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**Review of Non-Target and Associated or Dependent Species in the WCPO: Sea Turtles**

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**WCPFC22-2025-28b**

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**Prepared by the Secretariat**

### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide summary information to support the Commission's review of the performance of its current conservation and management measures (CMMs) on sea turtles. At WCPFC21, the Commission agreed to review and revise CMM 2018-04 on sea turtles, to ensure that the reporting requirements are clearly defined and to consider expanding the scope of the measure to include mitigation measures for deep-set longline fisheries, for consideration by SC22 and TCC22 and WCPFC23 in 2026<sup>1</sup> and tasked intersessional work to support the review. This paper includes relevant recommendations from subsidiary body meetings (SC21 and TCC21) in 2025, which are also contained in the relevant subsidiary body meeting reports.

### **Stock Status and Scientific Research**

2. There are currently no stock assessments for sea turtles within the WCPFC framework. However, the Scientific Committee has adopted a structured approach that rotates the review of available data on NTADS through the Ecosystem and Bycatch Mitigation (EB) Theme.<sup>2</sup> This process is supported by research on sea turtle interactions that has primarily been carried out by the Scientific Services Provider (SPC-OFP), noting [SC21-ST-WP-05](#) on *Strengthening Scientific Data Reporting to Support Sea Turtle Conservation (CMM 2018-04)*. While there is no targeted Research Plan for sea turtles, information is maintained and analyzed through ongoing initiatives, including operational-level fisheries data, observer reports, and summaries provided to the Scientific Committee. The SC21 outcomes also endorsed the establishment of an informal intersessional working group, led by the United States, to review CMM 2018-04 and examine sea turtle data reporting requirements, with outputs to be reported to SC22 and TCC22, ahead of consideration of a revised CMM at WCPFC23.

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<sup>1</sup> [WCPFC21 Summary Report, paras 204 and 207](#)

<sup>2</sup> [SC20 Summary Report, para 767](#)

## Management Framework

3. The current conservation and management measures (CMMs) for sea turtles are found in: [CMM 2018-04](#)<sup>3</sup>, [suppl CMM 2018-04-2](#)<sup>4</sup>, and [suppl CMM 2018-04-1](#)<sup>5</sup> and took effect on 1 January 2020.
4. WCPFC first adopted a CMM for sea turtles in 2008, later revising it in 2018 to strengthen mitigation and safe handling requirements. In 2023, the 19<sup>th</sup> Scientific Committee (SC19) reviewed the impact of fish aggregating devices (FADs) on sea turtles and recommended best practices, including the use of fully non-entangling FADs and the development of a “FAD WATCH” program. Compliance with these measures has been periodically reviewed by the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC), with recent assessments highlighting moderate risks of non-compliance, particularly regarding the use of line cutters and de-hookers on longline vessels. While some capacity challenges and incomplete data collection persist, annual reporting and observer data continue to inform ongoing efforts to reduce sea turtle bycatch and improve mitigation in purse seine and longline fisheries across the region.
5. At SC21 (2025), discussions focused on proposals to strengthen scientific data reporting for sea turtle conservation under CMM 2018-04. Key recommendations included revising catch reporting in SciData to explicitly include turtles, ensuring criteria for identifying shallow-set longline operations are captured in operational data, and adding gear characteristics such as hook size and type. Delegates highlighted challenges with data accuracy, especially regarding logbook bycatch data and observer coverage, and emphasized the need for improved alignment between reporting requirements and scientific data. Several CCMs supported the suggestion by the USA to establish an informal intersessional working group to review and potentially expand the CMM, with a focus on risk-based, evidence-informed approaches, and consideration of implementation burdens, especially for SIDS. The USA proposed hosting a workshop in 2026 to gather expert input, and suggested that the informal group report back on progress to future sessions of the Scientific Committee<sup>6</sup> and Technical and Compliance Committee<sup>7</sup>.
6. At TCC21, CCMs acknowledged the delegation paper from the US proposing a review of current reporting requirements and mitigation measures under CMM 2018-04 for sea turtles. TCC21 endorsed the formation of an informal intersessional process, led by the United States, to review this measure, with a particular focus on examining sea turtle data reporting requirements. TCC21 recommended that WCPFC22 formally task this working group to report back to both the Scientific Committee (SC22) and the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC22) on the outcomes of its discussions, supporting a collaborative and iterative approach to improving sea turtle conservation in the region.

