, SC15 recommended that the Commission take appropriate management action to ensure that the biomass depletion level fluctuates around the TRP (e.g., through the adoption of a harvest control rule).
- b. A comprehensive stock assessment was conducted for oceanic whitetip shark in 2019. Over the structural uncertainty grid, the median $SB_{\text{recent (2013-2015)}}/SB_0$ was 0.04 with a probable range of 0.03 to 0.05 (80% probability interval) and the median $F_{\text{recent}}/F_{\text{MSY}}$ was 3.94 with a range of 2.67 to 5.89 (80% probability interval). Therefore, the conclusions are that overfishing is occurring and the stock is in an overfished state relative to commonly used depletion and MSY-based reference points. SC15 noted that the stock assessment estimates a slight recovery in stock biomass in recent years (2013-2016). It remains unclear whether the stock status will continue to improve or perhaps decline in the future. To help clarify this issue SC15 recommended that stock projections based on the assessment be undertaken for SC16. SC15 also recommended that further efforts to mitigate catch and improve handling and release practices are required to further reduce fishing mortality and improve stock status.
- c. For the Southwest Pacific striped marlin, SC15 noted that the median $SB_{\text{recent}}/SB_{F=0}$ was 0.198 with a probable range of 0.093 to 0.464 (80% probable range), median recent spawning biomass relative to the spawning biomass at MSY ($SB_{\text{recent}}/SB_{\text{MSY}}$) was 0.737 with a probable range of 0.334 to 1.635 (80% probable range), and the median $F_{\text{recent}}/F_{\text{MSY}}$ was 0.911 with an 80% probability interval of 0.313 to 1.891. Although there are no agreed LRPs for the WCPO billfish, the Southwest Pacific striped marlin assessment results

indicate that the stock is likely overfished, and close to undergoing overfishing according to MSY-based reference points. SC15 recommended that WCPFC16 identify an appropriate LRP for this stock and consider measures to reduce the overall catch of this stock, including through the expansion of the geographical scope of CMM 2006-04, in order to cover the distribution range of the stock.

- d. Regarding the status of the Western and Central North Pacific Ocean (WCNPO) striped marlin stock, ISC provided the following information that i) there are no established reference points for WCNPO striped marlin; and ii) the results from the base case assessment model show that under current conditions the WCNPO striped marlin stock is overfished and is subject to overfishing relative to MSY-based reference points. SC15 recommended that WCPFC16 consider identifying appropriate LRPs for WCNPO striped marlin and appropriate actions to ensure rebuilding this stock to the NC14 rebuilding target (Para 70, NC14 Summary Report).
10. As required by the Work Plan to develop Harvest Strategy under CMM 2014-06, SC15 reviewed the elements of the plan scheduled for consideration in 2019 and forwarded the following recommendations to the WCPFC16:
- a. For the TRPs for bigeye and yellowfin tuna, SC15 reviewed information on what would be the minimum setting for candidate TRPs for yellowfin and bigeye tuna that avoid breaching the LRP with a specified level of probability under the current uncertainty framework. While SC15 noted that the main biological consideration for a TRP is that it should be sufficiently above the LRP, SC15 also noted that the choice of a TRP can be based on a combination of biological, ecological and socioeconomic considerations. SC15 recommended that WCPFC16 take note of these results when identifying appropriate TRPs for yellowfin tuna and bigeye tuna in 2019 as scheduled in the Harvest Strategy Work Plan. In so doing WCPFC16 should clarify the management objectives for these species.
 - b. For the TRP for South Pacific albacore, SC15 reviewed information on alternative catch trajectories to achieve the South Pacific albacore interim TRP within no later than 20 years. SC15 noted that the recovery target can be achieved through many different approaches with the assumed long-term recruitments. However, catch (and effort) reductions from the 2014-16 average (of 60,000 mt) are required under all scenarios. Noting that constant catch scenarios may mask declines in catch rates and associated economic conditions and requested that the Scientific Services Provider undertake a similar set of analyses based on fishing effort-based projections. SC15 recommended that WCPFC16 take note of both sets of results in consideration of rebuilding the South Pacific albacore stock to the interim TRP within 20 years.
 - c. Based on the 2019 skipjack tuna stock assessment, SC15 provided advice on technical approaches and analyses which should be undertaken to assist WCPFC16 review the performance of the interim skipjack tuna TRP.
 - d. SC15 reviewed several papers related to ongoing work by SPC-OFP on the development of a management strategy evaluation (MSE) framework for skipjack and South Pacific albacore. Detailed information and recommendations are available in Section 5.1.3 of the SC15 Outcomes Document. SC15 recommended that WCPFC16 note the progress on the development of the MSE for skipjack and South Pacific albacore tuna and provide

additional elements, if any, as specified in the Harvest Strategy Work Plan to further progress this work against the scheduled timelines.

- e. SC15 reviewed a tool developed by SPC-OFP (Performance Indicators and Management Procedures Explorer, PIMPLE) for exploring and comparing the relative performance of alternative candidate management procedures (MPs) and the included HCRs (SC15-MI-WP-09), and recommended it to managers and WCPC16 so that they can understand the performance of various MPs for achieving management objectives.
- f. SC15 reviewed two potential approaches for modelling mixed fisheries in the WCPO harvest strategy evaluations (SC15-MI-WP-04) and endorsed the use of a hierarchical approach based on single species operating models. SC15 also noted the possible inclusion of Performance Indicators from interacting fisheries/stocks in the development of Management Procedures for any single species within such a hierarchical approach. SC15 recommended that WCPFC16 note the approaches outlined in the above paper, and the possible implications of the challenges in developing a multi-species modelling framework on this item within the schedule of the Harvest Strategy Work Plan.

11. As required, SC15 reviewed information on the likely performance of the tropical tuna measure CMM 2018-01. In relation to the objectives of this measure stated in paragraphs 12 to 14, the minor adjustments to the CMM when compared to CMM 2017-01 were found to not materially affect the management conditions assumed under this evaluation. SC15 noted, however, the difficulty in evaluating the impacts of CMM 2018-01 paragraph 18 because of the need for clearer guidance on the interpretation of “small garbage”. SC15 recommended that the Commission revise paragraph 18 to include a more quantifiable and precise definition, so that a more meaningful evaluation of impacts may be undertaken.

12. The other issues considered by SC15 include management issues related to fish aggregating devices (FADs), review of shark measures and guidelines for the safe release of sharks, estimated seabird mortalities, and review of the Pacific Tuna Tagging and WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank Projects.

