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Update on the FAO Common Oceans Tuna Project II

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COMMON OCEANS PROGRAM



PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND BIODIVERSITY
IN THE OCEAN AREAS BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION

Update on the Tuna Project II

WCPFC 21
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The Project “Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction” is a continuation of an earlier project (2014-2019) with the same name. The Project objective is to achieve responsible, efficient, and sustainable tuna production and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ in the face of a changing environment.

This is a GEF- funded project, implemented by FAO with activities carried out by the partners of the project - including intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector.



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INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

WHAT WE DO

Improve tuna fisheries management

Ensure all major tuna stocks are fished at sustainable levels using harvest strategies.

Promote ecosystem approach to fisheries management in regional fisheries management organisations.

Improve compliance and tackle IUU fishing

Training in monitoring, control and surveillance for more efficient enforcement of regulations.

Improve compliance with fishing regulations by promoting innovative tools like electronic monitoring and traceability systems.

Reduce impact on the environment

Decrease bycatch with better monitoring and promoting best practices in bycatch mitigation and alternative gear.

Lower environmental impacts by advocating for ocean-friendly fishing devices.



IMPROVE TUNA FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Engaging Tuna Fisheries in MSC Program

Through the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), efforts are focusing on promoting sustainable fisheries and strengthening the management of tuna stocks in the Western Central Pacific Ocean by engaging tuna fisheries in the MSC Pathways to Sustainability Program. This Program supports small-scale fisheries and fisheries in developing economies in improving their practices, particularly within the pre-certification space.

MSC has completed the mapping stage jointly with FFA, and based on agreed criteria and according to the agreed selection process, Advisory Council members have selected tuna fisheries in Palau, Tonga, and Samoa for pre-assessment.

Joint Tuna RFMO Working Groups

Through the coordination of ICCAT secretariat, the Project will organize three joint tuna RFMO Working Groups on topics of technical global relevance for managers and scientists. A steering group was formed comprising officials from the t-RFMOs, the Tuna Project Management Unit, as well as other relevant stakeholders. The proposed themes for the three joint tuna RFMO working groups include bycatch, management strategy evaluation (MSE), and stock assessment.

The first working group meeting, tentatively scheduled for 27-29 January 2025 at FAO headquarters in Rome, will focus on bycatch.

Support scientific and technical capacity to further develop harvest strategies for tuna

Another Project partner, The Ocean Foundation (TOF), supports capacity building in Harvest Strategies/Management Strategy Evaluation in tuna RFMOs through technical support, developing e-learning courses and interactive tools, hosting quarterly webinars with simultaneous interpretation, and producing supporting outreach materials.

More information can be found here [Harvest Strategies | 21st century fisheries management](#).

Support implementation of EAFM, including consideration of consequences of climate change, in tuna RFMOs

The Project, with direct involvement of the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF), in collaboration with the Project Management Unit, will support the operationalization of Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) in t-RFMOs.

The emphasis is on how to formalize the implementation of the EAFM in t-RFMOs and establish a way forward by proposing a plan of action building on the outputs from workshops held in 2016 and 2019. Three workshops are planned to bring together stakeholders from the t-RFMOs, including delegates from CPCs, to discuss approaches and help develop EAFM action plans / roadmaps. The outputs from these workshops will be disseminated broadly and the goal is to advance the adoption of EAFM roadmaps in t-RFMOs with the support from stakeholders.

The first workshop of the second phase of the Project is scheduled for 21-23 January 2025 at FAO headquarters in Rome.



Tuna project

Three partner organizations: Conservation International, the Pacific Community (SPC), and Mercator Oceans International have started work to model the effects of likely climate change scenarios on tuna distribution in the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

This work builds on previous modelling work carried out in the Pacific Ocean to study the effects of climate change on tuna fisheries which showed dramatic shifts eastward in the distribution of tuna stocks in the Pacific, hence predicting changes in the availability of the resources for Pacific Island countries. Under Common Oceans Tuna II, Conservation International, the Pacific Community, and Mercator Oceans International will extend and replicate this work to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, as well as in the Pacific, including various climate change scenarios (based on International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) forecasts). The model SEAPODYM will be used to simulate spatio-temporal dynamics of tuna populations under the influence of both fishing and environmental pressures, including their prey (zooplankton and micronekton).

The goal of this work is to project the future of the tuna population using (corrected) forcing fields from IPCC scenarios and provide this information on climate change impacts to decision-makers for appropriate action.

IMPROVE COMPLIANCE AND TACKLE IUU FISHING

Develop human capacity for fisheries control and enforcement

The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) will further develop an Advanced Diploma in Fisheries Management qualification program. This initiative involves a vocational education training program aimed at building the capacity of fisheries officers and staff from other related government agencies (e.g., Immigration, Customs, Ports) in skills critical to fisheries and ocean resource management. Additionally, FFA will design and deliver training modules focused on leadership and data analysis.

