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International Seafood Sustainability Foundation Position Statement for WCPFC21

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Submitted by International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)



Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Annual Meeting, November 28 – December 3, 2024

This Position Statement outlines issues that we urge the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) to act on at its upcoming meeting.



COMPLIANCE PROCESSES

2024 Asks

Direct the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) Intersessional Working Group to develop guidelines for the participation of accredited observers and a scheme of responses to non-compliance to present to the Commission for adoption in 2025.

Background

A strong and transparent compliance process improves fisheries management by holding regional fisheries management organization (RFMO) members accountable. Transparency is an essential part of a modern and well-designed compliance process, yet the WCPFC is the only tuna RFMO that closes its compliance assessment process to observers. In 2023, [there was no consensus](#) on developing a process for the participation of observers, and this item remains bracketed in the [TCC Work Plan for 2022-2024](#). Best practice recommendations to improve RFMO compliance processes are available in reports from ISSF and Pew Charitable Trusts: [2020 report](#), [2021 report](#), [2022 report](#).

Priorities to Progress

Continue to refine and use the metrics to assess compliance for each CMM (i.e., audit points) and the Risk-Based Assessment Framework in the work of the CMS.

[RFMO Compliance Information & Resources](#)



TUNA STOCK CONSERVATION

2024 Asks

- Cooperate with IATTC in order to ensure that South Pacific Albacore is managed consistently throughout its range.
- Maintain current management measures for the Pacific bluefin stock so that it can continue to rebuild.

Background

No new assessments of tropical tuna stocks were made this year, and the three stocks are healthy. A new assessment of South Pacific albacore conducted this year shows that the stock is not overfished and not subject to overfishing and the WCPFC Scientific Committee (SC) did not recommend new management action. A new assessment of Pacific bluefin was

endorsed by the SC. Although the stock continues to be overfished, the assessment suggests that the stock continues to rebuild rapidly towards rebuilding targets due to management by both the IATTC and WCPFC. Although catch increases could be possible, the SC noted that the assessment used optimistic assumptions and did not consider major sources of uncertainty. Further, the SC noted that catch increases could bring the stock below the second rebuilding target which was already achieved.



2024 Asks

In line with ISSF's established approach to strengthening FAD management:

- Establish a timeline for transitioning to 100% biodegradable FADs consistent with the timeline agreed by the IATTC or IOTC.
- Adopt a requirement for provision of near-real-time FAD position and acoustic biomass records data for scientific use with appropriate time-lags to protect confidentiality.
- Task the FAD Working Group (FADMO-IWG) with developing, as a matter of priority, in 2025: (i) requirements for the transmission of satellite buoy data; (ii) a WCPFC "FAD register"; (iii) a WCPFC "FAD logbook" similar to what is used by the IATTC and Parties to the Nauru Agreement; and (iv) FAD recovery program/strategies.
- Develop and adopt a FAD marking scheme, including requiring the marking of the buoy and the FAD structure.

Background

Fishing with FADs has a risk of loss and abandonment of these devices, which can negatively impact the ecosystem. WCPFC has taken some steps to mitigate these impacts by requiring non-entangling FADs with no netting or meshed materials as of 1 January 2024. Additionally, recovery programs are being initiated in several areas in the Pacific Ocean. However, crucial steps are still needed to manage FADs effectively. This includes transitioning to FAD designs that are constructed with as much biodegradable materials as possible, requiring data from echo-sounder buoys used to track FADs, and implementing better marking of FADs to understand their numbers, dynamics and fate. These steps would enable the establishment of more effective management measures, such as science-based FAD limits, and help improve tropical tuna stock assessments.

Priorities to Progress

- Develop and implement science-based limits on FAD deployments and FAD sets.
- Develop a submission deadline for historical data gaps on FAD buoy data transmission.
- Develop and adopt clear rules for FAD ownership and for FAD buoy activation and deactivation.

[FAD Management Information & Resources](#)



ELECTRONIC MONITORING (EM) AND REPORTING & OBSERVER COVERAGE

2024 Asks

- Adopt in 2024 interim electronic monitoring program standards for all gear types and a timeline for EM implementation beginning in 2025. To the extent possible, harmonize these standards with those adopted by IOTC, ICCAT and IATTC to account for the many vessels that move between the RFMOs.
- Adopt a timeline and plan to substantially increase observer coverage in longline fisheries.

Background

Comprehensive observer coverage is critical to effective fisheries management, compliance monitoring, and independent verification of catch, effort, species composition and bycatch. 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) is feasible and necessary. [WCPFC's minimum 5% observer coverage requirement for longline vessels is insufficient and not being fully met](#). Catch estimates of bycatch species is unreliable at 5% coverage. The SC recommended that the Commission explore options to expand the observer coverage on longline vessels through both human and electronic approaches.