13. The status and progress of the 2019 SC work programmes and science related projects in 2019 are set out in Annex 1. The finalized Summary Report of SC15 will be posted on the Commission website by the time of WCPFC16.

2.2 The Northern Committee

14. The Northern Committee (NC) was established to consider and make recommendations on the formulation of conservation and management measures in respect of stocks which occur mostly in the area north of 20° north parallel namely NP albacore, Pacific bluefin and NP swordfish, and on the implementation for the area north of 20° north parallel of such conservation and management measures as may be adopted by the Commission.

15. The 15th Regular Session of the Northern Committee, chaired by Mr Masanori Miyahara, was held in Portland, Oregon, United States of America, from 3rd to 6th September 2019. However, the meeting did not acquire the requisite quorum. Despite the absence of a quorum, the members of the NC present in Portland agreed to proceed with the meeting with the view to reconvene the NC15 meeting with the necessary quorum prior to WCPFC16 to formalize the adoption of the report of NC15 for onward transmission to WCPFC16.

16. The NC meeting has a special meeting structure, which included the Joint IATTC-WCPFC NC Working Group Meeting on the Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna (JWG-PBF), co-chaired by Madam Dorothy Lowman (USA) and the NC Chair. The Second Catch Documentation Scheme Technical Meeting of the Joint IATTC and WCPFC-NC working group was also held on 2nd September 2019, towards the development of a Catch Documentation Scheme for Pacific Bluefin Tuna. The key outcomes of the NC15 will be presented for consideration at WCPFC16.

2.3 The Technical and Compliance Committee

17. The Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) was established to advise the Commission on the technical aspects of implementation of conservation and management measures and compliance with such measures.

18. The Fifteenth Regular Session of the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC15) was held at Pohnpei, FSM from 25th September to 1st October 2019. The meeting was chaired by Mr Laurence Edwards II (RMI) and over 180 participants attended the meeting.

19. TCC15 established small working groups to progress discussions on the margins of the meeting on the matters of cooperating non-member applications and TCC Workplan. Also convened in the margins of TCC15, informal face-to-face discussions for the Intersession Working Groups to Review CMM 2009-06 on Transshipment, co-chaired by Sam Lanwi (RMI) and Alex Kahl (USA)); the development of audit points for the Compliance Monitoring Scheme chaired by Eugene Pangelinan (FSM); and the TCC WG on flow of Observer Reports chaired by Tom Graham (USA).

20. TCC15 committed at least two and a half days to the review of the full draft Compliance Monitoring Report covering 2018 activities prepared by the Secretariat in accordance with CMM 2018-07. The review continued to be held in closed session to the exclusion of observer delegations. In addition, recommendations were made regarding the 2016 and 2017 assessments of Capacity Assistance Needed and Flag State Investigations. TCC15 agreed to recommend a provisional Compliance Monitoring Report to the Commission for consideration at WCPFC16. Noting that in accordance with CMM 2018-07 on the Compliance Monitoring Scheme the Provisional Report shall be finalized at TCC and forwarded to the Commission. TCC15 also agreed which obligations CCMs could submit up to 21 days after TCC additional information to fill a data gap.

21. The Compliance Monitoring Scheme was reviewed by Members during 2017 and 2018. At WCPFC15 the Commission agreed to CMM 2018-07 and paragraph 47 states that “this measure shall be enhanced in 2019 in accordance with the future work in Section IX” and paragraph 48 says that the measure will be effective for 2019 only. The future work set out in Section IX of CMM 2018-07 was intended to be a collective effort to continue to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (as required by CMM 2018-07 paragraph 45 and TCC Workplan 2019 - 2021 priority project specific tasks). Two of the seven Section IX Future Work tasks were progressed during the intersessional period prior to TCC (CMM 2018-07 paragraph 45 (ii) and (iii)). A report from the Secretariat that reviewed the Commissions reporting requirements and discussed options and principles for streamlining reporting requirements was presented and considered by TCC15 (CMM 2018-01 paragraph 45(ii)). TCC15 noted that there are presently some quantitative limits specified in CMMs where there are limited or no additional data presently available to WCPFC to verify the CCMs reports on implementation of quantitative limits and has forwarded some information about these gaps to the Commission for their consideration. TCC15 has supported that some streamlining suggestions for Annual Report Part

2 and related to Annual Report Part 1 and has tasked that the Secretariat and Scientific Services Provider undertake to implement certain suggestions as a trial in 2020, subject to available budget being approved by WCPFC16. The outcomes and experiences of the trials, including associated cost and resource implications, would be further considered by SC16 and TCC16. An intersessional activity report from Mr Eugene Pangelinan (FSM) was provided to TCC on the work FSM volunteered to lead to develop audit points to clarify the obligations assessed under the Compliance Monitoring Scheme prior to WCPFC16 (CMM 2018-07 paragraph 45(iii)). TCC15 acknowledged the importance of transparent audits points for robust compliance reviews and that audit points are CCMs collective responsibility and recommended that WCPFC16 convene an informal small working group to finalise any recommended audit points.

22. For the remaining five Section IX Future work tasks, TCC15 noted a proposal from New Zealand to develop a draft terms of reference related to the development of a risk-based assessment framework for the CMS (CMM 2018-07 paragraph 45 (v)), and the offer from the United States to refine and circulate an earlier paper on the guidelines for participation of observers in the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMM 2018-07 paragraph 45 (viii)). TCC15 also recommended that WCPFC16 task CCMs to provide the Secretariat with any suggested improvements to the online compliance case file system, so that the Secretariat can provide a paper for TCC16 on the feasibility and costs of those options, as well as any potential implications from potential resolution of paragraph 27 of CMM 2018-07 (CMM 2018-07 paragraph 45 (iv)). TCC15 further recommended that the WCPFC16 informal small working group to finalise CMS audit points should also discuss the broad suite of CMS future work outlined in Section IX of CMM 2018-07 with a view to develop a clearer approach and timelines to completing the various work areas in a complementary manner.

23. The annual reports of the WCPFC MCS Programmes administered by the Secretariat were also presented and reviewed by TCC15, and they covered the Vessel Monitoring System, Regional Observer Programme (ROP), Transshipment Monitoring, High Seas Boarding and Inspection, Record of Fishing Vessels, Eastern High Seas Pocket Special Management Area, Port State Minimum Standards, Report on the performance of the E-reporting standards and their application, Administration of Data Requests and gaps in Scientific data submissions.

