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Proposed Conservation and Management Measure on a Management Procedure for South Pacific Albacore

WCPFC21-2024-DP11
29 October 2024

Submitted by the South Pacific Group¹ and Australia

¹ Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu

29 October 2024

Rhea Moss-Christian
Executive Director
Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
PO Box 2356, Kolonia
Federated States of Micronesia

Dear Executive Director Rhea Moss-Christian,

Proposal for a south Pacific albacore CMM establishing a Management Procedure¹

This proposal is made on behalf of the 6 members of the South Pacific Group (SPG)² and Australia. The WCPFC South Pacific Albacore roadmap identifies the need for two conservation and management measure (CMM)s: One CMM defines the management procedure (MP; scheduled for 2024) and a second CMM defines the management arrangements to implement that MP (scheduled for 2025). This is a proposal for a management procedure for south Pacific albacore (attached).

SPG and Australia note that under the Commission's Harvest Strategy Workplan, WCPFC is due to adopt a management procedure for south Pacific albacore this year. We also note that WCPFC has undertaken significant work over the last twelve months to progress this, including the adoption of an interim target reference point at WCPFC20, adoption of operating models at SC20 and consideration of potential harvest control rules by SMD2.

SPG and Australia note with concern that catch rates for south Pacific albacore continue to decline and that this is undermining the viability of our fleets that are reliant on this stock. We are committed to achieving meaningful management of this stock and the adoption of a management procedure is a significant step towards this and a priority for the Commission. We note that improved catch rates for south Pacific albacore will benefit all WCPFC members whose fisheries take this stock.

We note that the specification of the HCR in our proposal may be updated to reflect the following request. That a HCR be evaluated based on "HCR1 +10/-5" that assumes the Eastern Pacific Ocean catch is fixed at 13,500t and where the HCR shape is adjusted to achieve the adopted interim target reference point.

We welcome any interested CCM to communicate with us at WCPFC21 or intersessionally to further progress this measure, with the goal being to adopt the MP at WCPFC21. Please direct any inquiries to myself (roseti.imo@maf.gov.ws) and the SPG Technical Adviser, Lars Olsen (olsenpacific@gmail.com).

Yours sincerely



Roseti Imo, Chair (Samoa)
South Pacific Group

¹ Prepared without prejudice to the positions of SPG Member CCMs individually or collectively

² Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu



**COMMISSION
TWENTY FIRST REGULAR SESSION**

Suva, Fiji
1 December to 6 December 2024

**DRAFT - CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURE ON A MANAGEMENT
PROCEDURE FOR SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE**

Conservation and Management Measure 2024-XX

Interim South Pacific albacore Tuna Management Procedure

A proposal from South Pacific Group¹ and Australia CCMs

Adopts, in accordance with Article 10 of the Convention, the following Conservation and Management Measure.

Objective

1. The objective of the interim Management Procedure (MP) for South Pacific albacore, is to ensure that:
 - a) the spawning potential depletion¹ ratio of South Pacific albacore is maintained on average at a level consistent with the target reference point; and
 - b) the spawning potential depletion ratio of South Pacific albacore tuna is maintained above the limit reference point with a risk of the limit reference point being breached no greater than 20 percent;with a view to maintaining the economic performance of dependant fisheries together with reasonable levels of total catch, in a manner that achieves relative stability in fishing levels between management periods.

¹ Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu

Reference Points

2. The Target reference point for South Pacific albacore is specified as four percent below the estimated average spawning potential depletion of the stock over the period 2017-2019 ($0.96 SB_{2017-2019}/SB_{F=0}$).² This supersedes an earlier decision of the Commission made by WCPFC 20 (paragraphs 29 to 32).

3. The Limit reference point is specified as 20 percent of the estimated spawning potential in the absence of fishing, calculated as described in technical definitions within paragraph 2.

Scope and design of the MP

4. The MP applies to longline and troll fisheries taking albacore tuna within the WCPFC convention area Exclusive Economic Zones and high seas south of the equator. The MP (and this CMM) determines the total annual albacore catch to be taken within this region while a separate South Pacific Albacore Management Arrangements CMM (to be developed in 2025) will set out the implementation and management arrangements for achieving this. It is acknowledged that the management arrangements may include catch, effort and other mechanisms of control.

Elements of the MP

5. The MP includes:

- a) The Harvest Control Rule set out in Annex I;
- b) The Estimation Method using the settings set out in Annex II;
- c) Data Requirements and the Monitoring Strategy set out in Annex III;
- d) The procedure for Exceptional Circumstances set out in Annex IV.