IOTC, ICCAT and IATTC have now all adopted interim minimum standards for Electronic Monitoring. The WCPFC has not adopted an EM program or Standards Specifications and Procedures (SSPs), despite the establishment of the Electronic Monitoring and Electronic Reporting Working Group (EMER WG) by the Commission in 2014. In 2023, the Commission tasked the EM and ER Working Group to develop interim EM Standards in 2024. The EMER WG has made progress on these draft interim standards this year. It is now time for the WCPFC to also adopt minimum EM standards.

Priorities to Progress

Adopt measures to increase observer coverage (human and/or electronic) on longline vessels from 5% as progress toward 100% coverage in industrial tuna fisheries, including all vessels engaged in at sea transshipment.

[Electronic Monitoring and Reporting Information & Resources](#)



TRANSSHIPMENT REGULATION

2024 Asks

Adopt revisions to CMM 2009-06 to strengthen the regulation of at-sea transshipment in line with [best practice standards](#), including requiring:

- that all transshipment activities, including those that don't include fish, to be reported to the Secretariat in near real-time electronic reporting (not longer than 24 hours after the event) for all transshipment activity, using minimum standard data fields, including IMO numbers
- the use of AIS and that VMS data are reported for all transshipments of WCPFC-covered species

- progressive increase in observer coverage on the unloading vessels involved in transshipment and the provision of observer data to the WCPFC, as well as the national program; and
- establishing criteria for authorization of at-sea transshipment and a review process.

Background

If not well-managed, transshipment at-sea can be a conduit for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fish to enter the supply chain. The current CMM 2009-06 is not aligned with [best practice standards](#). The WCPFC established a Working Group to conduct a review of the existing transshipment CMM in 2019. Despite several Working Group meetings during 2023 and 2024, progress has been slow and there have been no recommendations agreed to revise the current CMM to date.

The [2024 WCPFC Annual Report on Transshipment Reporting](#) highlights that in 2023 only 62% of vessels conducting high seas transshipments were included on the WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels and that 83% of high seas transshipments were conducted by longline vessels. [WCPFC's minimum 5% observer coverage requirement for longline vessels is insufficient and not being fully met](#). At-sea transshipment activities must be effectively monitored and data collected to provide independent verification of all transshipped catches, which is important for stock assessments and the implementation of management measures, including harvest strategies.

Priorities to Progress

Develop electronic reporting standards for transshipment observers or providers through the ER and EM IWG.



EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES (HARVEST STRATEGIES)

2024 Asks

- Adopt Target Reference Points and continue to develop management procedures for bigeye and yellowfin
- Adopt an interim management procedure for South Pacific albacore tuna.

Background

WCPFC has made notable progress in the last two years. In 2022, the Commission adopted a Management Procedure for skipjack. In 2023, the WCPFC translated the outputs of the skipjack management procedure into fishing catch-and-effort controls contained in its new tropical tuna measure ([CMM 2023-01](#)) and adopted a [harvest control rule](#) for North Pacific Albacore. The Commission needs to continue to build on this progress and develop robust management procedures for all tunas.

Priorities to Progress

Continue to refine the harvest and monitoring strategies using the latest information and advice from the Scientific Committee.



BYCATCH MITIGATION & SHARK PROTECTIONS

2024 Asks

- Adopt a seabird conservation management measure that reflects up-to-date scientific advice on bycatch mitigation best practices.
- Amend CMM 2022-04 to require that all retained sharks be landed with fins naturally attached without exceptions.

Background

WCPFC needs to adopt improved and science-based conservation and management measures to limit fishing mortality on seabirds, sharks, rays, and marine mammals and strengthen data collection and reporting requirements. A new assessment of the silky shark stock was conducted in 2024. While the assessment indicates that fishing mortality has decreased recently and that the stock is not likely subject to overfishing, the SC noted that there were considerable uncertainties with the assessment and the Commission should interpret the results with caution. Other shark and seabird species are declining in abundance or are threatened. In 2023, the WCPFC Commission directed CCMs who use utilize alternatives measures to the prohibition on shark finning in CMM 2022-04 to provide detailed information on the implementation and monitoring of those alternative measures in advance of TCC20. This information was to be used by TCC20 and WCPFC21 to review the implementation of alternative measures. Only two CCMs provided information to TCC20.

Priorities to Progress

Develop and adopt a recovery plan for oceanic white-tip sharks and continue to progress the work reviewing the impact of fishing gears on other non-retained shark species, such as silky sharks, including catches outside of the 20N-20S region.



CAPACITY

Background

Experts agree that there is overcapacity, too many vessels, in the global tuna fleets. Fishing fleet overcapacity increases pressure to weaken management measures, and eventually it leads to stock overexploitation.

Priorities to Progress

Establish limited entry through closed vessel registries and develop a common currency to measure fishing capacity.



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