24. TCC15 received a report from the TCC Working group on flow of Observer Reports from Chair Tom Graham (USA) and agreed that the groups work would continue. TCC15 received an intersessional report on progress from the Electronic Reporting and Electronic Monitoring (ERandEM) Working Group Chair Ms Kerry Smith (Australia) and noted that the Chair will provide a revised Electronic Monitoring Concept paper to WCPFC16, taking into consideration Project 93 discussion and any input from members. TCC15 recommended that a physical meeting of the ERandEM Working Group take place in 2020 prior to TCC16. TCC15 also received an intersessional activity report from the Co-chairs Sam Lanwi (RMI) and Alex Kahl (USA) of the IWG to review CMM 2009-06 and noted that the IWG participants have finalized and adopted terms of reference for the IWGs work.

25. TCC15 also considered the report on SC Project 93 that reviewed the Commissions data needs and collection programmes and supported the conclusions to inform the Commission of the current status of WCPFC data collection programmes and associated data gaps and needs. TCC15 recommended that the conclusions from Project 93 be considered in respect of the ROP (CMM 2018-05), the ERandEM Working Group and the IWG to review CMM 2009-06 on transshipment.

26. TCC was advised by the Secretariat that in 2019 a specific IT system to support E-reporting was operational. Currently the WCPFC E-reporting system can receive E-reported data as per the WCPFC high seas transshipment declaration and notices E-reporting standards. An application that WCPFC has developed to support CCMs implementation of the E-reporting Standards for high

seas transshipment declarations and transshipment notices is being used by the Secretariat and one Member (Chinese Taipei commenced using the application in September). The work to date was supported by supplemental funds from New Zealand and the United States of America. The design of the high seas transshipment E-reporting system provides the WCPFC with a base infrastructure that could be easily modified to collect other types of E-reported data in the future.

27. TCC15 also recommended that the three vessels currently on the WCPFC IUU vessel list are maintained. No additional IUU vessel list cases were received for review by TCC15.

28. A full summary report of the TCC15 meeting will be posted on the Commission website by the time of WCPFC16 and the outcomes and recommendations will be discussed at WCPFC16. The Provisional Compliance Monitoring Report documentation is available to CCMs and their authorized users through the WCPFC intranet and a copy has also been posted on the secure side of the WCPFC website. In accordance with CMM 2018-07 paragraph 40, the Secretariat will table a summary of updates to the compliance scores of CCMs on the Commission website by the time of WCPFC16. The key TCC related activities in 2019 are set out in *Annex 2* to this report.

2.4 The Finance and Administration Committee

29. The Finance and Administration Committee (FAC) is responsible for reviewing and advising the Commission on its budget and other financial and administrative requirements. Its thirteenth session (FAC13) will be held immediately prior to and as necessary throughout WCPFC16. Currently the FAC Co-chairs are vacant and Members will be updated on the status of those positions at the annual meeting. As expected, FAC13 will consider the routine matters relating to the work programme and budget of the Commission for 2020, personnel issues, administrative matters relating to the work of the Commission including issues associated with the maintenance of the headquarters office. The report and outcomes of FAC13 will be presented for discussion and decision at WCPFC16.

3. INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

3.1 Strategic Planning

30. The Commission at WCPFC15 considered a draft medium-term Corporate Plan for the Commission prepared by the Secretariat but was unable to progress the further the plan's development. Instead, the Commission directed the Executive Director to further the development of the Corporate Plan but to limit its focus only to the work of the Secretariat and to report back to WCPFC16. Pursuant to that tasking, the Secretariat will table a draft Corporate Plan framed specifically to provide a corporate framework to guide the work of the Secretariat.

3.2 Staffing matters

31. The number of established positions for the Secretariat remains relatively stable at twenty-four (24) comprising of 9 positions for professional staff including the Executive Director, and fifteen (15) positions for support staff. This year saw a few changes in the professional staff at the Secretariat with the departure of the ICT Manager Mr Sam Taufao and the Assistant Science Manager Mr Anthony Beeching. The Assistant Science Manager position was advertised on 21 February 2019 and Ms Elaine Garvilles from the Philippines was selected to fill the vacancy. The ICT Manager position was advertised on 17 April 2019 and Mr Tim Jones from Australia was selected to fill the vacancy. In addition, the position of Compliance Manager was advertised on 27 August 2019 and Members will be updated on the status of this vacancy once a successful candidate

for this position is selected. For the Secretariat's support staff, Mr Joseph Jack was appointed as the Vessel Monitoring System Operations Officer.

32. At WCPFC16, the Commission approved a supplementary retirement plan for locally engaged staff with a 7% matching contribution to be fully vested after 7 years. The plan was implemented in the second quarter of this year and the majority of the locally engaged staff has subscribed to the plan.

3.3 *Financial and Administrative Matters*

33. The 2018 financial statements were completed, audited and circulated to Members, together with the External Auditor's Report. The Auditor reported that the statements and accounts compiled were compliant with the required accounting standards as well as the Commission's Financial Regulations and presented a fair view of the financial position of the Commission. The Auditor's report will be presented for the collective review and final consideration of WCPFC16.

34. Article 18 (3) of the Convention provides that if a member's contributions is in arrears for the preceding two full years the member concerned shall not participate in the taking of decisions by the Commission, subject to the Commission permitting such a member to vote. It is gladly reported that currently there are no members who are affected by that conventional provision.

35. The Secretariat continued to use the QuickBooks Enterprise as the Commissions financial management system. Maintenance of the headquarters building services and grounds continued to be a challenge, however, by implementing a regular maintenance schedule of the buildings and grounds as supported by regular annual budgetary allocations ensured that those properties and assets continue to be in good order. The Secretariat continued to benefit from its solar panel installation accruing saving to the tune of \$70,000 a year from electricity bills.

36. The Secretariat continues to expand its green policy by eliminating the use of plastic bottles, Styrofoam containers and plates and a greater emphasis on purchasing recycled or sustainably resourced materials when making procurements. The Secretariat is working with the local power utility company to install additional solar power to achieve the goal of being a zero net energy building through expanding it use of solar power. Currently the amount of waste generated by the office that cannot be repurposed or recycled has been reduced by roughly 50%.

