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**REPORT TO WCPFC ON PROGRESS OF THE PROJECT SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT
OF TUNA FISHERIES AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE ABNJ**

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Food and Agriculture Organization
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Report to WCPFC on Progress of the Project Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the ABNJ

Rome, November 2019



1. Background

1. The Project “Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction” also referred to as the *Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Project*, is one of the four projects funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) under the umbrella of the [Common Oceans ABNJ Program](#), which brings together governments, regional management bodies, civil society, the private sector, academia and industry to work towards ensuring the sustainable use and conservation of ABNJ biodiversity and ecosystem services.
2. The five-year project started in 2014 and is supported by a 30 million USD GEF grant in addition to partners’ co-financing. It is the largest of the Common Oceans ABNJ projects, with FAO as the implementing agency in collaboration with the five tuna RFMOs which collectively represent over 90 different member countries as well as sub-regional organizations, the environmental community and the private sector.
3. The principles of the Project, discussed and agreed with partners at the Inception Workshop, held in March 2014, include:
 - a. Extend the global benefits of the Project to as many members and tuna RFMOs as possible;
 - b. Promote the cooperation and exchange of experiences between tuna RFMOs;
 - c. Facilitate the implementation of existing initiatives; and
 - d. Support developing coastal States in the tuna RFMOs to become more effective members.

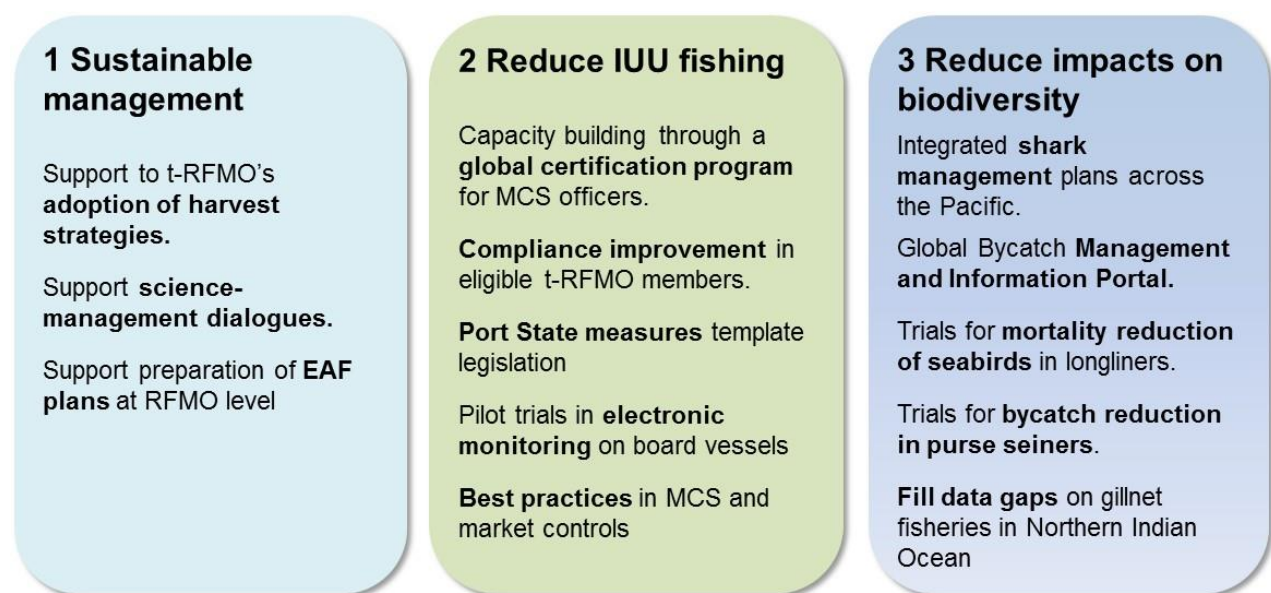


Figure 1. Structure of the Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Project

4. The Project is structured around three main components as shown in Figure 1 above.
5. The emphasis on sharing experiences between t-RFMO processes links the project to the spirit of the technical aspects of the Kobe process, in serving as a forum for cooperation in the scientific and technical communities of the t-RFMOs, therefore learning from the collective experience and improving the effectiveness of the various processes.

6. In 2017, the Project went through its Mid-Term Evaluation. The Report and the annexes are available [here](#). The Terminal Evaluation looking at the entire Common Oceans ABNJ Program is currently ongoing and the project is expected to end on 31 March 2020.
7. Regular news on the project and the Common Oceans ABNJ Program can be accessed [here](#) and by subscribing to the [programmatic newsletter](#).