Through the International IMCS Network, the Project continues to support the Tuna Compliance Network (TCN), which brings together compliance officers from the five tuna RFMOs, to review monitoring processes for compliance in tuna and non-tuna RFMOs to identify drivers of compliance rates and measures to improve compliance.

The third Tuna Compliance Network meeting is tentatively scheduled for June 2025 in the Asia-Pacific region.

Support establishing electronic monitoring (EM) systems in tuna RFMOs

To support the further development of regional standards for establishing electronic systems to improve fisheries monitoring, the Project partner International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) will convene and conduct two workshops involving relevant stakeholders from all t-RFMOs to identify opportunities for EM standard technical harmonization (1st workshop) and implementation aspects (2nd workshop).

The first workshop is tentatively scheduled for 10-12 December 2024 in San Sebastian, Spain.

To further support, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF-US) is developing and will promote a training guide/toolkit to address technical and financial barriers for the implementation of electronic monitoring in tuna fisheries.



REDUCE IMPACTS OF TUNA FISHERIES ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Develop monitoring and management systems to quantify and mitigate bycatch, develop innovative technologies for reducing bycatch, and disseminate best practice mitigation techniques to fishers

Under an activity coordinated by CCSBT secretariat, the Project is providing enhanced education, outreach, and capacity building for the monitoring and implementation of seabird bycatch mitigation measures, as well as an update of the 2016 global seabird risk assessment.

Another partner of the Project, the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF), continues efforts in bycatch mitigation, including a) develop and promote biodegradable/non-entangling FADs; b) hold skippers' workshops to adopt best practices in bycatch mitigation; c) develop acoustic technology to support selective fishing and bycatch avoidance, and d) produce and disseminate a policy paper for holistic bycatch management that considers the impact of different fishing gears.

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) started work in the Indian and Western Pacific Ocean basins to (i) assess cetacean bycatch and identify data gaps, (ii) build regional capacity and raise awareness on cetacean bycatch and available solutions, and (iii) collaboratively develop recommendations to address cetacean bycatch. In February 2024, the IWC hosted a workshop to start the review of five species of small cetaceans of the South Pacific Islands.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming is "a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated".

The Tuna project and its partners are actively working to improve gender equality and support a balanced participation and equitable benefits across genders within the fisheries sector. This work is being led by the FAO Fisheries Gender Team and will follow a structured three-phase approach, including a baseline study to analyze gender roles and gender-based constraints, followed by development of a toolkit to support capacity development efforts, coupled with awareness-raising efforts.

Successes from Common Oceans Tuna Project phase I

From 2014 until 2021, in collaboration with the five tuna RFMOs and many partners including intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector - the Common Oceans Tuna Project I promoted effective and sustainable tuna fisheries and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ.

Its achievements paved the way for future cooperation and knowledge sharing to ensure a positive and lasting impact on the world's tuna fisheries.

- **Better decision making in fisheries management:** Adoption of harvest strategies for six tuna stocks reduced overfishing in major tuna stocks from 13 in 2013 to 5 in 2019.
- **Conservation and management measures implemented:** Certification programs, compliance support missions, and the Tuna Compliance Network (TCN) improved national and international compliance, combatting illegal fishing with tools like Electronic Monitoring and a global vessel database (CLAV).
- **Reducing negative impacts of tuna fishing:** Bycatch-reduction initiatives, including gillnet training and seabird bycatch assessments, helped protect marine species like sharks and sea turtles, especially in the Northern Arabian Sea.
- **Promoting ocean-friendly materials:** Workshops led to adopting biodegradable fish aggregation devices (FADs) and guidelines on non-entangling FADs across tuna management bodies, minimizing environmental impact.



The Common Oceans Program is a global partnership funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), promoting sustainable fisheries and biodiversity conservation in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) with a particular focus on tuna and deep-sea fisheries, the Sargasso Sea and cross-sectoral cooperation. Led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Program brings together the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), regional fisheries management organizations, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, civil society and academia.

COMMON OCEANS | Tuna project

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IN COLLABORATION WITH: Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), BirdLife International (BLI), Conservation International (CI), INFOPECSA, International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF/ISSA), International MCS Network (IMCSN), International Pole and Line Foundation (IPNLF), International Whaling Commission (IWC), Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), PEW Charitable Trusts, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Ocean Foundation (TOF), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).



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FACTS & FIGURES

\$15 million

Project budget

\$200 million

Co-financing

18 implementing and
co-financing partners



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