3.4 *Trust Funds*

37. The Commission continued in 2019 to receive voluntary contributions from member states and multilateral organisations to support the work of the Commission. These are on top of the assessed contributions of member States that supported the core budget for 2019. The following voluntary contributions were gratefully received by the Commission:

- a. \$67,892 from Australia to the Special Requirements Fund (SRF);
- b. \$50,000 from Canada to the Special Requirements Fund (SRF);
- c. \$232,821 from the Japan Trust to support capacity building projects in fisheries statistic, regulations and enforcement in small island developing states;
- d. \$166,045 from Korea for the Tuna Tagging Project;
- e. \$9,523 as a donation from New Caledonia;
- f. \$548,284 from New Zealand for the West Pacific East Asia Sustainable Tuna Management Project;

- g. \$400,000 from the Chinese Taipei Trust Fund to support capacity building in the fisheries sector in small islands developing states;
- h. \$154,000 from the United States of America for the SRF (\$50,000), WCPFC Transshipment Analysis (\$74,000), and Cross-endorsed Observer Workshops (\$30,000); and
- i. \$81,683 from the United Nations Development Fund for the West Pacific East Asia Sustainable Tuna Management Project.

3.5 Information Technology Systems

38. As in previous years, the Secretariat network maintained internal operations and support to member States at more than 99% systems availability. The information and technology systems at the Secretariat are serviced by two full time staff one professional and one support staff who are supported by external contractors sourced through four Service Level Agreements (SLAs). As noted previously, the ICT Manager left in May and his replacement will take up office in November. So, for most part of the year the IT Officer with support from external consultants were able to secure the office networks and data holdings while maintaining an acceptable level of access and internet connectivity to support the work of the Secretariat and CCMs.

39. The IT team continued to support the Compliance team in their delivery of the online systems for Annual Report Part 2, Compliance Monitoring Report, online compliance case file system, electronic reporting systems for high seas transshipment reporting and other website applications. They also support the VMS team and members with their collective effort to include all vessels tracking agreement form (VTAF) or mobile transceiver units (MTU) synchronized automatically for reporting on the VMS. The results of such collaborations are best demonstrated through the work of the compliance and science teams and the resulting annual reports of the WCPFC MCS Programmes administered by the Secretariat that were presented to TCC15.

4. SERVICE PROVIDERS FOR THE COMMISSION

40. When the Commission was established in 2004, the Convention that established it acknowledged that some of the functions expected of the Commission were already undertaken by then existing regional organizations and arrangements. So, the Commission was encouraged to take advantage of those exiting capacities and avoid duplicating the same capacity. The Commission continued in 2019 to maintain contractual arrangements with other regional organisations for the provision of certain services on behalf of the Commission. These arrangements are explained in the succeeding paragraphs.

4.1 The Oceanic Fisheries Programme of the Pacific Community

41. The Oceanic Fisheries Programme of the Pacific Community (SPC-OFP) continued in the role of conducting data management, statistical analysis, stock assessments and related analytical services, management analyses and member performance monitoring, and other advisory and technical services as may be required by the Commission.

42. In 2019, SPC-OFP authored and co-authored 47 papers and reports for SC15, with additional papers to TCC15 and WCPFC16, and provided *ad hoc* advice and support throughout the year. In addition, SPC-OFP provided the necessary technical and scientific advisory support for the following activities:

- a. produced several key scientific papers and presentations for SC15, TCC15 and WCPFC16 meetings;

- b. 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;
- c. supported the WCPFC Bycatch Mitigation Problem-Solving Workshop;
- d. conducted the Pacific Tuna Tagging Project (PTTP) and coordinated the PTTP Steering Committee Meeting;
- e. continued the Biological Sampling Programme and hosted the 1st WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank Steering Committee Meeting;
- f. hosted the Tuna Data Workshop to assist compilation of tuna fishery data for developing countries;
- g. participated in the IATTC's Workshop on Age and Growth of Bigeye and Yellowfin Tunas in the Pacific Ocean;
- h. participated in the 2nd Joint t-RFMO FAD Working Group Meeting;
- i. hosted the Preparatory Workshop for 2019 Stock Assessments;
- j. provided advice on the completeness of scientific data provision by CCMs, ROP data submission and available information on purse-seine and longline observer coverage, and catch and effort table summaries for tropical tuna CMMs and South Pacific albacore; and
- k. continued to provide assistance to the Secretariat so that ROP-data could be used as a source of data in the online Compliance Case File system

43. Furthermore, SPC-OFP curated and facilitated access by researchers to samples contained in the WCPFC Tissue Bank and actioned various requests for access to WCPFC data, as approved by the WCPFC Executive Director.

4.2 *The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency*

44. The Commission continued its association with the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) through its service level agreement for VMS services, and since 30 June 2016, the service provider used by FFA has been TrackWell (www.trackwell.com). The Pacific VMS system continued to operate as two separate and distinct entities to protect the integrity of the Commission VMS data and the FFA VMS data. Currently there are almost 3,800 vessels reporting to the Commission VMS, and nearly 33% report through the FFA VMS system with position transfer to the WCPFC (the Commission separately maintains VMS contracts for airtime services for positions from the WCPFC-VMS direct reporting vessels). The Commission VMS system under the services level agreement provided continued ongoing support to routine VMS services, "flick the switch" implementation and members' high seas MCS operations.

4.3 *The International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean*

45. The 19th Plenary Session of the ISC was held in Taipei City, Taiwan, from 11th to 15 July 2019. Dr John Holmes (Canada) chaired the meeting and delegates from Canada, Japan, Korea, Chinese Taipei, USA and observers from Monterey Bay and the Western Pacific Fisheries Management Council attended the meeting. The WCPFC Secretariat also attended the meeting.

46. Key issues covered by the ISC19 included amongst others reports from species working groups (NP albacore, Pacific bluefin tuna, billfish and sharks); stock status and conservation information for NP albacore, shortfin mako shark, blue shark, WCNPO striped marlin; WCNPO swordfish; Eastern Pacific Ocean swordfish; Pacific blue marlin; and Pacific bluefin tuna; and review of statistics and database issues. Some of the highlights covered by the ISC19 are listed below:

- a. ISC conducted a full stock assessment for the WCNPO striped marlin stock. The results of WCNPO striped marlin stock assessment are considered to be the best available scientific information on the stock.
- b. The results of the 4th Management Strategy Evaluation for North Pacific Albacore (Yokohama, Japan during 5-7 March 2019) were reviewed; and the results of the 2nd Management Strategy Evaluation for Pacific Bluefin Tuna (San Diego, USA, during 20-21 May 2019) were discussed.
- c. The ISC reviewed recommendations from the *Peer Review Report on the Function of the ISC Stock Assessment Review Process* and agreed that independent expert reviews could improve the quality of stock assessments.
- d. In 2020, there will be benchmark stock assessments for North Pacific albacore and Pacific bluefin tuna.

