



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
SEVENTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**

Electronic Meeting
11-19 August 2021

**Assessing and addressing cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries –
A collaborative project proposed to Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Phase II**

WCPFC-SC17-2021/EB-IP-18

Secretariat of the International Whaling Commission

Assessing and addressing cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries – A collaborative project proposed to Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna II.

Secretariat of the International Whaling Commission

Executive Summary

The International Whaling Commission has submitted a proposed project capsule within the framework of the GEF/FAO [Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna II project](#). The objective of the capsule is to improve the understanding of cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries – and the available solutions for mitigation - in collaboration with RFMOs, national governments, fishing industry and other stakeholders. The proposed project is geographically focused in two regions: the western-central Pacific and the Indian Ocean. A range of activities are proposed to collaboratively identify and fill data and knowledge gaps and build capacity and awareness of both the issue and the solutions for monitoring and mitigation. This paper provides a brief overview of the proposed activities, partners, next steps and opportunities to collaborate.

We invite the WCPFC-SC to:

- Note the background and main activities of the project proposal;
- Provide feedback on this proposal and any relevant opportunities for collaboration to the IWC Bycatch Coordinator (marguerite.tarzia@iwc.int)

Introduction

Globally, the lack of systematic bycatch data collection, analysis and knowledge-sharing of where, when and how cetaceans are getting caught in fishing gears impedes the ability of RFMOs, other organisations and national governments to understand and address this issue. This in turn reduces opportunities to work with fishing communities to develop and test innovative tools and approaches to address cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries at the national and regional scale. This is particularly the case in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) where comparatively little is known about cetacean distribution, abundance and interaction with fishing gears (hotspots, specific fisheries of concern, bycatch rates, entanglement in pelagic gears, fish aggregating devices etc.).

There is currently only a limited focus within RFMOs, and t-RFMOs more specifically, on cetacean bycatch. There are gaps in relation to conservation management measures (CMMs) for the recording, reporting and mitigation of cetacean bycatch in different fishing gears ([IWC, 2020](#)).

This proposed project concept – submitted to the GEF/FAO [Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna II project](#) - is led by the International Whaling Commission through its Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (see: iwc.int/bycatch). The proposed project aims to build collaborations across two regions (the Indian Ocean and Western Central Pacific) to work towards addressing the lack of information in relation to cetaceans, cetacean bycatch and fisheries, and the solutions available to address these. The project plans to work collaboratively with relevant RFMOs and identified partners, regional organisations, governments, experts and fishing communities.

The project plans to undertake regional data collation and gap analyses and spatial bycatch risk assessment at the ocean-basin-scale. It also aims to address the mitigation of cetacean bycatch by collaboratively working with RFMOs, national governments, experts and the fishing industry to raise awareness of practical solutions available for monitoring and mitigation and the need to implement

these. This paper provides additional detail on the proposed activities and highlights some opportunities for collaboration.

Cetacean bycatch project description

Assessing and addressing cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries - proposed under the [Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna II project](#) ‘Sustainable management of tuna fisheries and biodiversity conservation in the areas beyond national jurisdiction’.

Lead Agency: International Whaling Commission (<https://iwc.int/home>)

Duration of activity (months): 48

Geographical area of activities to be implemented: Indian and Pacific Oceans

Objective: Improved understanding and management of cetacean bycatch in tuna fisheries in ABNJ and in Exclusive Economic Zones.

Identified potential partners: FAO, IOTC, WCPFC, SPC, SPREP

Main activities proposed:

Description	Region
Gap analysis for cetacean, cetacean bycatch and fishing effort data	Pacific and Indian Oceans
Regional bycatch risk assessments for two regions to identify and prioritise specific areas, gears and fleets requiring bycatch management	Indian Ocean, Western Central Pacific
Increased availability of information on cetacean distribution and abundance in ABNJ (specifically relating to information presented to RFMO technical meetings, but also within the IWC)	Indian Ocean, Western Central Pacific
Increase in scientific information available on cetacean bycatch to individual RFMO scientific and technical meetings. Including: estimate annual purse seine and longline cetacean interactions for recent years using observer data (or other relevant/available data sets)	Indian Ocean Western Central Pacific
Sharing of relevant results and information on bycatch mitigation trials for different fishing gears across the regions;	Western Central Pacific and Indian Ocean
Improve knowledge of potential risk of FADs to large whales at ocean basin scale	Western Central Pacific and Indian Ocean
Cetacean bycatch data collection harmonized between t-RFMOs and other IGOs; improvements made in quality/quantity of cetacean bycatch data reported to t-RFMOs. Including collaboration with the Bycatch Management Information System (BMIS) and Bycatch Data Exchange Protocol	Global

<p>Awareness raising activities with RFMO contracting governments (in Indian Ocean, and Pacific Ocean) on cetacean bycatch risk posed by various gears and likely locations with high bycatch; awareness of effective and practical solutions available to manage and mitigate and maintain viable fishing communities;</p>	<p>Western Central Pacific and Indian Ocean</p>
<p>Capacity building efforts undertaken in at least 6 countries to improve understanding of best practice for addressing cetacean bycatch. Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training workshops on bycatch risk assessment approaches, monitoring and mitigation/management (regional workshops or national workshops) and cetacean survey techniques. - Technical advice to IOTC, WCPFC and IWC member countries where requested - Establishment of bycatch reduction teams in 2-3 countries (partnership between government, researchers, fishers) - Scientific review, dissemination and promotion of best practice to IWC member governments through the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative, IWC Scientific Committee and Commission as well as through the IWC Conservation Management Plans, Database of Recommendations and Conservation database. 	<p>Indian Ocean Western Central Pacific</p>
<p>Recommendations on cetacean bycatch CMMs made and adopted by t-RFMOs, including data reporting requirements, observer coverage, and tailored restrictions on gear type and/or gear deployment.</p>	<p>Indian Ocean Western Central Pacific</p>

Next steps – project development

- The IWC has submitted this proposal to the FAO, which is internally reviewing the Tuna Phase II project and individual project capsules prior to final submission to GEF. At this stage, an outcome on this project concept is expected at the end of 2021 or in early 2022, with implementation of the Common Oceans project potentially beginning by mid - 2022.
- The IWC and its partners are currently defining the proposed activities in more detail. Input and feedback on these activities from the WCPFC Scientific Committee community are very much welcomed.
- The IWC also remains very open to collaborating with additional partners on this concept – as well as more broadly on cetacean bycatch. The IWC is particularly interested to explore synergies with existing, ongoing projects and initiatives within the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, including those that may be trialling solutions for bycatch assessment, monitoring or mitigation/management. The IWC would welcome opportunities for sharing data (cetacean/fisheries etc) or information on approaches to bycatch management which have been found to be effective. The proposed project aims to promote the approaches and effective solutions developed by others, sharing these across the fisheries management and IWC communities.
- Should this project concept proceed to the implementation phase, there would be various opportunities for national or regional training workshops and other capacity building and knowledge exchanges. The IWC would welcome discussion on whether this could be of interest to individual countries and at the regional scale.