Table 1. Summary table of obligations contained in CMM2018-04 on Sea turtles		
Section	Main Requirements	Reporting / Review
<b>General provisions</b>	Implement FAO Guidelines; ensure safe handling and release of captured turtles.	Annual Report Part 2 (implementation progress).

<sup>3</sup> Conservation and Management of Sea Turtles,

<sup>4</sup> WCPFC Guidelines for the Handling of Sea Turtles (Graphics)

<sup>5</sup> WCPFC Guidelines for the Handling of Sea Turtles

<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 7, [SC21 Outcomes Document](#)

<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 89, [TCC21 Outcomes Document](#)

<b>Table 1. Summary table of obligations contained in CMM2018-04 on Sea turtles</b>		
<b>Section</b>	<b>Main Requirements</b>	<b>Reporting / Review</b>
<b>Observer data</b>	ROP to collect and report all turtle interaction data.	Through existing scientific data provisions.
<b>Purse seine fisheries</b>	Avoid encirclement and entanglement; safely release turtles; use dip nets; record and report all incidents; develop FAD designs to reduce entanglement.	Annual scientific data reporting.
<b>Longline fisheries (general)</b>	Carry and use line cutters, de-hookers, and dip nets; follow WCPFC handling guidelines.	Included in national implementation reports.
<b>Shallow-set longline fisheries</b>	Use one of: large circle hooks, fish bait only, or other approved mitigation; record and report turtle interactions.	Annual scientific data and definitions in Report Part 2.
<b>Other longline fisheries (deep-set)</b>	Encourage trials of circle hooks and other mitigation methods.	Report results to SC and TCC.
<b>Mitigation measures / safe release</b>	Longline vessels to carry and use line cutters and de-hookers	Annual reporting and Compliance Monitoring Scheme
<b>Support for developing CCMs</b>	Access SRF for training and implementation support.	SRF use and contributions noted by Secretariat.
<b>Review</b>	Measure to be reviewed in 2021 for possible inclusion of deep-set longline measures.	Based on SC/TCC advice and CCM inputs.

### Data Collection Efforts and Monitoring for Sea Turtles

7. The WCPFC's approach to sea turtle conservation relies on robust data collection and monitoring, guided by CMM 2018-04. The WCPFC Regional Observer Programme (ROP) provides independent monitoring of fishing impacts on sea turtles, with aggregated summary data published annually in the ROP Annual Report. These reports supplement CCMs' self-reported information through daily logbooks ([CMM 2022-06](#) paragraph 2) and required reporting in Annual Report Part 1 on interactions with turtles ([CMM 2018-04](#) paragraph 7).
8. Decisions at SC21 have focused on improving the accuracy and consistency of sea turtle bycatch reporting in particularly in shallow-set longline fisheries. At TCC21, attention was placed on ensuring completeness of ROP data fields to support the updated CMM and improve verification of reporting.
9. Low and uneven observer coverage on longline vessels remains a challenge for accurately estimating sea turtle bycatch, resulting in uncertain data. In addition, differing interpretations among CCMs of

reporting obligations under CMM 2018-04 have contributed to incomplete or inconsistent submissions. Audit Points introduced in 2023 and 2024 have helped improve reporting consistency for some obligations.