5. RELATIONS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

47. As required by the WCPFC Convention, it is imperative that the Commission cooperate and collaborate with the FAO and other specialized UN agencies and other relevant organizations, in particular the other four tuna regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs), namely the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), to share information and exchange views on areas of common interest and best practices.

5.1 UNFAO and UN Processes

48. There was no scheduled meeting of the UNFAO that the Commission attended in 2019. However, the Executive Director attended the final meeting of the steering committee of the ABNJ project in Rome from 8 to 10 July 2019 and had the opportunity to interact and update senior officials of the FAO fisheries department on the work and key priorities of the Commission in 2019. The biennial meeting of the FAO Committee on Fisheries is scheduled for 2020.

5.1.1 Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Intergovernmental Negotiations

49. The Executive Director represented the WCPFC as an observer at the second session of the United Nations intergovernmental meeting negotiating a legally binding instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdictions. The negotiations are of interest to the Commission because the Commission also has legal management competence in areas beyond national jurisdictions in the WCPO concerning the conservation and sustainable use of highly migratory fish stocks and associated species. More explicitly, the members of the Commission are required to protect biodiversity in the marine environment. The Executive Director in conjunction with representatives from other tuna-RFMOs made concerted and coordinated efforts to ensure that the legal regime that is being developed through the BBNJ process does not undermine but complement existing regimes founded on the UN Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA). The intergovernmental organizations present at the negotiations had a side meeting with the Chair of the BBNJ process and they reemphasized the same point of not undermining existing regimes. The Chair in response assured that the point made is universally accepted as one of the guiding principles of the negotiations. The third meeting of the BBNJ process was held

from 19 to 30 August 2019 but the Commission was not represented due to other competing commitment of the Secretariat. However, most if not all member States of the WCPFC were actively participated in both meetings of the BBNJ process this year. The Commission will follow closely the remaining final sessions of the BBNJ process in 2020 as a final report is expected to be provided to the UN General Assembly in September 2020.

5.1.2 Informal Consultation of Parties to the UNFSA

50. The Commission was represented by the Executive Director at the 14th informal consultation of the parties to the UNFSA held at the UN Headquarters in New York, USA from 2 to 3 May 2019. The topic for the consultation was the ‘performance review of regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements’. The Executive Director also participated as a panelist in one of the panels that addressed the issue of “further enhancing the effectiveness of performance reviews through the resumed review conference on the Agreement and other intergovernmental processes”. The Executive Director’s contribution to the panel discussion included the following key points: while RFMOs operate within an overall framework of the UNFSA they are uniquely different in that they have different geographical coverage, stocks, ecosystems and memberships and therefore their performance reviews should be designed towards assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of that particular RFMO as there is no size fits all approach; the criteria for the review of a RFMO must be adaptable to the requirements of the RFMO like the targeted review of the WCPFC compliance monitoring scheme; the review process must be transparent and based on broad participation of all members and stakeholders; and there has to be some proper cost analysis for a review to ensure demonstrable benefits outweigh costs for the review. The outcome of the consultation will feed into the next session of the resumed review conference for the UNFSA tentatively scheduled for 2021.

5.2 Tuna RFMOs

51. Relationship with IATTC remains one of the key relationships for WCPFC because of our shared boundary, a joint management regime over overlapped convention areas and potentially shared tuna stocks. The Secretariats of both the WCPFC and IATTC maintained close liaisons and cooperated in various areas.

52. The two joint IATTC – WCPFC NC working groups on a catch documentation scheme (CDS) for Pacific bluefin and the joint management of the Pacific bluefin tuna stocks were both convened in Portland, USA, in the first week of September in conjunction with the NC15 meeting. The CDS meeting was chaired by Mr Shingo Ota (Japan) and the Joint management of the Pacific bluefin tuna stocks was co-chaired by Madam Dorothy Lowman (USA) and the NC Chair Mr Masanori Miyahara. A WCPFC-IATTC Cross Endorsed Observer Course was held in Nauru from 28 August to 2 September 2019. The course was attended by experienced observers from the national ROP observer programmes of Fiji, Nauru, Cook Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The participating observers were selected by their national programmes to gain a certification to allow them to continue to undertake observer duties in the IATTC Convention Area on purse seine vessels that may undertake a single fishing trip that includes both the WCPFC Convention Area and the IATTC Convention area. Training was carried out by the IATTC observer trainer Mr Ernesto Altamirano, who was supported by the WCPFC ROP Coordinator Mr Karl Staisch. The Executive Director represented the WCPFC at the annual session of the IATTC held in Bilbao, Spain from 22 to 25 July and had the opportunity to exchange briefs with the IATTC Director Dr Guillermo Compean.

53. In February 2019, the Compliance Manager, TCC Chair Mr Laurence Edwards II and the immediate past TCC Chair Ms Alexa Cole joined other tuna RFMO officials responsible for compliance and the Chairs of Compliance Committee as representatives at the 3rd Workshop of the Tuna Compliance Network (TCN) held in Bangkok, Thailand, after a series of international conferences on emerging technologies and MCS. The TCN was launched in March 2017 and its aim is to facilitate communication and cooperation between officers responsible for compliance in the tuna RFMOs. While it is focused on tuna fisheries, the Network also promotes the involvement of other relevant experts in fisheries compliance and monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS), in order to share best practice compliance processes, and ultimately to contribute to combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The workshop brought Chairs of the Compliance Committees and the Officers responsible for Compliance of the tuna RFMOs together for the first time and provided a valuable opportunity to discuss compliance processes and procedures and provided a valuable opportunity to learn from each other's experiences and approaches.

5.3 Other RFMOs

54. The Secretariat have had exchanges with the Secretariat of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) on the potential for enhanced cooperation between both organisations through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that formalizes such a framework of cooperation. The Secretariat will present a paper at the WCPFC16 meeting providing the background to those exchanges between the two Secretariats and tabling a draft MOU that provide a framework to guide cooperation between WCPFC and SPRFMO.

55. Similar exchanges were undertaken between the Secretariat and the Secretariat of the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC). It is expected that a draft MOU of cooperation between WCPFC and NPFC will be tabled at WCPFC17 in 2020. The NPFC has confirmed its interest in enhancing cooperation and working closely with WCPFC given that the two organisations have an overlap in their conventional areas.

