



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE  
TWENTY-FIRST REGULAR SESSION**

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**Review of cetacean reporting requirements in the WCPFC**

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**WCPFC-SC21-2025/ST-WP-08**

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## Executive Summary

This paper provides background information on cetacean reporting within the Commission to support SC21 to develop scientific advice for WCPFC22 on appropriate requirements for effective reporting of cetacean interactions in tuna and associated species fisheries. As per the Commission's request, *this work will include consideration of data types, collection methods, reporting formats, and alignment with SciData provisions to ensure robust and consistent monitoring across gear types, particularly in support of implementing CMM 2024-07 and enhancing cetacean interaction data from both longline and purse seine operations.* The key reporting of cetacean interactions comes from observer collected data, however, flag-states have responsibilities to report on captures through operational data and to detail interactions with cetaceans more fully in reports to the Commission (e.g., annual reports to the SC).

### **The SC is invited to:**

- consider explicitly noting the required reporting of cetacean catches under the SciData provisions, potentially with a footnote to the key species to be reported;
- explicitly require reporting on cetacean interactions and encirclements, steps taken to ensure safe release, and assessment of the life status of the animal on release, in the CCM annual reports to the SC, given dedicated logsheet fields for reporting interactions are not available;
- consider including time that a species of special interest (e.g., cetacean) is first sighted as part of the Regional Observer Programme Minimum Standard Data Fields (purse seine); and
- encourage CCMs to promote training of vessel operators and observers where data reporting gaps are identified to facilitate the complete and accurate reporting of cetacean interactions.

# 1 Introduction

The WCPFC21 annual meeting adopted [CMM 2024-07](#) (Conservation and Management Measure for Protection of Cetaceans from Purse Seine and Longline Fishing Operations) which came into force on July 1, 2025. The purpose of CMM 2024-07 is to adopt management arrangements for cetaceans as non-target and associated or dependent species, as they are incidentally caught by purse seine and longline fisheries in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO).

## 2 CMM 2024-07

Conservation and Management Measure for Protection of Cetaceans from Purse Seine and Longline Fishing Operations (CMM 2024-07) requires CCMs to:

1. **Prohibit** their longline and purse seine vessels from harvesting, retaining onboard, transshipping, or **landing** any cetacean
2. Prohibit their flagged vessels from **setting** a purse seine net on a school of tuna associated with a cetacean ... **if the animal is sighted prior to commencement of the set**
3. If a cetacean is unintentionally encircled in the purse seine net, that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure its **safe release**
4. Ensure longline vessels **release**, any cetacean that is caught or entangled by its fishing gear
5. Provide their purse seine and longline operators with information to ensure the safe release of the cetacean. The master of the vessel to follow any guidelines adopted by the Commission, including utilizing the [Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans](#).

Regarding the reporting of captures and interactions with cetaceans, CMM 2024-07 emphasises reporting by the vessel *through the logsheet or any other means* on cetacean interactions and releases, suggesting specific fields to include in the logsheet. There is also supplementary reporting by the flag state through observer reports, generally within the existing Regional Observer Programme (ROP) minimum standard data fields (MSDFs).

**Reporting by the vessel:** shall, through the **logsheet** or any other means, report the incident to the relevant authority of the flag CCM, including details of the species (if known) and number of individuals, location and date of such encirclement, steps taken to ensure safe release, and an assessment of the life status of the animal on release (including, if possible, whether the animal was released alive but subsequently died). The standard SciData data fields for retained/discarded catch are applicable for incidents where a cetacean was captured; however, dedicated fields for interactions are lacking. Additional reporting on cetacean interactions should be included in the flag-state's annual report to the SC.

The **Secretariat shall report** on the implementation of this conservation and management mea-

sure on the basis of observer reports, as part of the Annual Report on the Regional Observer Programme and any other reports as appropriate.

### 3 Tasking to address reporting gaps

WCPFC21 outcomes included tasking the SSP (SPC) to develop a cetacean ID guide (para 78), as well as recommend appropriate requirements for effective reporting on cetacean interactions (para 79).

#### 3.1 Cetacean ID Guide

The Commission agreed that the Secretariat, in coordination with the Scientific Committee and SPC, make available to CCMs a cetacean identification guide to improve species identification skills of captains and crew in the WCPO.

The SSP has published [PIRFO Whale and dolphin identification cards](#) for observers that are available. However, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) has also contacted the SSP regarding further developing an enhanced guide as per [IWC \(2025\)](#).