2. Summary of activities with project support involving WCPFC or its members

8. The WCPFC has been a partner in the Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna project with a focus on shark and bycatch work carried out under WCPFC lead since 2014 with funds from the Project, and including activities sub-contracted to SPC. A detailed progress summary of this work was provided to SC15 [here](#). The main activities since project initiation were the following:
 - a. A global shark data inventory was completed by WCPFC in 2016. Based on this, a prototype tuna RFMO Shark Browser was completed by WCPFC in February 2016 and is being further developed by SPC and consultant Dragonfly Data Science.
 - b. A project proposal for a bycatch data exchange (compilation) protocol ([BDEP](#)) based on a CCSBT model was populated by [WCPFC](#) and IOTC in 2016, 2017 and 2018 with the latest WCPFC [BDEP](#) now in the public domain in digital form. Further efforts by SPC on the WCPFC BDEP are ongoing. IOTC is [progressing with observer data compilation in the BDEP format](#) and looking ahead to data exchange with other institutions. In late 2017, CCSBT agreed [new confidentiality risk classifications](#) which assign “no risk” to ERSWG Data Exchange summaries (CCSBT’s version of BDEP) and allow this information to be placed on the public area of the CCSBT web site. [IATTC’s shark data](#) is now also in the public domain in a BDEP-like format.
 - c. Five shark assessments with a focus on the Pacific Ocean were completed:
 - i. The first stock status [assessment, for Pacific-wide bigeye thresher shark](#), was presented to WCPFC’s Scientific Committee (SC) in August 2017 where the SC [recommended](#) that the WCPFC consider management options;
 - ii. the [second assessment on the southern hemisphere porbeagle shark](#), undertaken in cooperation with CCSBT, was presented to WCPFC’s SC13 in August 2017 and was accepted. The results were also presented to the [IOTC](#) in September 2017;
 - iii. the [third assessment for Pacific-wide silky shark](#) was accepted by SC14 in August 2018 as the best available science and as a basis for maintained the current conservation and management measure; and
 - iv. the [fourth assessment for Indo-Pacific Ocean whale shark](#) was accepted by SC14 in August 2018 which called for concerted efforts to identify and promote best practice safe release methods.
 - v. The fifth assessment was an [alternative assessment approach for the oceanic whitetip shark](#) using methods designed for more data-poor conditions which was submitted to SC15 in August 2019.
 - vi. Additional work funded by savings was undertaken to support the development of shark limit reference points (with CSIRO), an assessment of biological data gaps for WCPFC key shark species and options for filling them; and a research collaboration between NIWA

- (New Zealand) and Chile's Instituto de Fomento Pesquero for preparation of blue and shortfin mako data from the Chilean swordfish fishery for use in future stock assessments.
- d. A WCPFC shark post-release mortality tagging study co-funded by the EU was completed in 2019. Tagging studies were initiated in May 2017, in accordance with a [sampling design developed by an expert panel](#) convened in January 2017. Tagging was completed in April 2019 with 117 sharks tagged and data were analysed during a dedicated workshop ([report](#)) held from 4-6 June 2019 in Wellington, New Zealand. Workshop results, including recommendations for reducing shark mortality and for further research, were reported to SC15 in July 2019 which recommended to WCPFC that when the safe release guidelines are next updated they should properly reflect the findings.
 - e. On the basis of an ABNJ Tuna Project proposal, the WCPFC adopted [safe release guidelines for encircled whale sharks](#) in December 2015. In 2018, the ABNJ Tuna Project helped to prepare draft [Safe release Guidelines for sharks and rays](#), which were discussed at SC14 and adopted as [Best Handling Practices for the Safe Release of Sharks](#) at the WCPFC15.
 - f. Two WCPFC [Workshops on Joint Analysis of Sea Turtle Mitigation Effectiveness](#) were held in 2016 with representatives from 21 countries and organizations. The [final results](#) were submitted to the WCPFC SC in August 2017. Subsequently in 2017, an intention to re-visit the WCPFC's sea turtle mitigation measure was introduced by the US at TCC13 and WCPFC14. WCPFC15 adopted a [new sea turtle conservation and management measure](#) in December 2018 that requires mitigation for all shallow set longline fisheries, not only those which "fish for swordfish in a shallow set manner".
 - g. Expansion and redevelopment of the Bycatch Management Information System (BMIS) <https://www.bmis-bycatch.org/> was completed by SPC. BMIS consolidates information on the mitigation and management of species of special interest, including seabirds, sharks and rays, marine turtles and marine mammals, incidentally caught in the pelagic tuna and billfish fisheries of the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. A recent [progress report was presented at SC15](#).
 - h. A workshop on *WCPFC bycatch mitigation problem-solving* using BMIS was held at SPC in Nouméa on 28-30 May 2018 and attended by eleven WCPFC CCMs and seven IGOs/NGOs. The three-day workshop's content was developed and delivered by Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Project staff and there were intensive efforts by the BMIS team to get the system ready for the workshop. BMIS performed well and participant feedback was positive. The [report of the workshop](#) was presented to SC14.
9. In addition to the work directly under WCPFC lead, the project supported a series of activities involving WCPFC or its members:
- a. Two capacity building workshop on the role of management strategy evaluation in the development of harvest strategies targeting WCPFC members and organized by WWF were held in [Indonesia](#) in August 2017 and [Fiji](#) in February 2018.
 - b. Support was provided to the *4th WCPFC Harvest Strategy Workshop* from 30 November - 01 December 2015 in Bali, Indonesia, and to *WCPFC's Intersessional Meeting to progress the draft Bridging CMM on Tropical Tuna*, a Commission Special Session that took place on 22-24 August 2017, in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA, with the objective to advance a draft measure to provide interim arrangements until harvest strategies are adopted.