5.4 Pacific Regional Organisations

56. The Secretariat continued in 2019 to maintain close links with the relevant Pacific regional organizations. In March and May of this year the Executive Director represented the WCPFC as an observer at the annual meetings of the PNA Officials and Ministers respectively. The annual meetings of the governing bodies of the Forum Fisheries Agency were held in Pohnpei, FSM in May for the officials and in June for the ministers. The Executive Director and senior managers at the Secretariat were able to observe both meetings which included discussions on likely priorities for FFA for the WCPFC16 meeting. The FFA ministerial meeting coincided with the Commission Day on 19th June that celebrated the formal establishment of the WCPFC and the Executive Director hosted FFA ministers and officials to a dinner reception at the Commission premises to mark the occasion.

57. The Executive Director represented WCPFC at the annual meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in Tuvalu from 12 to 16 August 2019. The meeting was attended by heads of states and governments of the Pacific and is the premier annual political gathering for the Pacific. WCPFC attended as one of the accredited intergovernmental observer organisations. The Executive Director addressed Pacific leaders and updated them of the key developments, priorities and challenges of the WCPFC. The report on the healthy status of the four key

commercial tuna stocks in the WCPO was well received by the leaders with their caution against complacency. The key focus of the leaders meeting for this year was on the impacts of climate change and I was also able to brief leaders on the Commission ongoing efforts in reviewing the impacts of climate change on the abundance and distribution of the tuna fisheries of the WCPO. Fisheries, as agreed, is a standing item on the leaders annual meeting.

58. The Compliance Manager participated at the FSM Technology for Tuna Transparency Symposium in March and FFA/SPC Longline E-Monitoring workshop in October to provide updates on key developments related to Electronic Monitoring within the WCPFC. Throughout 2019, the Compliance Manager also worked alongside FFA, SPC-OFP and PNA Office representatives in the delivery to SC15 and TCC15 of Science Project 93 on the Review of the Commission's data needs and collection programmes.

6. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

6.1 ABNJ (Common Oceans) Tuna Project Bycatch Component

59. WCPFC is responsible for a portion of the bycatch component of the Global Environment Facility-funded and FAO-implemented ABNJ (Common Oceans) Tuna Project under an Execution Agreement signed on 25 October 2014 and extended for 52 months until early this year. The objective of the work is to reduce bycatch and other adverse ecosystem impacts on biodiversity in tuna fisheries. The WCPFC's work under the project was coordinated by Dr Shelley Clarke acting as the project's Technical Coordinator-Sharks and Bycatch (TCSB). In February 2018 Dr Clarke relocated from the WCPFC Secretariat to FAO headquarters where she continued in the coordination role under contract to FAO with duties specified under an amendment to the FAO-WCPFC Execution Agreement.

60. At the annual meeting of the Project Steering Committee, held in July 2018 in Rome and attended by the WCPFC Executive Director, the FAO informed that the GEF would grant FAO a no-cost extension to allow the project more time to complete its work within its original budget. In order for the WCPFC-based work to continue past the original termination date in early 2019 a further amendment to the FAO-WCPFC Execution Agreement, as well as a 2019 MOU between WCPFC and SPC, were executed. FAO called for all partners' project work to be completed by August 2019, at the latest, so that the ABNJ (Common Oceans) Tuna Project's entire programme of work can be closed out by the end of 2019. So, the WCPFC work under the project in 2019 focused on closing off some of the remaining activities that included shark post release mortality, additional work on tagging and Bycatch Management Information System (BMIS) related services. The conclusion of the ABNJ project was extended for two months to allow extra time for SPC to complete the necessary work under the MOU.

61. The Executive Director attended the final steering committee meeting of the ABNJ project at FAO Headquarters in Rome, Italy from 8 to 10 July 2019. The meeting reviewed progress of the outstanding project activities and their financial acquittals, arrangements for the terminal evaluation of the project, and considered update on the development of a proposal for a second phase of the ABNJ project. All financial aspects of the project will be finalized towards the end of this year.

6.2 West Pacific East Asia Project

62. The GEF-funded UNDP Project (*Sustainable Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the West Pacific and East Asian Seas*), which commenced in October 2014, officially ended on 27 April 2019. The participating governments were Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam. The total GEF funding support was around USD 2.2 million for three years but due to delayed commencement in Indonesia and Vietnam, the project was extended to another 18 months with no additional cost. The WPEA Project was linked with the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) and the Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Project (YSLME) under the Project Framework Document (PFD). Under the PFD, PEMSEA, YSLME and WPEA should cooperate to implement regional and sub-regional level activities for coast and ocean governance. The final WPEA Project Board Meeting was conducted in January 31, 2019 and the terminal evaluation of the project commenced in 4 October 2019.

63. The three countries continued to collect tuna catch data at tuna landing sites throughout the year, which is the core focus area of the project. The WPEA-SM project supported the following activities: around 65 enumerators in Indonesia and Vietnam to collect catch and effort data from port sampling; over 20 support staff to encode data into databases; and Data Review Workshop and Total Annual Tuna Catch Estimates Workshop to be convened, assisted by Mr Peter Williams (SPC-OFP) to produce national annual total tuna catch estimates by species and by gear. In 2018, total annual catch of oceanic tunas was 525,791 mt in Indonesia, 220,834 mt in Philippines, and 120,533 mt in Vietnam.

64. The WPEA-SM project undertook several workshops and consultancies to support its work in each participating country, and jointly in a three-country setup, covering a variety of areas and subject matters, including development of a harvest strategy framework; climate change adaptations, ecosystem approach to fisheries management; risk assessment; monitoring, control and surveillance issues; certification and supply/value chain analysis; FADs management; fisheries legislative review; and fishing manuals for fishermen.

65. The 3rd phase of the WPEA Project, titled the *Western Pacific East Asia Improved Tuna Monitoring Activity* (WPEA-ITM), funded by the government of New Zealand for five years, is in progress. Mr Dale Withington, who was hired in July 2017 as the Project Manager of this phase, resigned in early June 2019 to take up another role with the US Peace Corps. The WCPFC Science Manager has been managing the project until the new Project Manager Ms Alice McDonald takes on the full role in early 2020. Key features of this phase include: i) expanding the capacity of enumerator programs to gather fisheries catch landings and port sampling data; ii) build the capacities and sustainability of fisheries observer programs; iii) support additional national policy and legal reviews to improve tuna fisheries catch monitoring and governance; and iv) add to the capacities of national fisheries data management and analysis efforts.