Schedule and Roles of the Commission, the Scientific Committee and the Scientific Services Provider

6. The Scientific Committee shall regularly review the performance and outputs of the MP, including the indicators set out in Annex III, and provide advice to the Commission on:
 - a) the performance of the MP as a basis for pre-defined rules that manage South Pacific albacore in order to achieve biological, ecological, economic and social objectives, including the robustness of the MP to changes in the fishery and any exceptional circumstances consistent with Annex IV; and
 - b) the application of the MP output to the relevant management implementing arrangements.
7. The Scientific Services Provider shall run the MP, perform the stock assessment, and support the Scientific Committee and Commission consideration of the MP.

² Technical definitions: Spawning potential depletion refers to the estimated South Pacific albacore spawning potential as a percentage of the estimated spawning potential in the absence of fishing (i.e., the unfished spawning potential). The metric is dynamic and can be estimated for each model time step.

The method to be used in calculating spawning potential in the absence of fishing ($SB_{F=0}$) shall be:

- a. $SB_{F=0, t1-t2}$ is the average of the estimated spawning potential in the absence of fishing for a time window of ten years based on the most recent South Pacific albacore stock assessment, where $t1=y-10$ to $t2=y-1$ where y is the year under consideration; and
- b. The estimation of unfished spawning potential shall be based on the relevant estimates of recruitment that have been adjusted to reflect conditions without fishing according to the stock recruitment relationship.

8. The Commission shall review the South Pacific Albacore Management Arrangements in a repeating 3-year schedule as follows:

Year	Scientific Services Provider	Scientific Committee	Commission
2025	- Run the MP (using data to 2023). - Support SC and Commission consideration of the MP.	- Provide advice to the Commission on the MP outputs for the period 2026-2028.	- Develop/Review the SPA Management Arrangements CMM for 2026-2028, taking into account the output of the MP.
2026		- Monitor performance of the MP.	- Apply the SPA Management Arrangements CMM.
2027	- Perform full stock assessment ($y_{last} = 2025$).	- Monitor and review the performance of the MP, including potential exceptional circumstances, and advise Commission.	- Apply the SPA Management Arrangements CMM. - Review the performance and use of the MP.
2028	-Run the MP (using data to 2026). -Support SC and Commission consideration of the MP.	-Monitor the performance of the MP. -Provide advice to Commission on the MP outputs for the next management period (2029-2031).	- Review and revise the SPA Management Arrangements CMM for 2029-2031, taking into account the output of the MP.
2029		- Monitor performance of the MP.	- Apply the SPA Management Arrangements CMM.
2030	- Perform full stock assessment ($y_{last} = 2028$).	- Monitor and review the performance of the MP, including potential exceptional circumstances, and advise Commission.	- Apply the SPA Management Arrangements CMM. -Review the performance and use of the MP.
2031	- Run the MP (using data to 2029). - Support SC and Commission consideration of the MP.	- Monitor the performance of the MP. - Provide advice to Commission on the MP outputs for the next management period (2032-2034).	- Review and revise the SPA Management Arrangements CMM for 2032-2034, taking into account the output of the MP.
etc			

Management Strategy Evaluation

9. The MP has been simulation tested to determine its likely performance against a range of plausible scenarios. These scenarios and the details of the testing procedure are provided in WCPFC-SC20/MI-WP04. The results of the evaluations are outlined in [WCPFC21-2024-XX](#) and are available online at: <https://ofp-sam.shinyapps.io/SPAMPLE/>.

Review and Final Provisions

10. The Commission shall review this CMM in 2027 and 2030, coincident with the stock assessment, to ensure that the various provisions are having the intended effect.
11. This measure shall come into effect on **X January 2025** and shall remain in effect unless replaced or amended by the Commission.

ANNEX I: HARVEST CONTROL RULE [The specification of this HCR may be adjusted to reflect a request to develop a version of “HCR1 +10/-5” that assumes an EPO catch fixed at 13,500t and has been adjusted to achieve the target reference point specified in paragraph 2.]

1. The harvest control rule is outlined in Figure 1 with parameters provided in Table 1. Features include:
 - a) The input to the harvest control rule derives from the Estimation Method (Annex 2).
 - b) For each 3-year management period, the harvest control rule uses the estimate of stock status as determined by the Estimation Method, to calculate a scalar that adjusts catches up or down relative to the baseline fishing conditions.
 - c) The output from the harvest control rule is an overall, unallocated Total Allowable Catch that results from a catch scalar applied to the average 2020-2022 catch levels.

