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Discussion Paper for a WCPFC-IATTC Joint Working Group on South Pacific Albacore

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Explanatory Note

Recognizing the value of harmonizing management of south Pacific albacore (SPA) between IATTC and WCPFC, some WCPFC members have expressed support for establishing a joint WCPFC-IATTC working group for SPA (SPA-JWG). This interest was reinforced during the second WCPFC Science-Management Dialogue (SMD02) in September 2024, which noted that:

SMD02 agreed on the value of a joint working group (JWG) process between WCPFC CCMs and IATTC CPCs to harmonize management measures for SP-ALB and invited the Commission to consider the establishment of such a JWG.

To advance these initial discussions, the United States is submitting this discussion paper, which presents background information and identifies potential next steps for establishing a SPA-JWG for WCPFC21's consideration.

Background Information

Recent WCPFC and IATTC Actions on South Pacific Albacore Cooperation

Some WCPFC members have been pressing for cooperation with IATTC on management of SPA for nearly a decade ([WCPFC11 Summary Report, paragraph 584](#)).

During WCPFC20, the Commission acknowledged that management of SPA in the Convention Area would be enhanced by joint IATTC management in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and that cooperation between the two RFMOs should be encouraged ([paragraph 41](#)).

More recently, at its annual meeting in September 2024, IATTC endorsed a resolution setting expectations for future work on SPA ([Resolution C-24-04](#)). Among its expectations, IATTC will (1) consider reference points and interim catch and/or effort limits for SPA that are compatible with the work of WCPFC and (2) coordinate with WCPFC on a joint effort and process to develop and explore a range of SPA harvest strategies.

As stated above, within a week of IATTC's 2024 annual meeting, SMD-02 "agreed on the value of a joint working group (JWG) process between WCPFC CCMs and IATTC CPCs to harmonize management measures" for SPA and invited the Commission to consider establishing such a JWG ([paragraph 7](#)).

Recognizing these outcomes, the WCPFC SPA Roadmap Working Group (SPA-RM-WG) met in October 2024 and reiterated its support for WCPFC-IATTC cooperation on SPA management.

WCPFC-IATTC Cooperation on Stock Management

Paragraph 4 of Article 22 of the Convention provides for cooperation with IATTC regarding fish stocks that occur in the convention areas of both organizations, such as SPA.

The 2009 Memorandum of Understanding between WCPFC and IATTC ([MOU](#)) details specific areas of cooperation. Under the MOU, WCPFC and IATTC agreed to establish and maintain consultation,

cooperation and collaboration in respect of matters of common interest to the two organizations, including conservation and management measures for stocks and species of mutual interest.

Noting the deep history of cooperation between WCPFC and IATTC, WCPFC members are considering a path towards forming a SPA-JWG with IATTC. Both RFMOs cooperate extensively, as detailed in the Secretariat's update to WCPFC20 on Relations with IATTC ([WCPFC20-2023-31](#)). WCPFC's Northern Committee (NC) formed a JWG with IATTC on the management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna that has proven successful in rebuilding that stock across the Pacific (PBF-JWG). WCPFC leadership in the PBF-JWG is provided by the WCPFC NC Chair. PBF-JWG meetings are held adjacent to Northern Committee meetings and participants include members from both organizations ([NC12 summary report, attachment D](#)).

Steps for the Development of a SPA-JWG

Given the successes achieved by the PBF-JWG, the United States proposes that the overall structure of the PBF-JWG offers a useful starting point for the future SPA-JWG, without prejudice for its scope and objectives, which would need to be jointly developed with IATTC.

WCPFC members could consider, in line with the Convention, MOU, and the framework of the PBF-JWG, the following actions at WCPFC21 to put the Commission on track towards forming and operationalizing a SPA-JWG within the next year:

1. **WCPFC21 agreement to establish a SPA-JWG and identify its structure and objectives.** Such objectives may include, but are not limited to, harmonizing harvest strategies, coordinating scientific analysis, as well as monitoring, reporting, and data sharing. These discussions would benefit from early coordination with IATTC.
2. **WCPFC21 decision tasking the WCPFC Chair to engage IATTC in the formation of a SPA-JWG in early 2025, to include developing a draft Terms of Reference that could be agreed intersessionally before SC21 and provided to the next annual meeting of IATTC and WCPFC for consideration.** Having the WCPFC Chair lead engagement with IATTC would follow the model of the NC Chair co-chairing the PBF-JWG and would also allow flexibility for the WCPFC Chair to identify a core team of advisors such as the Executive Director, Compliance and Science Managers, leadership from the Scientific Service Provider, chairs of subsidiary bodies or working groups, and interested CCMs as appropriate. Identifying a lead and support team will be essential towards developing a robust Terms of Reference to achieve the objectives identified by the Commission.
3. **WCPFC21 decision encouraging members who are Party to both Conventions to support the formation of a SPA-JWG in both organizations and to support or ensure drafting of consistent text between RFMO decisions, resolutions, and management measures, where feasible.** There are multiple WCPFC members¹ that are also party to the Antigua Convention and as a result, members of IATTC. These members are in a unique position to leverage understanding across both RFMOs to achieve WCPFC objectives through consistent and compatible text.

¹ Canada, China, European Union, France, Japan, Kiribati, Republic of Korea, Chinese Taipei, United States of America, and Vanuatu.

4. **WCPFC21 decision providing a proactive 2025 timeline for action that includes intersessional decision making.** The Commission should move forward on the recent discussions surrounding potential collaboration with IATTC by prescribing 2025 intersessional decision points with specific dates that take into consideration the WCPFC and IATTC calendars of subsidiary body and working group meetings with interest in SPA management.