66. Since the commencement of the WPEA-ITM Project in July 2017, it took almost two years to complete signing of the MOUs between WCPFC and the three participating countries which were signed with Indonesia in December 2018, with Vietnam in January 2019, and with Philippines in May 2019. Despite these delays, the Secretariat has gone ahead and clarified in an MOU with SPC the role of the SPC-OFP in support of the new project activities. The first meeting of the WPEA-ITM Project Steering Committee (PSC) took place in Honolulu on 7th December 2018. The PSC covered i) review of project progress in each country; ii) finance status; iii) review

of targets, indicators and activities; and iv) project management issues. For 2019, the three participating countries undertook several national observer programme activities and catch estimate workshops supported by the ITM component of the WPEA project.

7. FUTURE WORK

67. The WCPFC16 is expected to take decisions on key issues that will constitute the main components of the work programme for 2020 and outer years for the Commission members States and its Secretariat. Without preempting the outcomes of those decisions, the following activities are anticipated to feature predominately in the work programmes of the Commission and its Secretariat:

- a) a new tropical tuna measure is needed for 2021 and onward years, so the Commission is expected to engage in serious negotiations in 2019 to develop a successor measure for consideration at WCPFC17;
- b) as envisaged by the current tropical tuna measure CMM 2018-01, the Commission is expected to agree by 2020 on hard limits and an allocation framework for the purse seine fishery in the high seas and for the bigeye for the long line fishery;
- c) with several WCPO fish stocks assessed to be subject to overfishing or in an overfished state, the Commission will require remedial actions to rebuild those stocks;
- d) work on developing harvest strategies pursuant to the work plan under CMM 2014-06 will continue to intensify with the Commission having had adequate time at WCPFC16 to provide clear directions and timelines on the way forward to progress elements of the harvest strategies;
- e) subject to the decision on the future of the CMM 2018-07 on the Compliance Monitoring Scheme, the future tasks envisaged to enhance the efficiency of the scheme will continue to generate intense work for the Commission and its members;
- f) with the intersessional working group on the review of the transshipment measure having agreed to its terms of reference, a significant body of work will flow from that commencing in 2020;
- g) work on fast-tracking developments in electronic reporting and electronic monitoring will continue hopefully guided by a meeting of the ERandEM working group in 2020.

8. RECOMMENDATION

68. WCPFC16 is invited to consider and note the report.

Annex 1

Status of Key SC Work Programme Activities in 2019

- ***Project 15: West Pacific East Asia Project***
The fishery monitoring component of the WPEA project will continue under the name of *WPEA Improved Tuna Monitoring (WPEA-ITM) Activity* funded by the government of New Zealand. Summary report on the progress of the WPEA project is in SC15-RP-WPEA-01.
- ***Project 35b: Management of the WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank***
This project has an annual budget of USD 99,195, with an indicative rise in 2021 and 2022. During SC15, the 1st session of the Tuna Tissue Bank Steering Committee was convened, and SC15 recognized the value of this project and recommended its continued support by the Commission. The *Report of the Tuna Tissue Bank Steering Committee* is in SC15- RP-P35b-02.
- ***Project 42: Pacific Tuna Tagging Project (PTTP)***
A PTTP Steering Committee meeting was convened during SC15, and SPC-OFP presented a progress report on 2018-2019 tagging activities and the status of tag recovery. SC15 supported the 2020 tagging programme, and associated budget (\$645,000), the 2021-2022 tagging programmes and their associated indicative budgets (\$730,000 each year), and the PTTP work plan for 2019-2022. Details are in the *Report of the Pacific Tuna Tagging Programme Steering Committee* (SC15- RP-PTTP-01).
- ***Project 60: Purse Seine Species Composition***
SPC-OFP reported on work conducted to date through the *Progress Report on Project 60* (SC15-ST-WP-02). SC15 recommended that additional activities be considered under Project 60 over the coming year and recommended changes be incorporated into the process for generating the aggregated purse seine species catch estimates in the future. SC15 supported the additional analytical work and associated budget (\$ 40,000) in 2020 and additional indicative budget (\$ 40,000) in 2021.
- ***Project 68: Seabird Mortality***
SPC-OFP provided a final report on Project 68: *Estimation of seabird mortality across the WCPFC Convention Area* (SC15-EB-WP-03). The scope of Project 68 included estimate total annual seabird mortalities in WCPFC fisheries; assess mortality per year since the first WCFPC seabird CMM and assess whether there is any detectable trend; describe the methods used, including treatment of data gaps; and identify limitations in available data. No budget is requested for 2020 but an indicative budget for 2022 (\$ 75,000).
- ***Project 88: Acoustic FAD Analysis***
SC15 reviewed SPC-OFP's *Report on Preliminary Analyses of FAD Acoustic Data* (SC15-MI-WP-13) and *Electronic Tagging for the Mitigation of Bigeye and Yellowfin Tuna Juveniles by Purse Seine Fisheries* (SC15-EB-WP-08) in relation to FADs and noted the preliminary results. SC15 indicated strong support for these projects and recommends that WCPFC16 support the continuation of these work, with associated budget (\$ 30,000) in 2020 and the indicative budget (\$ 15,000) in 2021.
- ***Project 90: Length Weight Conversion***
SPC-OFP presented an update on Project 90: *Better data on fish weights and lengths for scientific analyses* (SC15-ST-WP-03). SC15 recommended that the WCPFC Scientific Services Provider proceed to coordinate the activities proposed as listed in

Annex 2 of SC15-ST-WP-03, the associated budget (\$ 30,000) in 2020 and the indicative budget (\$ 20,000) in 2021.