- c. The WCPFC Secretariat has been participating in the Tuna Compliance Network since 2017. The Tuna Compliance Network is organized by the IMCS Network and three workshops have been held so far. The [Second workshop of the Tuna Compliance Network](#) was hosted by FFA in Honiara, Solomon Islands from 15-18 February 2018 and the [3rd Workshop of the Tuna Compliance Network](#) took place in Bangkok, Thailand from 22-24 February 2019.
- d. An electronic monitoring (EM) pilot was carried out in Fiji to demonstrate the feasibility of the use of EM systems installed on board fishing vessels to enhance the compliance of the vessels with existing national and regional regulations. Trials began in October 2015 and currently 50 longline vessels in Fiji are equipped with EM systems and an EM unit was established with 11 EM analysts. A Business Case for EM systems in the Fijian tuna longline fleet was developed, including a comprehensive assessment of the costs and benefits of implementing routinely EM systems in Fiji and cost-recovery scenarios. The Business Case was presented and discussed in a meeting open to all national stakeholders and regional partners (SPC, FFA, WCPFC) on 29 January 2019 in Suva. Complementary activities taking place include the review of the legal framework in Fiji, including provisions linked to EM data and its use as an MCS tool, as well as the integration of EM data in the regional observer database TUFMAN/TUBS. The project has been assisting the Fiji Government in the process of securing the future continuation of EM during an interim period (2-4 years), while a regional policy and framework is being developed. Fiji and project staff participated in the recent Longline EM Planning Workshop, jointly organised by FFA/SPC/PNAO and held at the FFA Conference Centre, Honiara, 16-18 October 2019. A draft Regional Longline EM Policy was developed, involving the participation of 15 FFA Members and representatives from regional bodies such as SPC, PNAO, FFA, and WCPFC, as well as industry representatives from FFIA (Fiji), Luen Thai, and Tri Marine. Much of the discussion built on experiences and lessons learned in Fiji.
- e. The project supported two cohorts of the the FFA/University of the South Pacific (USP) *MCS study programme – Certificate IV in Fisheries Enforcement and Compliance*.
- f. From 2015-2019, the project supported FFA's work on an MCS system that integrates information coming from multiple data sources and that is used to create intelligence reports to better target efforts to fight IUU fishing.
- g. The project supported the development of WCPFC seabird bycatch estimates (Project 68). The [results](#) were presented to SC15 by SPC.
- h. In 2019, the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) held three workshops on biodegradable FADs for fishers operating in the Western Pacific Ocean.
- i. BirdLife South Africa's Port-based vessel visits targeting Chinese-flagged vessels started in Fiji early 2018 with >200 individual vessels visited so far.
- j. Continued support to the maintenance of, and identification of possible duplicates in, the Consolidated List of Authorized Vessels (CLAV).

3. Preparing for a possible Common Oceans ABNJ phase II

- 10. Following a recommendation from the mid-term evaluation, the project has been extended without additional funding until March 2020, to complete some on-going activities. Through contacts with the current partners, it became clear that there is interest to extend the activities of the project into a second phase, also as a component project of a programmatic approach. Such an interest recognizes that a five-year investment in the project is often not sufficient to achieve

transformational change, and also recognizes the satisfactory performance of the project during the first phase.