#### 3.2 Reporting On Cetacean Interactions

The Commission tasks the SSP to *provide information to SC21 to support development of advice to the Commission at WCPFC22 on appropriate requirements for effective reporting on cetacean interactions with tuna and associated species fisheries in the Convention area.*

The Regional Observer Programme Intersessional Working Group (ROP-IWG) Workplan has included a review of the [ROP MSDFs \(ROP-IWG Chair, 2025\)](#). The review recommended removal of certain fields related to vessel capacity, gear and licences discussed. The input from CCMs as part of the review have also suggested the inclusion of new fields to detail interactions of species of special interest (SSIs) with fishing operations and their condition at release. Those fields proposed for the ROP Minimum Standards Data Fields (MSDFs), pertaining to cetaceans, include:

1. **Fate:** This is a proposed addition to the purse seine data fields specifically, as they are already included in ROP MSDF for longline [Table A1](#). The field describes what happens to the ‘fish’ after capture, whether retained and for what purpose/how processed or discarded and for what reason. Condition is a separate though complementary field to describe the life status at the start of interaction and again when released, and is already an ROP data field.
2. **Time of SSI first sighting with time recorded before or after set time:** The observer collects information on the time an SSI was first sighted and whether the set encircled the cetacean or whale shark knowingly, or incidentally. This additional information would clarify whether the sighting was observed before the vessel started their set, which is a requirements of CMM 2024-07 (Cetaceans) para 1 (effective 1 July 2025).

3. **SSI is incidentally encircled in the purse seine net:** This provision is a requirement of CMM 2024-07 para 2(a). The observer can verify if the vessel has taken all reasonable steps, as required by CMM para 2(a), to ensure its **safe release**. This shall include stopping the net roll and not recommencing fishing operations until the animal has been released and is no longer at risk of recapture. While Japan noted that handling guidelines are non-mandatory, optional reporting on handling processes can be included in Fate codes.
4. **If SSI is caught by longline, what is the length of line on released live animal:** In 2024, the US suggested that it would be useful to request an indication of how much gear (e.g., 0.5 m line) may be left on a released animal.

Discussions on the ROP MSDF changes are ongoing. CCMs provided input in 2024 and further in 2025 through the ROP-IWG05 and ROP-IWG06. Another ROP-IWG is proposed for refining recommendations during TCC21.

### 3.3 Existing fields for cetacean interactions in Pacific Islands CCM waters

The Commission SSP also supports the data collection of the Pacific Islands CCMs, which are standardised through the SPC/FFA/PNA Data Collection Committee (DCC). These standards include some of the fields proposed above, which were included as DCC fields in 2016. DCC developed a [Supplementary Form for Cetacean and Whale Shark Interactions](#) to **logsheets** for implementation of reporting on cetacean interactions, which has been implemented by some vessels and the resulting data inputted into the regional database, TUFMAN2.

Furthermore, Pacific Islands observers record the time at first sighting of the cetacean or whale shark relative to the start of set (on PS-3 forms); this data field has been collected by Pacific Islands purse seine observers since 2016. As these DCC fields are collected by Pacific Islands CCMs, TUFMAN2 has already been adapted for the collection of these fields ([Table 1](#)).

The reporting rates of the relevant data fields required by CMM 2024-07, at the trip level, are illustrated in [Figure 1](#) and [2](#). For most of these data fields, reporting rates have increased through time, although there are a few key fields that could benefit from targeting training or debriefing to potentially enhance reporting. Overall, it appears that it is generally feasible to report on these data fields and that observers are generally doing so.