Figure 1. Harvest control rule.

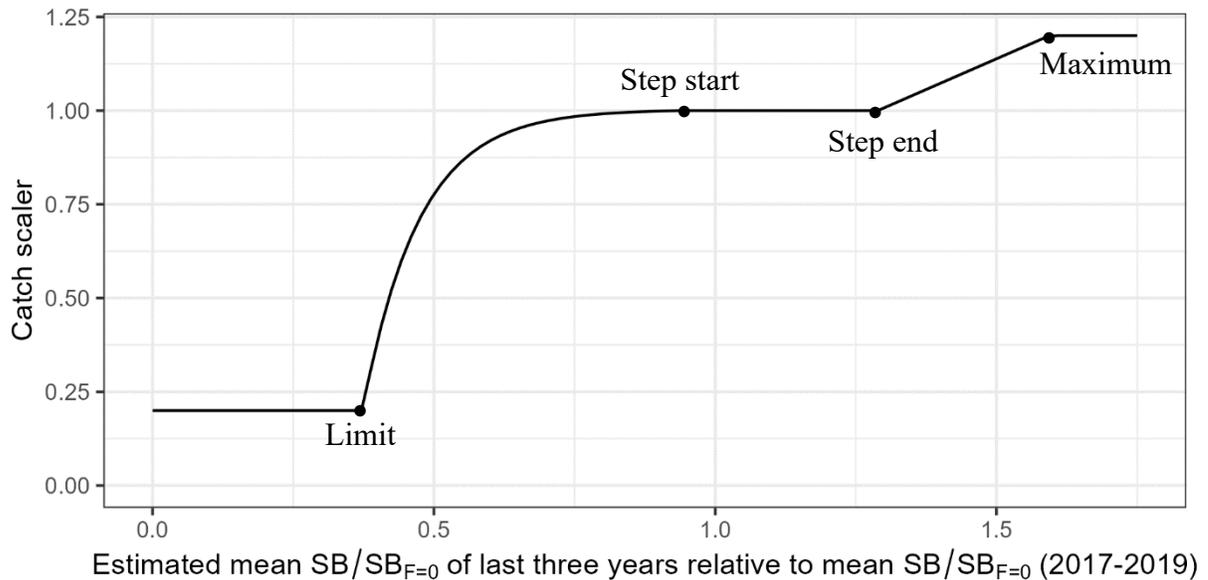


Table 1. Harvest control rule parameters (see also WCPFC21-2024-IP-XX). Type = 'Asymptotic Hillary step constrained'.

	Limit	Step Start	Step End	Maximum
SB/SBF=0 relative to 2017–2019	0.37	0.94	1.29	1.59
HCR output	0.2	1	1	1.2

2. The maximum change in catch indicated by the HCR between any 3-year management period shall be a decrease of 5% and an increase of 10% relative to the catch levels specified by the MP for the previous three years period. For the first running of the MP, the maximum change in catch shall not exceed either a decrease of 5% or an increase of 10% relative to the last year of available catch data (i.e. 2023).

ANNEX II: ESTIMATION METHOD

1. Stock status is estimated within the MP using an Age-Structured Production Model implemented in MULTIFAN-CL as detailed in [WCPFC21-2024-IP-XX](#).
2. The estimation method employs similar fishery definitions and model structure to that of the 2024 stock assessment, except that the troll fishery CPUE index is omitted from the estimation method (see Table 2).
3. The value of stock status returned from the estimation method is a relative measure, calculated as the mean depletion ($SB_y/SB_{F=0}$) in the last 3 years relative to the mean depletion for the period 2017-2019 ($SB_{2017-2019}/SB_{F=0}$). All quantities are calculated by the Estimation Method model. The calculation for $SB/SB_{F=0}$ is generally as described in Paragraph 2.

Table 2. EM settings

Model setting	Value
Regional structure	2 regions
Number of fisheries	19
Longline	13
Troll/DN	4
CPUE indices	2 (longline only)
Steepness	0.8
Natural mortality	Lorenzen, $M_{12} = 0.36$
Growth	Fixed $ML_1 = 45.538$ $ML_2 = 100.115$ $K = 0.3932$
Movement rates	Fixed (2024 assessment)
Selection patterns	Fixed (2024 assessment)
Recruitment fixed to average values	Last 2 years
Regional recruitment distribution	Region 1 = 0.819, Region 2 = 0.181

ANNEX III: DATA REQUIREMENTS AND MONITORING STRATEGY

Table 3. Data requirements under the WCPO MP and considerations for the monitoring strategy with respect to the collection, provision, coverage, and quality of data necessary to run the MP and generate performance indicators.