11. In 2018, GEF issued its most recent [Programming Directions](#) that reiterate that the improvement of management in the ABNJ is one of its objectives for the International Waters Focal Area Strategy.
12. Consultation for scoping of a potential second phase of the Common Oceans ABNJ Program began in December 2018 with an FAO-convened workshop on designing a theory of change. A second programme design workshop was held in April 2019 at which were invited to present proposals for new activities. Close to 80 proposals have been submitted so far, which means that a selection process will be required given that financial resources are likely not sufficient to cover all activities. A theory of change diagram and narrative, criteria for the selection of proposals, and a succinct statement of the impact of the project's first phase are currently being prepared and shared with potential funders, implementing agencies, partners and stakeholders.
13. At the beginning of 2020, and once the operations of the Projects of the Common Oceans ABNJ Program are all closed and evaluated, FAO expects to have a proposal in the form of a Program Framework Document, including concept notes for the projects under the Program, for submission to GEF for their consideration. If approved by the GEF Council, and given the time normally required for evaluation of a proposal, it is assumed that the implementation of the second phase will not start before mid-2021.
14. The Project will have a final meeting of its Steering Committee at the end of January 2020, to review the findings the terminal evaluation currently underway, and to introduce the Program Framework Document for the second phase.

4. Progress in activities with global benefits

15. The following sections broadly describe the activities that the Project has been carrying out in all regions, grouped by each of the components of the Project.

Component 1: Promotion of Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries, in Accordance with an Ecosystem Approach

16. This component includes a number of activities that aim to facilitate the incorporation into the management framework of the tuna RFMOs of principles that have been identified as important elements in sustainable management, such as the precautionary approach, and the ecosystem approach to fisheries management including:
 - a. Capacity building workshops for officials from t-RFMO member countries to increase the familiarity and confidence with the process of Management Strategy Evaluation. This activity has been coordinated by WWF. Eight workshops have been completed:
 - i. Indian Ocean: Two workshops in Sri Lanka in [2014](#) and [2017](#)
 - ii. Western Pacific Ocean: one workshop in [Indonesia](#) in August 2017 [and one in Fiji in February 2018](#)

- iii. Eastern Pacific Ocean: one workshop in [Panama in 2015](#) and in San Diego, USA, in August 2018 (in Spanish).
 - iv. Atlantic Ocean: one workshop in [Ghana in 2016](#) and one in [Senegal \(in French\)](#) in January 2018.
 - b. Support to the science-management dialogues and to the scientific processes in the tuna RFMOs that had not yet adopted a harvest strategy (led by FAO). Support was provided for meetings or meeting participants in WCPFC (MOW4, 2015), and [IOTC](#) (various activities since 2014).
 - c. Collaboration within the scientific community of the t-RFMOs. In this context, the project supported the two meetings of the *Joint Management Strategy Evaluation Technical Working Group*, which was created during the Third Joint Meeting of Tuna RFMOs in 2011. The first meeting, organized by ICCAT with support of the Tuna Project, took place in Madrid from 1-3 November 2016. The second one took place in Seattle, USA from 13-15 June 2018.
17. The Project is promoting and supporting the preparation of long-term plans for operationalizing the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) in each of the t-RFMOs, encouraging consideration of the impacts of fishing activities on the environment. In this context, a [Joint Meeting of tuna RFMOs on the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management](#) originating from an initiative of ICCAT was organized and supported by the Project from 12-14 December 2016 in FAO Headquarters in Rome. A second workshop on [Options to Operationalize the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management in tuna RFMOs](#) took place in Rome from 17-19 September 2019 to discuss how to best advance operationalization of the ecosystem approach to fisheries management.
18. . In the context of the EAFM, the Project supported two meetings of the the *Joint t-RFMO FAD Working Group* , the first one, organized by ICCAT, took place in Madrid from 19-21 April 2017 ([report](#)). The second one, organized by IATTC, took place from 08-10 May 2019 in San Diego, USA ([report](#)).

