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WCPFC18 POSITION STATEMENT

**WCPFC18-2021-OP02
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Submitted by International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)

WESTERN AND CENTRAL PACIFIC FISHERIES COMMISSION (WCPFC) VIRTUAL MEETING, 29 NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 7

The impacts of COVID-19 continue to present challenges to RFMOs in conducting meetings. Even under these challenging circumstances, WCPFC must ensure the uninterrupted, sustainable management of the tuna stocks and marine ecosystems under its purview. There are several critical measures and issues that require immediate attention by the WCPFC this year.

This Statement focuses on those critical measures and issues on which the WCPFC must take action in 2021, which align with the ISSF global priorities for tuna RFMOs.

Tuna Conservation

What are the issues?

Effective management measures — consistent with advice from the WCPFC Scientific Committee — are needed to maintain bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack tuna fishing mortality and biomass at sustainable levels.

Why are we concerned?

In 2020, SC16 conducted the latest assessments of bigeye and yellowfin tuna and found that they remain healthy. SC16 recommended that fishing mortality on bigeye tuna stock should not be increased from the level that maintains spawning biomass at 2012-2015 levels until the Commission can agree on an appropriate target reference point (TRP). The current tuna conservation measure (CMM 2020-01) is only effective until February 15, 2022. The WCPFC must ensure that a CMM at least as effective continues to apply throughout 2022. In addition, ISSF continues to be concerned with the global growth of fishing capacity and effort creep in the WCPFC region. Fishing fleet overcapacity increases pressure to weaken management measures, and eventually it leads to stock overexploitation.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

- (1) Adopt a new comprehensive CMM for tuna conservation that limits fishing mortality for bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack to the target reference points adopted by the Commission in 2021 and removes ambiguities and exemptions.
- (2) Ensure, at a minimum, that CMM 2020-01, which is only effective until February 15, 2022, does not lapse.
- (3) Establish limited entry through closed vessel registries and develop a common currency to measure fishing capacity.

Our Top Asks for WCPFC:

1. Adopt an enforceable tropical tuna CMM for all fleets that limits fishing mortality for bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack that removes ambiguities and exemptions.
2. Adopt a work plan for FADs with a timeframe to transition to FADs without nets and made primarily with biodegradable materials; develop recovery policies, a marking scheme and ownership rules; and require FAD position and acoustic data.
3. In order to meet the June 2023 MSC deadline for harvest strategy conditions, adopt target reference points for bigeye and yellowfin; a list of candidate management procedures for skipjack & albacore; and establish a scientist/manager dialogue group.
4. Adopt a CMM for an Electronic Monitoring Program and Minimum Standards for the use of electronic monitoring in WCPFC fisheries
5. Accelerate the remaining work to reform the at-sea transshipment CMM and the CMS.

FAD Management

What are the issues?

In the WCPFC, FAD sets account for about 33% of tropical tuna catches. Given the high risk of ecosystem impacts, it is essential to report the number of FADs being deployed and FAD position data and trajectories to develop science-based management measures.

Why are we concerned?

Currently deployed FADs should be lower-entangling and fleets should be moving towards fully non-entangling using biodegradable materials to mitigate ecosystem impacts. Requiring additional FAD data and FAD marking mechanisms also are critical. A recent study in PNA waters (WCPFC-SC17-2021/MI-IP-04) indicates that most vessels use a much lower number of FADs than the 350 active FAD limit established by the Commission in 2018.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

- (1) Amend CMM 2020-01 or include in the replacement CMM:
 - (i) A clear timeframe to transition to FADs without nets and made primarily with biodegradable materials.
 - (ii) A workplan to design and adopt FAD-recovery mechanisms and incentives by 2023.
 - (iii) Requiring vessels to provide complete FAD position data and acoustic records from echosounder buoys for scientific use.
 - (iv) A workplan to develop and adopt a FAD marking scheme by 2022 for all new FAD deployments, regardless of vessel type, that requires that FADs be marked on both the buoy and the FAD structure.
 - (v) A requirement for observer coverage on supply vessels, the identification of the purse seine vessels each support, and reporting of the number of FADs being deployed and serviced annually.
- (2) Request the Scientific Committee to provide science-based limits on FAD deployments, active FADs and/or FAD sets.
- (3) Develop FAD ownership rules and definitions and develop clearer rules for activation and deactivation of FAD buoys by 2023.

Harvest Strategies

What are the issues?

Harvest Strategies — which include target and limit reference points together with harvest control rules — provide pre-agreed rules for managing fisheries resources and acting on stock status changes.