Data requirement	Monitoring Considerations
MP: estimation model	
Annual catch estimates.	Obligatory under WCPFC scientific data submission standards.
Aggregate catch/effort data.	Obligatory under WCPFC scientific data submission standards.
Longline operational catch/effort data.	Obligatory under WCPFC scientific data submission standards.
Standardised CPUE indices for longline fisheries	Continuation of ongoing arrangements.
Monitoring-Strategy: performance indicators	
Catch and effort data as above	Calculation of performance indicators listed in table 5 for comparison with MSE outputs.
Other data as available to calculate performance indicators – this may include:	The frequency and scope of these data may vary depending on data availability and collection procedures. Performance indicators calculated from them may represent only a subset of the fishery.

Table 4. Aspects to be considered for inclusion in the monitoring strategy and the Commission body at which those considerations can be made.

MP Element	Commission Body	Monitoring Considerations
Review the MSE framework		
OM sets.	SC	Ensure that the most important sources of uncertainty are included in the OM sets.
Calculation of performance indicators.	SC	Appropriate representation of objectives by performance indicators.
Modelling assumptions.	SC	Consider the technical details of the simulation and testing framework.
Data availability to support the OM sets	SC	Improvements to data collection to either enhance the OM sets and/or better represent uncertainty in the OM sets.
Review performance of the MP		
Comparison of MP performance against latest stock assessment.	SC	Check that the MP is performing as expected.
Data availability to run the MP.	SC	Check availability, quantity, quality of data necessary to run the MP (e.g. the estimation model, see table 3).
Other sources of data to monitor performance not included in the MSE framework.	SC/TCC	Identify other data as available to inform calculation of performance indicators (economic, social, ecosystem, etc).
Review of the MP		
Management objectives.	Commission	In accordance with para 8, periodically check that the overall objectives of the MP remain appropriate.
Consider Exceptional Circumstances		
Exceptional circumstances.	SC/TCC/ Commission	Drawing on all of the above, have events (unexpected, extra-ordinary) occurred such that remedial action is required to either review, modify or replace the MP

Table 5. Performance Indicators Examined within the Management Strategy Evaluation

Indicator 1	Stock status (SB/SBF=0)
Indicator 2	Probability SB/SBF=0 < LRP
Indicator 3	Expected catch in the WCPFC convention area
Indicator 4	Expected vulnerable biomass (VB - a proxy for catch rates) in the WCPFC convention area, relative to the level in 2020-2022.
Indicator 5	Catch variability (annual absolute change in catch in the WCPFC convention area)
Indicator 6	Effort variability (of longline fisheries in the WCPFC convention area)

ANNEX IV: EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

1. Exceptional circumstances are defined as the occurrence of events that are outside the range of scenarios considered for testing the MP. In the case of such events, it may be necessary to re-evaluate the MP or, in severe cases where there is considered to be a risk to the stock, take remedial action. Exceptional circumstances are not a mechanism for making regular, small adjustments to the MP, but rather should be invoked where, through an agreed process, the operation of the MP has been demonstrated to be highly risky or inappropriate. This Annex provides guidance on the process for determining whether exceptional circumstances exist and the necessary actions but does not provide firm definitions of all possible exceptional circumstances.

Process to determine if exceptional circumstances exist

2. SC to implement and conduct a monitoring strategy and to advise the Commission on the occurrence of exceptional circumstances based on the results of:
 - Routine annual evaluation of potential exceptional circumstances based on information presented to and reviewed by SC; and
 - Detailed evaluation of potential exceptional circumstances every 3 years coincident with the stock assessment.
3. Examples of what might constitute exceptional circumstances include, but are not limited to:
 - Persistent low recruitment outside the range for which the MP was tested;
 - Substantial improvements in knowledge, or new knowledge, concerning the dynamics of the population which would have an appreciable effect on the operating models used to test the MP;
 - Non-availability of important input data resulting in an inability to run the MP;
 - Stock assessment biomass estimates that are substantially outside the range of simulated stock trajectories considered in the MP evaluations, calculated under the reference set of operating models;
 - significant increases in the contribution of fisheries not affected by the MP impacting stock depletion in the WCPO;
 - Failure of reported catch and effort to be within an acceptable range around the levels indicated by the MP; and
 - Persistent or strong negative outcome in indicators calculated under the monitoring strategy.