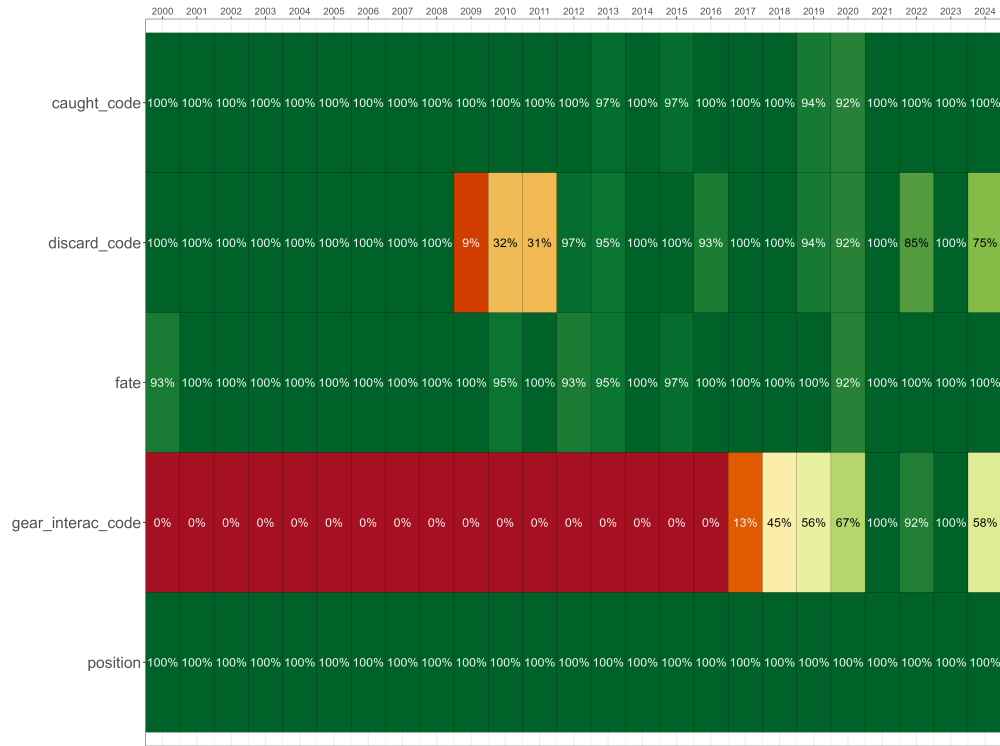


Figure 1: Adoption of data fields pertaining to cetacean interaction reporting as a percentage of trips by Pacific Islands' longline observers that collected data pertaining to cetacean interactions (CMM 2024-07). These fields include: Condition Caught, Condition Released, Fate, Interaction Code, Position (lat/lon). Gear interactions codes for longline were introduced by the DCC in 2016.

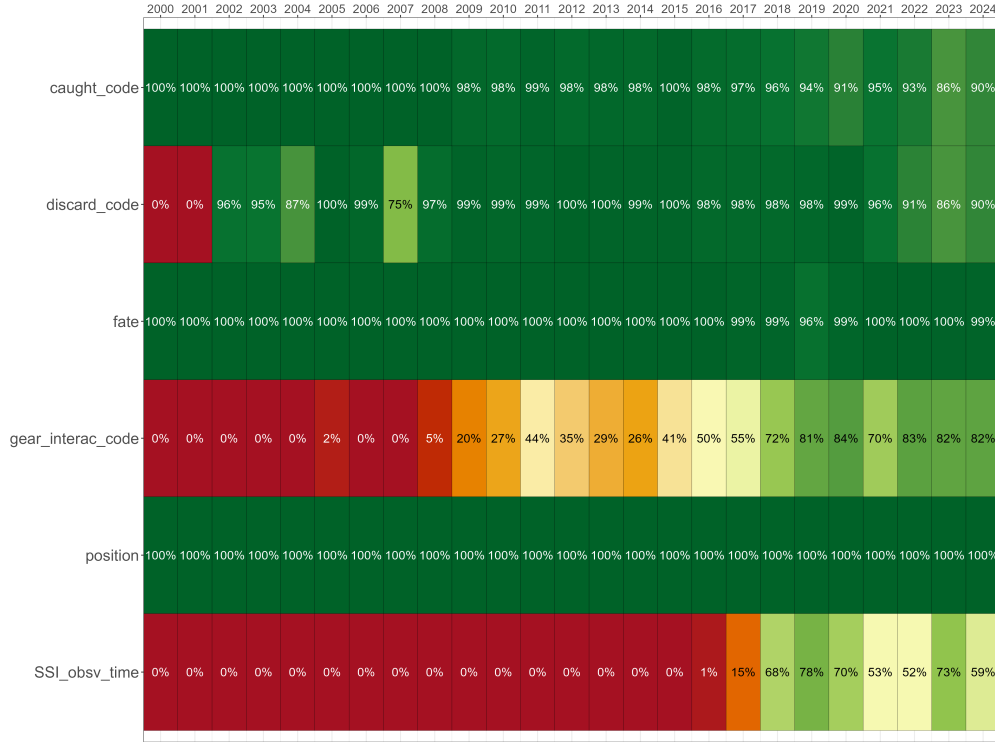


Figure 2: Adoption of data fields pertaining to cetacean interaction reporting as a percentage of trips by purse seine observers that collected data pertaining to cetacean interactions (CMM 2024-07). These fields include: Condition Caught, Condition Released, Fate, Interaction Code, Position (lat/lon), Time SSI first sighted was first introduced by the DCC in 2016.

## 4 Summary and recommendations

SC21 could consider the following recommendations to bolster and align scientific data reporting with CMM 2024-07. The first is to enhance the SciData guidelines by explicitly including cetaceans either in the key species to be reported or as a footnote to the key species, as there is already a provision that states other species shall be reported as determined by the Commission. In addition, there are requirements for CCMs to report on cetacean interactions and encirclements, steps taken to ensure safe release, and assessment of the life status of the animal on release; these could be explicitly required as part of the annual reports to the SC.

