



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
SIXTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**

WPEA-ITM PROJECT UPDATE

WCPFC-SC16-2020/RP-WPEA-01

Alice McDonald¹

¹ WPEA-ITM Project Manager, WCPFC Secretariat

Western Pacific East Asia Improved Tuna Monitoring (WPEA-ITM) Project Update

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief update on activities under the Western Pacific East Asia Improved Tuna Monitoring (WPEA-ITM) project over the past 12 months, for the information and noting of the Scientific Committee.

BACKGROUND

2. The tuna fisheries in the Pacific Ocean waters of Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam represent around 30% of the annual catches of key tuna species in the WCPO. The lack of accurate data on catch, effort and the composition of catches in these waters has been highlighted as a key uncertainty in WCPO stock assessments at WCPFC (and previously the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish) for a number of years.

3. In an effort to improve understanding of these fisheries and increase the accuracy of data available for stock assessments, a series of projects have been implemented since 2000 to support data collection in Indonesia, the Philippines and more recently Vietnam. These projects have included the Indonesia and Philippines Data Collection Project (IPDCP), the West Pacific East Asia Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (WPEA-OFM), and the Sustainable Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the West Pacific and East Asian Seas (WPEA-SM). The WPEA-SM project, implemented by the WCPFC Secretariat working closely with national project coordinators in the three countries, terminated on 27 April 2019.

4. Since these projects were first instituted in 2000, significant progress has been made on data collection, data analysis and verification, and the provision of catch estimates. Consequentially, the uncertainty in WCPO tuna stock assessments associated with tuna data in these three countries has been reduced. More detail on the activities and achievements of these projects can be found in WPEA updates to previous Scientific Committee meetings.

5. Recognising the importance to the WCPFC of continuing to improve tuna data from these three countries, the Government of New Zealand is providing NZD 4.91 million over 5 years for the Western Pacific East Asia Improved Tuna Monitoring Project (WPEA-ITM). The goal of the WPEA-ITM is to improve monitoring and management of tuna catches in Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam and contribute to reduced Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

6. The WPEA-ITM project is being managed by the WCPFC Secretariat, working closely with the national fisheries authorities in the three countries, and with SPC FAME playing a critical implementation role. Project components include expanding the capacity of enumerator programs to gather tuna landings and port sampling data, build the capacities and sustainability of fisheries observer programs, support additional national policy and legal reviews to improve catch monitoring and governance, and build the capacity of national fisheries data management and analysis efforts.

7. The WPEA-ITM project commenced in 2017, but the full implementation of activities was delayed due to capacity constraints associated with the cross over with the WPEA-SM project and administrative delays. However, since April-May 2019, when the MOUs between WCPFC and the

three countries were completed and the WPEA-SM project wrapped up, implementation of the WPEA-ITM activities has gathered momentum.

SUMMARY OF WPEA-ITM ACTIVITIES IN 2019-20

8. The WPEA-ITM Steering Committee met for the second time in Manila in February 2020, with the primary output being an ambitious work plan and budget for project activities in 2020. Unfortunately the COVID pandemic has disrupted this momentum, and travel restrictions have meant that many planned activities in 2020 have had to be postponed. Despite these disruptions though, a number of activities have been able to progress and some workshops have been able to be held remotely, allowing continued improvements to tuna data in the three project countries.

9. Since the last update to the Scientific Committee, activities under the WPEA Project have included:

- a. Additional enumerators and port sampling officers have been deployed in all three countries.
- b. Vietnam has revised its tuna logbooks to comply with WCPFC requirements and has trained data entry officers in the updated forms and processes. IT equipment has also been upgraded to support data entry officers in Vietnam
- c. Observer Planning and Strategy Workshops were held in Vietnam and Indonesia.
- d. Observer training was provided by the WCPFC Secretariat and SPC in Vietnam, and preliminary work is now being undertaken to develop a fisheries observer diploma or certificate program for Vietnam.
- e. Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam have all held their Annual Catch Estimates workshops using a mix of in-person and remote participation. SPC participated remotely in all three workshops, and assisted with the collation, auditing and submission of annual catch estimates.
- f. Philippines and Indonesia are working with SPC to provide additional information to the Commission on their “other fisheries”.
- g. SPC has continued to provide a range of technical support for countries data collection, entry and management, including support to the implementation and enhancement of databases in all three countries.

10. Highlights of progress over the last 12 months include:

- a. Philippines now has over 250 enumerators at tuna landing sites, and close alignment between the catch estimates from industry and data collection under the National Stock Assessment Program demonstrate improved data collection and catch estimation processes.
- b. Tufman 2 has been installed in Vietnam after SPC included the Vietnamese language and developed customised components to support Vietnam’s specific data collection needs. SPC also conducted in-country training for national staff in Tufman 2 and migrated Vietnam’s tuna fishery data from 2011-2017 over from Tufman 1. A backlog of data from recent years is now being entered by data entry officers in Vietnam.
- c. Indonesia now has enumerators across most of the primary tuna landing sites and a range of data collection initiatives contributing to the collection and verification of catch data.

- d. The observer planning and strategy workshops in Indonesia and Vietnam produced the first strategic national plans for observer programs in these two countries.

11. The COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to disrupt the work program of the three countries and the project more broadly. While it is hoped that a number of postponed activities can be held in late 2020 or early 2021, the continuation of domestic and international travel restrictions will constrain or prevent some of these planned activities going ahead. The WPEA Project Manager and national project coordinators are currently considering new approaches to information sharing and capacity building that will allow continued progress towards project outcomes despite the changed circumstances.

12. A WPEA project portal has been established (www.wpeaproject.org), where project documentation on WPEA-ITM and earlier WPEA projects are available. This website is currently being updated to include more information on recent WPEA-ITM national and tri-country activities. A detailed progress report for 2019 is available at www.wpeaproject.org/reports/WPEA-ITM for those seeking further information.