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Establishment of a Joint Working Group on the Management of South Pacific Albacore Tuna

WCPFC22-2025-19

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Submitted by the Secretariat

Background and Rationale for Establishing the SPAJWG

1. The establishment of a *Joint Working Group on the Management of South Pacific Albacore (SPAJWG)* between the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) reflects both organizations' recognition of the shared responsibility for managing the South Pacific albacore (SPA) stock, which extends across the boundaries of the two Convention Areas. Following discussions and recommendations made at WCPFC21 in 2024 and IATTC's 102nd Annual Meeting, both Commissions acknowledged the growing need for closer coordination on the conservation and management of SPA fisheries, given the biological and operational linkages of the fishery across the Pacific Ocean.
2. The formal start of the process to establish the SPAJWG was marked by the first informal joint session, held virtually on 20 May 2025 and co-chaired by the Executive Directors of WCPFC and IATTC. The informal session underscored the importance of collaborative approaches for stock assessment, harvest strategy harmonization, and management of fishing activities across both Convention Areas. Participants emphasized that cooperation is essential to ensure sustainable management outcomes and consistency in policy measures, particularly given the overlapping fisheries and the need for compatible conservation and management measures (CMMs) between the two Commissions.
3. The second informal joint meeting on 1 August 2025 further advanced this process. The group reviewed and finalized the *draft Terms of Reference (TOR)* and *provisional 2026 Workplan* for the SPAJWG, achieving consensus on the objectives, structure, and operating modalities of the new Working Group. The agreed TOR highlights that the SPAJWG will serve as a platform to harmonize harvest strategies, coordinate scientific analyses, and develop compatible management arrangements for SPA fisheries. It will also facilitate the exchange of data and expertise between the two Commissions and their subsidiary bodies.

Next Steps and Requirements for WCPFC22

4. The IATTC adopted the *Resolution on Terms of Reference of an Ad Hoc IATTC-WCPFC Joint Working Group on South Pacific Albacore Tuna* at its 103rd Annual Meeting in September 2025 ([Resolution C-25-04](#)). Accordingly, the WCPFC Commission, at its upcoming Twenty-Second Regular Session (WCPFC22) in December 2025, will be requested to formally adopt the TOR in **Attachment A** and

endorse the provisional 2026 Workplan in **Attachment B**, thereby completing the establishment process for the Joint Working Group.

5. The Commission is invited to:
 - a. Designate a WCPFC Co-Chair for the SPAJWG, who will serve alongside the IATTC's designated Co-Chair, Mr Guillermo Moran (Director of the TUNACONS Foundation, Ecuador).
 - b. Consider and confirm the venue and timing for the first formal meeting of the SPAJWG, tentatively planned for March 2026 in a hybrid format. One member has expressed preliminary interest in hosting the inaugural session, with China suggested as a potential host location.
 - c. Provide guidance on intersessional preparations by the WCPFC Secretariat, including coordination with the IATTC Secretariat, on logistical arrangements, meeting documentation, and translation services.
6. These decisions will ensure that the SPAJWG can convene early in 2026 to begin implementing its first-year workplan, which includes reviewing the status of the SPA stock, aligning harvest strategies, and enhancing cooperation in scientific research and data exchange across the Pacific.

**JOINT WCPFC AND IATTC WORKING GROUP MEETING ON THE MANAGEMENT OF
SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE TUNA
Second Informal Session (SPAJWG-INF02)**

**Terms of Reference for the IATTC-WCPFC Joint Working Group on
South Pacific Albacore Tuna (SPAJWG)**

Attachment C, SPAJWG-INF02 Co-Chairs' Summary

Taking into account the mandates for cooperation and coordination between the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) with respect to the south Pacific albacore tuna contained in, *inter alia*, IATTC Resolution C-24-04 and the recommendation adopted by WCPFC21 instructing the Chair of the WCPFC to help develop Terms of Reference for the establishment of a Joint Working Group;

Recognizing that South Pacific albacore is an important tuna species harvested by members of both Commissions;

In accordance with the provisions of Article XXIV of the Antigua Convention and Article 22 of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean;

Agree:

To establish an IATTC-WCPFC Joint Working Group on South Pacific albacore tuna (SPAJWG) to enhance cooperation between WCPFC and IATTC for South Pacific albacore tuna research and management, with the following terms of reference:

