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**DISCUSSION PAPER ON SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE**

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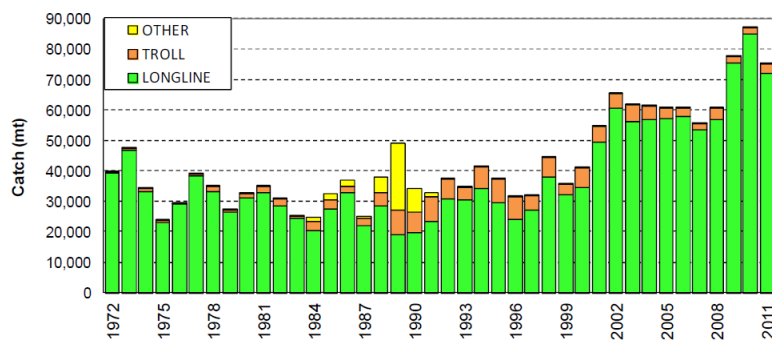
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**Paper prepared by FFA Members**

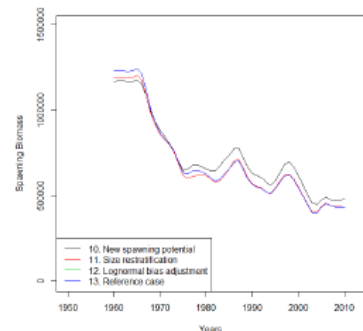
## FFA DISCUSSION PAPER ON SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE

### Introduction

1. South Pacific Albacore is a stock of critical importance to many FFA members. For those Small Island Developing States (SIDS) located to the south of the Convention Area, it represents the mainstay of domestic fleets and the major prospect for fisheries related development.
2. FFA members have always had a key interest in the management of this stock including in 2005 when the initial CMM was developed, 2010 when amendments to the reporting requirements were agreed to, and 2011/12 when we proposed additional changes including the introduction of a catch limit.
3. Management of the stock is supported by its currently healthy state, with the assessment indicating that fishing mortality and spawning biomass are well within their MSY-based reference points. However, the stock assessments have consistently cautioned against further increases in catch on the basis that they would reduce vulnerable biomass (larger adults) and therefore decrease catch rates and profitability.
4. Despite these warnings, which have been echoed by the SC for the past six years, catch has increased significantly in recent years. The stock assessments already show marked reductions in spawning biomass, which is the key driver of catch rates, with the effect being felt most keenly by small vessels in SIDS domestic fleets that do not have the same capability to relocate to other favourable fishing grounds as distant water fleets.



Source: SC8-GN-WP-01



Source: SC8-SA-WP-04

5. FFA members readily acknowledge that some of this increased catch has been achieved through the expansion of EEZ-based fisheries outside of the scope of the CMM, particularly through an increase in domestically-flagged or chartered vessel activity. This is a basic representation of the realisation of domestic development goals, in establishment and expansion of domestic longline operations and with increased catch and effort resulting in a range of benefits such as additional licensing revenue, additional product for regional processors and related opportunities such as transshipment and provisioning. Nevertheless, FFA members continue to implement management plans and other strategies to ensure that expansion of the south Pacific albacore fishery is achieved in a sustainable manner that generates maximum economic benefits. It is of concern to FFA members that catch and effort in the high seas, including waters adjacent to our EEZs and also high seas south of 20° S where the current measure applies, also continues to increase and this is unfortunately a threat to FFA member opportunities to develop their South Pacific Albacore fisheries further. Much of this fishing appears to be supported by high seas transshipment even though the Commission has not received any applications under CMM 2009-06 to permit such activities.

### **Current Conservation and Management Measure (CMM 2010-05)**

6. The current CMM was a good first step at introducing management arrangements for the stock. It required CCMs to limit the number of their flagged vessels fishing for albacore south of 20°S to historical levels. It also requires reporting against this limit as well as annual reporting of catch levels.
7. For FFA members there are some weaknesses in the measure that have contributed to the increase in catch shown above. In brief, these are:
  - a) Limited spatial scope: The measure only applies south of 20°S. FFA members have been developing zone based arrangements to extend the scope of the measure south of the equator (discussed below).
  - b) Vessel based limits: Attempting to regulate catch by managing the number of vessels is difficult and ineffective (i.e. increase in fishing power and fishing time), especially in this longline fishery where there is such a range of vessel types and sizes. This is contributed to by the ambiguity of the term “actively fishing South Pacific albacore” in the CMM.
  - c) Flag based limits: Given the prevalence of EEZ fishing on the stock as a whole, the current flag based limits need to be reviewed, and where appropriate, converted to zone based limits. High sea limits currently enjoyed by distant water flags will need to contain provisions to account for increased SIDS participation in high seas fisheries.
  - d) CMM does not specify the limits: Unlike CMM 2008-01 that sets out the bigeye longline catch limit per CCM, the albacore measure does not specify them, creating uncertainty.
  - e) Arbitrary basis for limit setting: The reference periods in the CMM were selected for convenience rather than in view of stock status. Now that the Commission is moving towards reference points and harvest control rules, greater attention should be paid to limit setting on a scientific basis.

### **Approaching the issue in 2012**

8. FFA members do not expect that all of the issues above can be resolved at WCPFC9. Nevertheless we are looking to establish meaningful and cooperative dialogue with other CCMs at TCC and in the lead up to WCPFC in order to move forward on at least some of them.
9. FFA members recognise the importance of this fishery to other CCMs as well (other coastal States as well as flag States) and believe that this fishery could be used as a template for the implementation of reference point management, the realisation of SIDS special requirements in a meaningful and tangible way and achievement of the Commission’s objectives on sustainable development.
10. Issues that FFA members would like to discuss with other CCMs at TCC include:
  - a) How should WCPFC set overall catch limits for this (and other) fisheries? FFA members note that the SC has made good progress on Limit Reference Points and commenced discussion on Target Reference Points. FFA members strongly support that work and will be following it up at the Management Objectives Workshop later this year. In the meantime, FFA members continue to promote the importance of economic targets, such as maintaining catch rates at high levels for vessel profitability in the catching sub-sector, as well as expansion and viability of onshore processing sub-sector.

- b) EEZ limits. FFA members have been working over the past 18 months to develop zone based limits for albacore in our EEZs. We hope to be in a position to notify these limits (individually or collectively) before WCPFC9. This will be a positive move and will reduce the need for provisions such as SIDS exemptions in the current measure. We seek to work with others to ensure the zone based limits are implemented in an orderly and effective manner. Zone based limits will be a new direction for FFA members and the Commission alike and it is to be expected that they will evolve into the future.
  - c) High seas limits. In order to ensure whole stock management, limits for the high seas will need to be developed in recognition of the zone based limits discussed above and the overall limit for the stock. FFA members will also be seeking longer term transitional arrangements that allow for enhanced SIDS participation in high seas fisheries.
11. FFA members are also interested in discussing other issues with CCMs, such as innovative transitional arrangements or other cooperative mechanisms that would assist WCPFC to introduce sustainable development oriented management measures for this stock.