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Updates on Climate Change Activities at WCPFC and Other International and Regional Fishery Bodies

WCPFC21- 2024-14

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Submitted by the Secretariat

Purpose

1. This paper provides an overview of the recent activities, strategies, and policies undertaken by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and other relevant international & regional fishery bodies (RFBs) in response to climate change impacts on fisheries. It highlights key developments, collaborative efforts, and future directions in managing fisheries in the face of climate change.
2. This paper is provided to the Commission at WCPFC21 for information, and in response to the tasking to the Secretariat at WCPFC20, to provide an annual update summarizing climate change-related activities conducted by international and regional fishery bodies (RFBs).

Background

3. At WCPFC19 in December 2022, the Commission agreed that climate change will be a standing agenda item of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies and to prioritize discussion on how best to incorporate climate change information and analyses into the Commission's work.
4. In December 2023, WCPFC20 recognized that there is an increased importance for the Commission to ensure relevant information and data collection is adequate to support improved and updated understanding by the Commission on the impacts of climate change and implications for the management of WCPFC fisheries. Discussions at WCPFC20 reflected several ideas from CCMs on possible approaches to assist the Commission with understanding the impacts of climate change on its conservation and management framework.
5. WCPFC20 further tasked the Secretariat to continue to provide a brief that summarizes updates on climate change-related activities and developments undertaken in international and regional fishery bodies (RFBs).
6. Since 2023, the Northern Committee (NC), Scientific Committee (SC), and Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) have incorporated climate change considerations into their meeting agendas. The outcomes of the 2024 meetings of the WCPFC Subsidiary Bodies are found at [WCPFC21-2024-15](#), and further summarized in the next section.

2024 Climate Change Activities in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)

Seventeenth Round of Informal Consultations of States Parties (ICSP-17) to the Fish Stocks Agreement, 15 - 17 May 2024, UN Headquarters in New York City

7. The Division of Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea (DOALOS) organized a consultation on "Sustainable Fisheries Management in the Face of Climate Change," bringing together UN members, observers, NGOs, and IGOs to discuss the implementation of the Agreement, share experiences, and identify best practices. The WCPFC Secretariat contributed a paper and participated as panelists, providing insights on the WCPFC's approach to sustainable fisheries management amid climate change. Aligned with General Assembly resolution 78/68, the ICSP-17 consultation focused on improving understanding of the challenges posed by climate change to fisheries. The meeting emphasized the importance of cooperation and knowledge sharing to conserve straddling and highly migratory fish stocks at national and regional levels, reinforcing the global commitment to marine resource protection through collaboration.

Meeting between IATTC¹ and WCPFC Secretariats, 24/25 July 2024, Online

8. The IATTC and WCPFC Secretariats meeting convened online both Secretariats share a mutual interest in conducting joint activities related to climate change, particularly in research, with ongoing efforts by the SPC-OFP and IATTC. Both organizations are currently developing work plans and terms of reference (TORs) on climate change, which may be shared in the future to enhance collaboration. Climate change will remain a priority in future discussions between the two RFMOs. Additionally, both IATTC and WCPFC have committed to supporting the development of the SEAPODYM model, which is being developed by SPC-OFP and Mercator, through co-financing provided by the FAO ABNJ Tuna II Project.

GEF Common Oceans Tuna and Climate Initiative Project Steering Committee, 17 October 2024, Online

9. The GEF Common Oceans Tuna and Climate Initiative Project Steering Committee meeting held virtually on 17 October 2024, outlined the project's goals of promoting the sustainable management of tuna fisheries and conserving biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The meeting agenda emphasized addressing the impacts of climate change on tuna populations through collaborative efforts involving Mercator Oceans International (MOI), Conservation International (CI), and the Pacific Community (SPC). The WCPFC Secretariat and SSP attended the meeting and noted that robust data collection and advanced modeling are essential to improve the management of highly migratory fish stocks. A key component of the project is the development of the SEAPODYM (Spatial Ecosystem and Population Dynamics Model) to forecast tuna biomass distribution and migration patterns under changing ocean conditions. Discussions also explored expanding SEAPODYM's application to other ocean basins, demonstrating the project's potential to inform fisheries management globally, in line with addressing climate change impacts on tuna stocks.