- **Project 97: Shark Research Plan 2021-2025**
SC15 recommended a new project, *Developing the WCPFC SC's 2021-2025 Shark Research Plan*, which will include evaluating the progress against the 2016-2020 plan, with an associated budget of \$ 46,000 in 2020.
- **Project 98: Radiocarbon Aging Workshop**
The objective of this activity is to assess the feasibility of applying the bomb radiocarbon technique to the validation of annual age counts on otoliths of tunas from the WCPO. The workshop will determine the overall feasibility of applying the bomb radiocarbon method to the validation of opaque-zone counts on bigeye and yellowfin tuna otoliths from the WCPO. The associated budget for this activity is (\$35,000) in 2020.
- **Project 99: Southwest Pacific Striped Marlin Population Biology**
SC15 reviewed the recent stock assessment paper for SW Pacific striped marlin (SC15-SA-WP-07) and recommended research activities in order to progress stock assessment work for this species. The objective of this Project is to assess age, growth and maturity estimates for SW Pacific striped marlin. The associated budget for this activity is (\$33,000) in 2020.
- **Project 100: Close-kin Mark-recapture**
Close-kin mark-recapture estimation is a novel method recently developed by CSIRO scientists which can be used to provide an absolute measure of population size. Given the challenges assessing the status of shark populations in the WCPO, the application of the close-kin mark-recapture estimation method was identified by SC15 as an alternative method for assessing the size of shark populations. SC15 also endorsed holding a workshop to examine the feasibility and costs of applying this method to shark populations in the WCPO. However, as this method has also been applied to tuna populations, the scope of this project should be extended to also consider the suitability of this method for estimation of tuna populations within the WCPO. The associated budget for this activity is (\$7,500) in 2020.
- **Project 101: Monte Carlo Simulations – Shark Mitigation**
SC15 reviewed post release mortality rates of sharks incidentally captured in Pacific tuna longline fisheries (SC15-EB-WP-04) which provides improved information on the potential levels of post-release mortality levels for oceanic whitetip and silky sharks in pelagic longline fisheries. The objective of this project is to update the analyses undertaken in SC12-EB-WP-06 (*Potential implications of the choice of longline mitigation approach allowed within CMM 2014-05*) incorporating the latest information on shark post release mortality in SC15-EB-WP-04. The associated budget for this activity is (\$40,000) in 2020.
- **Project 102: Population Projections for Oceanic Whitetip Shark**
The updated stock assessment for oceanic whitetip shark presented to SC15 (SC15-SA-WP-06) showed that the stock was overfished and undergoing overfishing, but also highlighted a small reduction in stock depletion, and improvements in recruitment and F-based reference points under certain catch scenarios. However, since oceanic whitetip sharks are late-maturing and fishing mortality on juveniles is high, uncertainty remains as to the effectiveness of the non-retention measure active for the last four years of the assessment (CMM 2011-04) and the resulting timeline for recovery. The objective of this work is to develop future projections for the 2019 WCPO oceanic whitetip stock

assessment to assess the impacts of future fishing mortality on recovery timelines. The associated budget for this activity is (\$35,000) in 2020.

- ***Project 103: Limit reference points for WCPO elasmobranchs***

SC15 noted the final report of the project *Identifying appropriate reference points for elasmobranchs within the WCPFC* (SC15-MI-IP-04) and the outcomes of the stock assessments for oceanic whitetip sharks. However, due to time constraints SC15 deferred consideration of appropriate limit reference points for elasmobranchs for the WCPFC until SC16. In order to facilitate this process SC15 recommended that the key conclusions of the above report and other reports presented to previous SCs are summarized and presented to SC16 together with any other relevant information. The associated budget for this activity is (\$25,000) in 2020.

Annex 2

Key TCC Related Activities in 2019

The activities of the WCPFC Technical and Compliance programme are covered in detail in the Executive Directors Overview Report of the WCPFC MCS and Compliance Programmes (*TCC15 working paper WCPFC-TCC15-2019-05*). Some highlights in 2019 include:

- The Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) is expected to continue to be at the core of the Commission's Technical and Compliance programme. It presently provides the platform for the TCC to undertake its key task of assessing the level of compliance of CCMs of their obligations under the WCPFC Convention and CMMs. But it is a platform that rests on top of a network of integrated MCS tools that furnished the relevant data and information that inform TCC's assessment.
- During this year some of the planned CMS Future Work tasks under CMM 2018-07 on the CMS have been progressed and remain on track to contribute to the continued enhancement of the CMS. The Secretariat stands ready to support the CMS Future Work tasks towards enhancing the operation of the CMS. As the CMM is only operational for 2019, these future tasks are essential to Commission's efforts to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the CMS.
- Continued improvements to the Secretariat Information Management System (IMS) remain essential to the servicing of the Commission's Technical and Compliance programme. Most of the Secretariat's work in support of TCC is necessarily supported from the integrated-MCS IMS-hosted databases and associated reporting tools. TCC and the Commission are strongly urged to continue to adequately resource this area of work of the Secretariat.
- The delivery of new online technical solutions to assist MCS personnel in efficiently discharging their responsibilities that included:
 - a list of significant dates, which includes key reporting deadlines, is now accessible and exportable through the calendar on the website from this link <https://www.wcpfc.int>;
 - a list of non-public domain data requests received and actioned and a corresponding bar chart are published at <https://www.wcpfc.int/administration-wcpfc-data-access-rules-and-procedures> and is exportable in CSV format;
 - published summary statistics based on High Seas Boarding and Inspection activities and the Register of Authorised Inspection Vessels are publicly available and published at <https://www.wcpfc.int/hsbi-summary-statistics> and <https://www.wcpfc.int/register-inspection-vessels> respectively. A map enhancement was recently added to the display of the list of vessels that have been previously inspected under the HSBI scheme published to the secure side on the website and viewable to authorized users at <https://www.wcpfc.int/ccm/hsbi-report>. These

- summaries are updated based on current WCPFC HSBI database records; and
- a new section on the website that is dedicated to Implementation of Article 30 of the Convention <https://www.wcpfc.int/implementation-article-30-convention> and includes information on the Strategic Investment Plan, funding options, eligibility and application processes for capacity assistance needs, CMR Capacity Development Plan template, reports from CCMs on implementation of CMM 2013-07 and past CMM 2013-06 assessments.
 - The work on electronic reporting and electronic monitoring holds huge potential for enhanced data collection, coverage and quality in the future. The Secretariat has efficiently utilized its limited budget in this area and with the financial assistance provided by New Zealand in 2018 and the United States in 2019 it has made positive progress on a specific IT system to support E-reporting. Currently the WCPFC E-reporting system can receive E-reported data as per the WCPFC high seas transshipment declaration and notices E-reporting standards. An application that WCPFC has developed to support CCMs implementation of the E-reporting Standards for high seas transshipment declarations and transshipment notices is now operational. The windows version of the application and user manual can be accessed from the WCPFC website at <https://www.wcpfc.int/e-reporting/tser>; More importantly, the project was designed to provide the Secretariat with a base infrastructure that could easily be modified to collect other types of data. With smart investment in this area, the Commission can expedite the development of the necessary framework to operationalize e-reporting and e-monitoring at the Commission level.
 - The MCS Programme of the WCPFC remains an integrated programme that need to be viewed in its totality.