Why are we concerned?

The timeframes in the original Harvest Strategy Work Plan have lapsed. The 2019 assessment of skipjack indicates that biomass has been below the target level for a decade and this needs to be managed through a Harvest Control Rule (HCR). The MSC established deadlines for harvest strategy (HS) and HCR (Principle 1) conditions, after which certifications will be suspended. In the WCPFC: (i) HCRs must be adopted by **June 2023** for southern albacore and by **May 2024** for northern albacore; (ii) a HS must be in place by **June 2023** for western Pacific skipjack; and (iii) an HCR must be adopted by **June 2023** for western Pacific yellowfin.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

- (1) Adopt Target Reference Points for bigeye and yellowfin and a list of candidate management procedures for skipjack & albacore.
- (2) Establish a scientist/manager dialogue group and agree to hold its first meeting in 2022.

Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

OBSERVER COVERAGE AND ELECTRONIC MONITORING

What are the issues?

Comprehensive observer coverage is critical to effective fisheries management, compliance monitoring, and independent verification of catch, effort and species interactions (e.g., sharks, sea turtles and whale sharks). The COVID-19 Pandemic has severely affected observer coverage in the purse seine and longline fisheries. The situation would have been different if there were minimum standards for Electronic Monitoring (EM) in place.

Why are we concerned?

Some CCMs did not meet the minimum 5% observer coverage requirement for longline vessels adopted in 2007 — 13 years ago - even before the Pandemic - and in 2020 it was only 3%. The paucity of longline fishery data hinders both science and management.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

- (1) Adopt a CMM for an Electronic Monitoring Program and the Minimum Standards developed by the EM/ER Working Group.
- (2) Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) in industrial tuna fisheries, including all those engaged in at sea transshipment, by 2024.
- (3) Reinstate the observer requirements for purse seine vessels and at-sea transshipment as soon as it is safe and logistically feasible.

TRANSSHIPMENT

What are the issues?

If not well-managed, transshipment at-sea can be a conduit for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fish to enter the supply chain.

Why are we concerned?

Reports presented at TCC17 show the number of reported high seas transshipment events has increased from 656 in 2011 to 1,559 in 2019 and, due to the Pandemic, in 2021 only 17% of high seas transshipment events have been observed. As of June 2020, 62% of the vessels on the WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels are authorized to transship in the high seas. The WCPFC transshipment CMM is not consistent with best practices.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

- (1) Direct the Working Group to present best practice amendments to CMM 2009-06 to the Commission in 2022 including:
 - (i) Require real time, or as close to near real-time, reporting for all transshipment activity.
 - (ii) Use AIS data to complement VMS information.
 - (iii) Set criteria for authorization of at-sea transshipment and establish a process for Commission review against those criteria.
- (2) Require the use of other MCS tools, such as EM and ER, to monitor high seas transshipment activities as the Pandemic continues.

Compliance

What are the issues?

Strong compliance processes improve fisheries management by holding members accountable. ISSF publishes best practices for improving RFMO compliance processes.

Why are we concerned?

The WCPFC is the only tuna RFMO that closes its compliance assessment process to accredited observers. The WCPFC has a CMS work plan with outstanding items that must be accelerated, including enabling accredited observers to participate.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

Direct the CMS IWG to accelerate its work on the work plan, including a risk-based framework, finalizing audit points and guidelines for the participation of observers, and to present recommendations to the Commission on these items in 2022.

ISSF Global Priorities for Tuna RFMOs

Implementation of rigorous harvest strategies, including harvest control rules and reference points.

Effective fleet capacity management, including developing mechanisms that support developing coastal state fishery engagement.

Science-based FAD management & non-entangling and biodegradable FAD designs.

Increased member compliance with all adopted measures, and greater transparency of processes reviewing member compliance with measures.

Strengthened Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) measures and increased observer coverage, including through modern technologies such as electronic monitoring and e-reporting.

Adoption of best-practice bycatch mitigation and shark conservation and management measures.

Did You Know?

ISSF is collaborating on [biodegradable FAD](#) research with fleets , coastal nations, and other stakeholders.

ISSF resources for vessels include [skippers guidebooks on bycatch-mitigation techniques](#) as well as reports on [electronic monitoring](#) and [vessel monitoring systems](#).

ISSF also offers [guidelines for implementing non-entangling and biodegradable FADs](#).

Three [ISSF conservation measures](#) focus on shark and bycatch mitigation.

Two [ISSF conservation measures](#) focus on FAD management.



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