Review of the Scope and Feasibility of an Assessment of CMM Susceptibility to Climate Change Impacts

10. WCPFC20 tasked the Secretariat and the SSP to explore the scope and feasibility of undertaking an assessment of active CMMs and determine specific CMM provisions that may be susceptible to be impacted by climate change, and present the findings to the Science Committee, the Technical and Compliance Committee, and the Commission. A paper on the Review of the Scope and Feasibility of an Assessment of CMM Susceptibility to Climate Change Impacts was prepared by the Secretariat and the SSP in response to this task. The said paper

¹ Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission

was presented at NC20, SC20 and TCC20. Discussions and outcomes related to climate change at recent NC, SC, and TCC are summarized below.

20th Regular Session of the Northern Committee (NC20)

11. At NC20, the paper [NC20-WP-05](#), together with the *Commission's Climate Change Work Plan and TOR for the Assessment of CMMs Susceptible to Climate Change* ([NC20-WP-04](#)) was presented. The NC20 supported the proposed task in the *Work Plan* of coordinating with the ISC² as it considers how to incorporate climate change advice into management recommendations to NC. The NC20 also noted the importance of cooperation with other organizations, including the ISC and tuna RFMOs including RFMOs that manage species such as sardine and mackerel in the NPO, which are an important part of the ecosystem of northern stocks. The NC20, therefore, agreed to request the Chair to contact the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC) on potential cooperation in relation to climate change. Full discussions are available in paragraphs 55 – 58 of the [NC20 Summary Report](#).

20th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee (SC20)

12. SC20 further reviewed this paper ([SC20-EB-WP-07](#)) and provided recommendations on a draft Climate Change Workplan and draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for assessing WCPFC CMMs susceptibility to climate change impacts ([SC20-EB-WP-02](#)). SC20 acknowledged the collaborative efforts behind the Workplan and suggested that future drafts include status updates on SC tasks, resource requirements, and expected outcomes to better inform the Commission's decisions with an extension of the Workplan to 2027. The SC20 noted uncertainties related to data availability, the complexity of the CMMs susceptibility assessment, and the resources needed for this work. SC20 emphasized the need for ongoing discussions to clarify expected outcomes and resource needs and recommended refining the TORs to include indigenous and traditional knowledge.
13. At SC20 the SSP, presented update on WCPFC Project 121: Ecosystem and Climate Indicators ([SC20-EB-WP-01](#)). SC20 acknowledged the SSP's progress in implementing the Ecosystem and Climate Indicators Work Plan, which was endorsed by SC19. It also noted the delay of the first expert workshop due to travel disruptions caused by the 2024 civil unrest in New Caledonia. Nevertheless, plans are moving forward for the SSP, in collaboration with the WCPFC Secretariat, to organize a Climate Indicators Expert Workshop from November 25–26, 2024, in Suva, Fiji. This workshop will bring together specialists in physical and fisheries oceanography, climate and ecosystem science, and WCPFC members with relevant expertise.

20th Regular Session of the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC20)

14. TCC20 requested that the Co-Leads on Climate Change revise the Workplan for WCPFC21, addressing ongoing projects, resource needs, and coordination between subsidiary bodies. They also discussed the need for an assessment of CMMs impacted by climate change but raised concerns over resource demands, assessment value, a phased approach, and timeframe. TCC20 recommended focusing on a select number of CMMs for climate change assessment in 2025, once the Terms of Reference (TOR) are endorsed and welcomed financial contributions from the USA and Chinese Taipei for integrating climate change into fisheries management.

2024 Climate Change Activities in Other International and Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs)

United Nations Division of Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea (UN DOALOS)

15. The United Nations (UN) conducted the Seventeenth Round of Informal Consultations of States Parties (ICSP-17) to the Fish Stocks Agreement, held from 15 to 17 May 2024, at its

² International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean

Headquarters in New York City. The said activity was organized by the Division of Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea (DOALOS). The consultation focused on "Sustainable Fisheries Management in the Face of Climate Change." The event was attended by UN member states, observers, NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) to discuss the implementation of the Agreement, share experiences, and identify best practices. In alignment with General Assembly resolution 78/68, ICSP-17 aimed to enhance understanding of the challenges that climate change presents to sustainable fisheries management. The consultation highlights collaborative efforts and knowledge sharing to ensure the conservation of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks at both national and regional levels, reinforcing the global commitment to protecting marine resources through regional and international collaboration.