Process for action in the event of exceptional circumstances

4. Having determined that there is evidence for exceptional circumstances, the SC will, in the same year, provide advice to the Commission including, but not limited to:
 - the nature and considered severity of the exceptional circumstances;
 - the necessary action required;
 - where the severity is considered to be high, the recommendation may be for a change to the catch/effort limits; and
 - where the severity is considered to be low, the recommendation may be that the Scientific Committee review the MP earlier than scheduled.

Application of CMM 2013-06

The following information is offered to assist the Commission to meet the requirements of CMM 2013-06 in respect of this draft CMM.

a. Who is required to implement the proposal?

All CCMs fishing south of the equator will be required to implement this proposal in their cooperation to achieve the outcomes of the management procedure for south Pacific albacore tuna through a TAC.

b. Which CCMs would this proposal impact and in what way(s) and what proportion?

This proposal will have an impact on all CCMs involved in fisheries that take south Pacific albacore tuna in the Convention Area. The impact will be greatest on SIDS in whose waters fishing for south Pacific albacore tuna partly takes place, and who are, in many cases, substantially dependent on fisheries targeting albacore for their sustainable development. The impact on those SIDS will depend on how the Commission implements the TAC for south Pacific albacore tuna, noting the implementation arrangements CMM is scheduled to be completed in 2025 in accordance with the SPA roadmap and in time for the full application of the MP in 2026. It is important that implementation of harvest strategies shall not result in transferring, directly or indirectly, a disproportionate burden of conservation action onto developing States, and territories and possessions. It is anticipated that the MP will result in achieving the stated objectives of maintaining the economic performance of dependant fisheries together with reasonable levels of total catch and overall improvements to the management of the fisheries for south Pacific albacore tuna in the Convention Area. This has benefits to SIDS. However, if the application of MP does not work as anticipated, those SIDS could potentially face economic losses, hence the need for monitoring and the “interim” nature of the measure.

c. Are there linkages with other proposals or instruments in other regional fisheries management organizations or international organizations that reduce the burden of implementation?

How the shared south Pacific albacore tuna stock is managed by the IATTC in the Eastern Pacific Ocean has an impact on the effectiveness of any management intervention taken by the WCPFC. Cooperation with IATTC on the management of south Pacific albacore will help reduce the burden of management of this stock.

d. Does the proposal affect development opportunities for SIDS?

The proposed management procedure is designed to achieve objectives around profitability of SIDs domestic fleets together with providing reasonable levels of catch to support the activities of foreign fleets operation in SIDs water. It is intended to improve decision-making management for south Pacific albacore tuna fisheries and long-term conservation of a stock that is a key tuna species within some SIDs fisheries. If effective, the proposal will enhance development opportunities for those SIDS substantively engaged in the south Pacific albacore tuna fisheries.

e. Does the proposal affect SIDS domestic access to resources and development aspirations?

As noted above, the proposal has the potential to contribute to maintaining and increasing the value of fisheries for south Pacific albacore tuna, including the artisanal and purse seine fisheries in a way that would enhance SIDS domestic access to resources and promote development aspirations. All relevant CCMs will be subject to some level of catch or effort constraints, including SIDs.

f. What resources, including financial and human capacity, are needed by SIDS to implement the proposal?

The harvest strategy approach is recognised as complex and demanding, and effective participation in this process is challenging. This is a recognised priority, with assistance already being provided by the SPC, FFA, and the WCPFC, through a range of workshops and technical advisory activities. Work in this area will need to continue to be recognised as a priority. However, capacity building assistance by itself is not sufficient. There is a need to also ensure that harvest strategy activities are integrated into the Commission's programme in a way that does not increase the burden of overall participation in Commission activities on SIDS.

g. What mitigation measures are included in the proposal?

The mitigation measure included in the proposal is:

- The interim nature of the proposed MP together with a process for monitoring and exceptional circumstances is designed to enable further development of the south Pacific albacore tuna Management Procedure should it not achieve its objectives as expected.
- The further components for the implementation of this harvest strategy following will also be subject to a 2013-06 assessment and consideration of the special requirement of SIDS.

h. What assistance mechanisms and associated timeframe, including training and financial support, are included in the proposal to avoid a disproportionate burden on SIDS?

Current and projected programmes of assistance are expected to meet the needs for training and technical assistance, provided the current priority is maintained.