With respect to ROP MSDFs, including time that an SSI is first sighted during net setting and fate code for purse seine, as part of the ROP MSDFs, would align with the DCC observer standards and potentially provide valuable information about setting behaviors. For both purse seine and longline the fate field could be used to report on safe release processes, whereas life status upon release would be best captured through the condition codes.

SC21 could also encourage CCMs to promote training of vessel operators and observers where data reporting gaps are identified to facilitate the complete and accurate reporting of cetacean

interactions.

SC21 should note that the SSP database currently has the capability to receive and store the data fields associated with implementation of CMM 2024-07 data reporting requirements (e.g., date, time and position of cetacean interactions and time of first sighting of an SSI). These data would be managed as observer data and in compliance with the [WCPFC Data Rules and Procedures](#) for data sharing and usage.

Table 1: Requirements of CMM 2024-07 compared to existing WCPFC vessel reporting and ROP MSDFs. Included for consideration are data fields of the DCC supplementary cetacean logsheet and PIRFO observer data fields pertaining to CMM 2024-07 requirements.

Requirement	Information Required	Purse seine	Longline	ROP	DCC Log (2016 Interactions)	DCC/PIRFO
Prohibit landing	species	Species code	Species code	Species code	Species name	Species
	number of individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>retained number</li> <li>discarded number</li> <li>reason for discard</li> <li>set identifier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>retained number</li> <li>discarded / released number</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>retained catch (by species)</li> <li>discards (by species)</li> </ul>	number of animals involved	observer (mt)/no.
	location and date of such encirclement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>latitude</li> <li>longitude</li> <li>set start date/time</li> <li>set end date/time</li> </ul>	NA <sup>1</sup>		set start: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>latitude</li> <li>longitude</li> <li>date</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>school assoc (6)</li> <li>latitude</li> <li>longitude</li> <li>set start date/time</li> <li>set end date/time</li> </ul>
Non-intentional Setting on Cetaceans Incidental Catch	animal is sighted prior to commencement of the set					If SSI observed (observed time sighted)
	safe release	reason for discard		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>condition when landed on deck</li> <li>condition when released</li> </ul>	fate code	fate Comments / SSI treatment
	life status			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fate (II)</li> <li>Condition when caught (II)</li> <li>Condition when released (II)</li> </ul>	Condition code: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>encircled</li> <li>released</li> </ul>	SSI condition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>condition when caught</li> <li>condition when discarded</li> </ul>

## 5 References

IWC (2025). Developing a Cetacean Identification Guide for the Pacific Ocean. *WCPFC-SC21-2025/EB-WP-10, Nuku'alofa, Tonga, 13-21 August*.

ROP-IWG Chair (2025). Update on ROP-IWG Taskings and Proposed Changes to ROP Minimum Standard Data Fields. *WCPFC-SC21-2025/ST-WP-10, Nuku'alofa, Tonga, 13-21 August*.



## A.1 Annex

Table A1: ROP Fate Codes and Descriptions

FATE CODE	DESCRIPTION
ALF	Alive adult - Lively or Other
DDL	Alive adult - Difficult to land
DFR	Alive adult - Fins removed and shark discarded
DFW	Alive adult - Discarded from well
EAD	Alive adult - Easy damage
LIV	Alive adult - No injury or damage
LOR	Alive adult - Other reasons (specify)
RPA	Alive adult - Principal species - Alive
RPD	Alive adult - Principal species - Dead
RPC	Alive adult - Principal species - Guideline 18 Record
SDA	Alive adult - Shark damage
SPE	Alive adult - principal species (eg. surface)
SPI	Alive adult - Principal Species - Condition unknown
SSD	Alive adult - Shark damage
TWO	Alive adult - required check if Guideline heading
UFS	Alive adult - too small
VER	Alive adult - Mechanical damage
WDG	Alive adult - Various methods
WHD	Alive adult - Whole damage
CCC	Retained - Care (Consequent)
CUT	Retained - Filleted
FDR	Retained - Fins removed and shark returned
GHC	Retained - Gilled and guts ( Consequent the Rule)
GGO	Retained - gilled only
GHT	Retained - gilled guts and tail (by Rule)
HHC	Retained - headed and gutted (Market)
HWT	Retained - Headed, guts and tailed
LAND	Retained - Fins removed/Whole retained (STANDARDIZED)
OTH	Retained - other reasons (Specify )
PRO	Retained - general (eg. Other, liver)
SHD	Retained - Shark damage
TRU	Retained - Tailed
WWD	Retained - Whole Damage
WWR	Retained - Weighed
WWH	Retained - Whole
UNO	Unknown - not observed