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO)

16. In 2024, the FAO continues to guide initiatives that tackle climate change impacts on fisheries, prioritizing resilience for vulnerable communities and ecosystems. From January 15 to 18, 2024, the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management convened in Rome, Italy. The Sub-Committee acknowledged the severe impacts of climate change on fisheries, particularly for small-scale fisheries (SSF) and indigenous groups, stressing the need for adaptation strategies. It commended FAO's progress on climate adaptation and risk management and requested support for integrating climate change into the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF), along with indicators to measure adaptive management effectiveness. The Sub-Committee also urged FAO to boost resource mobilization and improve access to climate finance for fisheries.
17. The UN FAO Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network Magazine No. 22 ([RSN Magazine No.22](#)) was launched in February 2024 and focuses on the "Changes from Changing Climate". This edition of the magazine is a good resource for obtaining recent information on different regional fishery bodies' initiatives and activities related to climate change and includes a submission by the WCPFC Secretariat and the Scientific Services Provider.

Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)

18. IATTC adopted a climate change workplan at its 2024 Annual Meeting. The plan focuses on promoting climate-resilient fisheries in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, in response to the growing impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems. The resolution passed at the meeting mandates that climate change be a standing agenda item at future annual meetings. It also includes provisions for a virtual climate change workshop in early 2025 to discuss the workplan's implementation. This workplan was developed based on the recommendations from the IATTC's Scientific Advisory Committee and the Working Group on Ecosystem and Bycatch.

International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)

19. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) adopted [Resolution 22-13](#) at its 2022 annual meeting. The Resolution focuses on addressing the impacts of climate change on both target and non-target species within its convention area. This resolution aims to evaluate the effects of climate change on fish stocks and their associated ecosystems, as well as to understand the socioeconomic repercussions for fishing communities and contracting parties. ICCAT convened an online Meeting of the Joint Experts Group on Climate Change in early July 2024, as part of its implementation of its Plan of Action on Climate Change, which was adopted in 2023 and revised in October 2024.
20. The joint expert meeting was aimed to achieve several objectives, including reviewing existing knowledge and ongoing initiatives from other regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) concerning climate change impacts within ICCAT. They also planned to identify sources of climate-related data pertinent to the Commission, assess data gaps and research

needs, and develop a workplan to guide ICCAT's efforts in addressing climate-related challenges. Additionally, the meeting sought to recommend actionable steps that ICCAT and Contracting Parties could take, potentially including collaboration with other relevant intergovernmental organizations to effectively tackle the identified issues.

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)

21. The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) adopted [Resolution 22/01](#) on climate change in 2022. The Resolution encourages the Commission to consider scientific information on climate change in management decisions, supports further research on the effects of climate change on tuna stocks and ecosystems, and calls for capacity-building in developing coastal States. The resolution also seeks funding for climate-related scientific work and outlines measures to reduce the environmental impact of IOTC operations, including holding virtual meetings to minimize the ecological footprint.
22. In addition to this resolution, the IOTC has established a stringent management framework for drifting fish aggregating devices (FADs), which includes a ban on fully non-biodegradable FADs and limits on their numbers per vessels, aimed at reducing environmental impacts and promoting sustainable fishing. These efforts are crucial for enhancing the resilience of marine ecosystems in the face of climate stress and ensuring the long-term sustainability of tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean.

Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT)

23. The Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) does not yet have a specific resolution or conservation measures focused solely on climate change but adopts an ecosystem-based management approach that recognizes its potential impacts on tuna populations. CCSBT emphasizes enhanced data collection (e.g., catch documentation schemes, electronic reporting) and research to understand the effects of climate change on Southern Bluefin Tuna and its ecosystems.
24. The CCSBT also incorporates adaptive management practices and collaborates with other regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) to integrate climate change considerations into stock assessments and management strategies. Following CCSBT discussions during its October 2024 meeting of the Extended Commission (EC), members agreed to include climate change as a standing agenda item in future Extended Scientific Committee (ESC) meetings, highlighting the increasing importance of climate change in the long-term sustainability of the stock and the broader ecosystem.

North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC)

25. In April 2024, the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC) took significant steps to address the impacts of climate change on its fisheries management. The adoption of the [NPFC Resolution on Climate Change](#) in 2023 marked a key development in its work, emphasizing the need to consider how changing oceanographic conditions affect fish stocks, ecosystems, and fishing communities in the region. The resolution tasks the NPFC's Scientific Committee with integrating climate change analyses into stock assessments, particularly for species under pressure, such as Pacific saury and chub mackerel, as well as for vulnerable marine ecosystems. This approach aims to enhance the resilience of fisheries and ecosystems by using the best available scientific data to inform conservation and management measures.
26. The NPFC also strengthened cooperation with regional and global organizations, including the WCPFC and the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC), facilitating joint efforts on research and data sharing related to climate change impacts.

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