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Earth Island Institute Position Statement to WCPFC22

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Submitted by Earth Island Institute



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Position Statement for WCPFC22
Earth Island Institute International Marine Mammal Project (EII IMMP)

Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Annual Meeting, December 1 – December 5, 2025

Introduction

The Earth Island Institute International Marine Mammal Project (EII IMMP) would like to thank the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) for the opportunity to attend the 22nd Regular Session of the annual WCPFC meeting. EII IMMP recognizes the important role that WCPFC plays in the oversight of Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) fisheries.

EII IMMP works with the world's leading tuna fishing companies to utilize Dolphin Safe fishing practices. We maintain a network of more than eight hundred fishing companies, canners, brokers, suppliers, and retailers that require procurement of tuna caught without setting nets on dolphins. Many of these companies also use a Dolphin Safe tuna label which requires that tuna is caught in sets that do not result in any killing or serious injury to dolphins.

The WCPFC Conservation and Management Measures for Protection of Cetaceans from Purse Seine Fishing (CMM 2011-03) includes a provision for CCM to ensure that potential impacts on the sustainability of cetaceans from accidental mortality through purse seine operations are mitigated.

Since the enactment of this CMM there have been major changes in the WCPFC tuna purse seine tuna fishery. There has been continued increase in tonnage of tuna catches, as well as unprecedented growth in the use of drifting fish aggregating devices (dFads).

EII IMMP urges members of the WCPFC to address the issues and recommendations raised at WCPFC22.

Below are our 2025 recommendations to WCPFC.

Cetacean Interaction Data Reporting Requirements

Background:

The WCPFC21 annual meeting adopted CMM 2024-07 (Conservation and Management Measure for Protection of Cetaceans from Purse Seine and Longline Fishing Operations) which took effect 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.

At the WCPFC SC21 meeting SPC presented a working paper that proposes recommendations to bolster and align scientific data reporting with CMM 2024-07. The recommendations are as follows:

“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 datafields 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.”

2025 Ask:

- Adopt all recommendations outlined in the SPC paper *Cetacean interaction data reporting requirements* (SC21-ST-WP-08, <https://meetings.wcpfc.int/node/26573>)

Developing a Cetacean ID Guide for the Pacific Ocean

Background:

At the WCPFC SC21 meeting the International Whaling Commission (IWC) presented a working paper (SC21-EB-WP-10, *Developing a Cetacean Identification Guide for the Pacific Ocean*, <https://meetings.wcpfc.int/node/26615>). The paper states: “Accurate species identification is critical for effectively monitoring and managing cetacean interactions in fisheries, as different species vary in their conservation status, biological characteristics and vulnerabilities. WCPFC Conservation and Management Measure 2024-07 requires members to report interactions with cetaceans in purse seine and longline fisheries. However, reporting is limited due to the difficulty of correctly identifying species that interact with fisheries. This proposal seeks WCPFC approval to develop a Cetacean Identification Guide designed specifically for use by Pacific Ocean observers, fishers, and compliance officers. The guide will support the implementation of CMM 2024-07 and help Members meet broader obligations such as those under the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. It will contribute to improved data collection, capacity building, and the conservation of marine biodiversity in the Pacific Ocean.”

2025 Ask:

- Adopt IWC’s proposal to develop a cetacean identification guide for the Pacific ocean.

Analyses to inform discussions of mitigating purse seine fishery impacts on cetaceans

Background:

At the WCPFC SC20 meeting EII IMMP presented a working paper proposing that WCPFC undertake research analyses of existing ROP data to inform discussions of reducing interactions with cetaceans in the WCPO tuna purse seine tuna fisheries. The paper (WCPFC-SC20-2024/EB-WP-13) can be found here: <https://meetings.wcpfc.int/node/23048>.

Such a study could provide detailed data comparing cetacean impacts during daylight purse-seine sets compared to sets during darkness. This study could determine the relative impacts of sets on logs, anchored Fads, drifting Fads, and free schools.

The SC20 did not make a recommendation to move forward with this proposal at the annual meeting because the terms of reference and cost of analysis were not fully developed. However, we believe that outlined scientific analyses are consistent with the WCPFC’s goals of reducing

impacts on cetaceans from purse seine fisheries. It could also provide a stronger basis for management decisions regarding mitigation of impacts on cetaceans.

2025 Ask:

- We ask that WCPFC urges SC to develop a research proposal using ROP observer data to examine the impacts on cetaceans from purse seine fisheries. This analysis could also provide a stronger basis for management decisions regarding mitigation of impacts on cetaceans.

Longline Observer Coverage

Background:

100% observer coverage on longline vessels is needed in order to effectively manage and monitor WCPO longline fishery activities. WCPFC's current longline minimum observer coverage rate of 5% is inadequate and does not allow for reliable monitoring and recording of longline bycatch estimates. As a result, the impacts of longline fishing on bycatch species in WCPO are unknown.

2025 Ask:

- Adopt a timeline and plan to increase observer coverage (human or electronic) in longline fisheries to 100%.

*For more information please visit www.DolphinSafe.org or contact Sarah Elzea at Sarah@earthisland.org