10. Despite these challenges, annual reporting by CCMs and observer data collected in both purse seine and longline fisheries remain important to inform management decisions. Recent efforts through the Scientific Committee and Technical and Compliance Committee focused on updating and improving the accuracy, consistency, and alignment of sea turtle bycatch reporting with the CMM requirements. This emphasis will continue during the review of CMM 2018-04 in 2026, given the Commission's inclusion of clearly defined reporting requirements as a part of the scope of the review.
11. SC19<sup>8</sup> had previously noted inconsistencies between CMM 2018-04 reporting obligations and operational-level SciData data fields, particularly for logbook reporting of sea turtle interactions, and recommended that TCC19 consider clarifying these requirements. This concern was further discussed at SC20. In 2024, the Commission at WCPFC21, adopted updates to Scientific Data reporting adding additional voluntary longline operational data fields.<sup>9</sup> At SC21, SPC ([SC21-ST-WP-05](#)) proposed updates to the SciData standards to better capture sea turtle interactions and gear characteristics, while Members supported initiating an intersessional review toward revising CMM 2018-04 by 2026 to address persistent data gaps, assess mitigation effectiveness—including in deep-set longline fisheries<sup>10</sup>.

## Compliance History

12. Since the adoption of the first CMM for sea turtles in 2008, implementation and reporting obligations have been periodically assessed by the TCC through the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS). Audit points were introduced in 2023 and 2024 for CMM 2018-04 regarding longline vessels' carriage and use of line cutters and de-hookers, and the implementation of approved mitigation methods by shallow-set longline vessels. Most potential compliance issues are identified through observer reporting or through CMM self-reported data in logbooks and Annual Report Part 1. CCM assessments of the consequences of non-compliance as part of [the risk-based assessment framework](#) (RBAF) have generally indicated moderate to high risks, particularly where gaps exist in implementing required mitigation measures.
13. The TCC reviews CCM's compliance with obligations in the CMM through the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS), which also supports an assessment of the robustness of reported data. CMM 2018-04 has been reviewed through the CMS three times since it took effect in 2020 (in 2021, 2022 and 2023).
14. Recent compliance monitoring has highlighted ongoing challenges with observer coverage and incomplete data collection for obligations in the most recent CMM, which are necessary to support verification of the reporting of sea turtle interactions and compliance. Nevertheless, based on available data, compliance levels in the last two years of review have been assessed as generally high ([WCPFC CMM webpage](#)). The Commission continues to emphasise the importance of accurate data collection, observer coverage, and timely reporting to support effective compliance monitoring and adaptive management of sea turtle conservation measures.

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<sup>8</sup> [SC19 Summary Report](#), paragraphs 82-84

<sup>9</sup> [WCPFC21 Summary Report](#), paragraph 203

<sup>10</sup> [SC21-ST-WP-05](#), [SC21 Outcomes Document](#), Paragraph 7 and [SC21-ST-WP-06](#)

**Table 2. 2024 Final Compliance Monitoring Report (fCMR) for CMM 2018-04 covering 2023 activities**

<b>CMM 2018-04</b>	<b>Para. 01</b>	<b>Para. 02</b>
Compliant	20	20
Non-compliant		
Not applicable	18	18
Pending	1	1

### Recommendations and Next Steps

15. The outcomes and recommendations from SC21 and TCC21 related to sea turtles are listed below for consideration, support, endorsement and/or approval by the Commission at WCPFC22:

<b>Sea turtles: SC21 Outcomes and Recommendations</b> ( <i>Reference: para. 7, SC21 Outcomes Document</i> )
SC21 endorsed the formation of an informal intersessional working group led by the United States to review CMM 2018-04 for sea turtles, noting that an examination of sea turtle data reporting requirements could be undertaken as part of this review. SC21 requested that this informal intersessional working group report back to SC22 and TCC22 on the outputs of its discussions.

<b>Sea turtles: TCC21 Outcomes and Recommendations</b> ( <i>Reference: para. 88-89, TCC21 Outcomes Document</i> )
<p>a) TCC21 thanked the United States for its delegation paper on a proposed process to review current reporting requirements and mitigation measures contained in CMM 2018-04 (Sea Turtles) (<a href="#">TCC21-2025-DP07</a>).</p> <p>b) TCC21 endorsed the formation of an informal intersessional process led by the United States to review CMM 2018-04 for sea turtles, noting that an examination of sea turtle data reporting requirements could be undertaken as part of this review. TCC21 recommended WCPFC22 task this informal intersessional working group on sea turtles to report back to SC22 and TCC22 on the outputs of its discussions.</p>