Component 2 – Reducing IUU fishing and improving compliance
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19. Addressing IUU fishing is supported through a number of strategies. To a large extent, these are based on empowering officials from t-RFMO member countries through capacity building of enforcement and compliance officers by establishing, for the first time in the world, a certification-based training program. Activities included:
- a. Development of practical MCS implementation sheets and recommended practices with a focus on developing national MCS capacity is currently ongoing. This would focus on successful practices in MCS and existing MCS systems, which can be used as references for national MCS managers and officers.
 - b. The project has partnered with the [International MCS Network](#) to create a ‘sub-network’ to facilitate communication and cooperation between officers responsible for compliance in tuna RFMOs and MCS experts. The [Inception meeting of the Tuna Compliance Network](#) took place in Vigo and Madrid from 27-31 March 2017 ([report](#)). The [2nd Workshop of the Tuna Compliance Network](#) took place from 15-18 February 2018 at the Headquarters of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) in Honiara, Solomon Islands ([report](#)). The Workshop placed special emphasis on data reporting and management. The [3rd Workshop of the Tuna Compliance Network](#) took place in Bangkok, Thailand from 22-24 February 2019 to assess

challenges to current compliance assessment procedures and identify solutions for their improvement ([report](#)).

- c. The Project supported FFA, a partner of the Project, and the University of the South Pacific to carry out two different rounds of regional *MCS study programme – Certificate IV in Fisheries Enforcement and Compliance training* in 2015 and 2016.
- d. A legislative template framework for the implementation of the Port State Measures Agreement was launched in 2016. The template is available online [here](#). Translations into [French](#) and [Spanish](#) have been completed in 2017.
- e. The Consolidated List of Authorized Vessels with automated updates was developed in 2014 and is available on the [tuna-org.org website](http://tuna-org.org)¹. The project is providing expertise to analyse the data contained in the CLAV and identify some data inconsistencies, including possible duplicate records and issues are reported to the t-RFMOs for further investigation and correction by the reporting member States.
- f. The pilot programs to test Electronic Monitoring Systems (EMS) in Fiji and Ghana provided an opportunity for both countries to test the use of EMS as an MCS tool to better assess compliance of fishing fleets as well as to collect observer data. The pilot in Ghana with a focus on the tuna purse seine fishery with all 14 active vessels in the Ghana purse seine fleet equipped with EMS, was completed in early 2019, the business case study is available [here](#). The pilot in Fiji is described in para 9d of this document.
- g. [Design options for the development of tuna catch documentation schemes](#) were developed and published.
- h. The Project supported innovative ways of improving compliance in several tuna RFMOs. These included the first steps toward the development of the IOTC electronic monitoring and reporting information system (e-Maris), as well as the development of an online reporting platform for ICCAT CPCs (FORS) which should improve the timeliness of reporting, the quality of the data and the compliance assessment process overall.

¹ <http://tuna-org.org/GlobalTVR.htm>

Component 3 – Reducing ecosystem impacts of tuna fishing

20. The third component addresses the ecosystem impacts of tuna fisheries. The WCPFC-led sharks and bycatch work is described in section 2 of this document. A detailed progress summary of this work was provided to SC15 [here](#). Additional work under this component included:

- a. Shark data collection work in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and resulting recommendations contributed to the approval of [IATTC Resolution C-16-06](#) on Conservation Measures for Shark Species, with emphasis on the Silky Shark.
- b. BirdLife International carried out various outreach activities to refine and facilitate the understanding of techniques to reduce the incidental mortality of birds during longline operations, as well as collecting information that could lead to assessing the extent of the application of the mitigation techniques in the field including
 - i. [National awareness workshops](#);
 - ii. observer training workshops with participation from Korean, Namibian, Indonesian and South African observers;
 - iii. at sea trial demonstrations of sliding “lumo leads” on Korean longline vessels and sea trips and data collection onboard the Namibian and South African tuna longline fleet;
 - iv. Port-based outreach targeting high seas fleets from Cape Town and Fiji; and
 - v. a global seabird bycatch assessment workshop held in South Africa from 25 February to 01 March 2019 to estimate seabird mortality in longline fishing in the Southern Hemisphere and several associated preparatory activities ([report](#) presented to SC15).
- c. ISSF carried out purse seine sea trials to demonstrate the effectiveness of small tuna/shark mitigation measures including research cruises in the Western Central Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Ocean, aiming to reduce bycatch in large industrial purse-seiners, followed by skipper workshops, and a final [International Workshop on Mitigating Environmental Impacts of Tropical Tuna Purse Seine Fisheries](#) conducted in collaboration with FAO at FAO HQ in Rome from 12-13 March 2019 ([report](#)). The best practices identified and tested are incorporated into a curriculum used in Skippers Training Workshops and these materials are available for [free public access](#). A summary of outcomes to date can be found [here](#).