1. The SPAJWG shall be composed of representatives designated by Members of both Commissions and WCPFC Participating Territories, and who may be accompanied by such experts or advisors as each Member may deem appropriate. The SPAJWG may also include, as observers, representatives of relevant intergovernmental organizations as well as non-governmental organizations accredited to either Commission.
2. The functions of the SPAJWG shall be the following:
 - a. To develop a common understanding and approach for the conservation and management of South Pacific albacore in both convention areas;
 - b. To enhance the harmonization of harvest strategies and other conservation and management actions through, *inter alia*, the development of a workplan for the SPAJWG, which shall be developed at its inaugural meeting in the first half of 2026;
 - c. To develop compatible and/or harmonized management arrangements or measures for South Pacific albacore, as appropriate, across all fisheries, including the coordination of catch and/or effort levels between the two Commissions;
 - d. To coordinate scientific research and analyses and facilitate the collection and exchange of relevant fisheries data, scientific knowledge, and expertise;

- e. To identify priority areas for improvement in monitoring, reporting, and data sharing;
 - f. To collaborate in the identification of ways to streamline the relevant decision-making processes within each Commission to ensure efficient progress towards the robust conservation and management of South Pacific albacore;
 - g. To undertake additional tasks related to South Pacific albacore, as appropriate and pursuant to corresponding requests from both Commissions;
 - h. To report to each Commission on the advances of its work.
3. Regarding the overlap area, the SPAJWG may consider recommendations for coordinated data collection, scientific work, and management in this area, taking into account decisions jointly taken by the two Commissions.
4. Each Commission will appoint a co-chair of the SPAJWG for the term each will determine.
5. The Secretariats of both Commissions will coordinate the adoption and implementation of all arrangements needed for the work of the SPAJWG. This includes the preparation, translation, and dissemination of meeting documents, information sharing, in a manner consistent with the applicable rules and procedures of each Commission. Unless otherwise provided for, the IATTC Secretariat shall be responsible for providing simultaneous English-Spanish interpretation for meetings of the SPAJWG, and the translation of meeting documents between the two languages, as appropriate.
6. Meetings of the SPAJWG will be convened by the Co-Chairs, consistent with the relevant rules of procedure of both Commissions, and in consultation with the Chair and Director of each Commission, in a format to be decided on a case-by-case basis (virtual, presential or hybrid), taking into account the matters to be discussed and *inter alia*, the availability of funding.
7. The SPAJWG shall adopt its conclusions and recommendations by consensus. If efforts to achieve consensus fail, the meeting reports shall so indicate and shall reflect the SPAJWG discussions.
8. The conclusions and recommendations adopted by the SPAJWG shall be submitted to both Commissions, as well as to their subsidiary bodies as appropriate.
9. In order to optimize its work, as appropriate, the SPAJWG, through the Co-Chairs:
- a. will ensure coordination with other relevant subsidiary bodies of both Commissions, particularly with a view to seeking their inputs;
 - b. may seek appropriate inputs from all relevant stakeholders, such as inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations or natural persons such as scientists, researchers, managers, industries, etc.
10. These Terms of Reference shall enter into force at the time of their adoption by both Commissions, with the Terms of Reference and Workplan open for review by each Commission and revised as appropriate, annually.

**JOINT WCPFC AND IATTC WORKING GROUP MEETING ON THE MANAGEMENT OF
SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE TUNA
Second Informal Session (SPAJWG-INF02)**

Provisional 2026 Workplan for the IATTC–WCPFC Joint Working Group on South Pacific Albacore

Attachment D, SPAJWG-INF02 Co-Chairs' Summary

This Workplan has been developed on a provisional basis in anticipation of its consideration and adoption by the Joint IATTC–WCPFC Working Group on the Management of South Pacific Albacore (SPAJWG), which is expected to be established by the IATTC and the WCPFC at their upcoming annual meetings in 2025. Its purpose is to serve as a multi-year roadmap guiding collaboration between the two Commissions. The Workplan outlines a phased approach to harmonizing scientific analysis, coordinating management strategies, improving monitoring and data exchange, and advancing regionally compatible measures for the effective conservation and management of South Pacific albacore tuna fisheries.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

To support the effective implementation of this Workplan, the following cross-cutting issues will be duly taken into consideration throughout all phases:

- Small Island Developing States (SIDS), developing Members, and participating territories engagement: Within the WCPFC, there is a need for financial and logistical support for delegates from SIDS, developing States, and participating territories. Similarly, within IATTC, there is the same need for its developing Members.
- Transparency: The need for all meeting documents, recommendations, and data-sharing protocols to be made available in English and Spanish.
- Stakeholder Involvement: The need to ensure, as appropriate, the participation of scientific experts, NGOs, and industry representatives to be invited as observers or advisors, consistently with the respective rules of procedure of each Commission.
- Capacity Building: The need to support the development of technical and institutional capacity in SIDS, developing Members, participating territories, and Cooperating Non-Members, especially in scientific and monitoring capabilities.
- Communication and Outreach: The need to enhance understanding and visibility of SPAJWG's objectives and progress among stakeholders and the public.

REVIEW OF THE WORKPLAN

Once adopted by the Working Group, and to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness, the SPAJWG Workplan shall be subject to an annual review by SPAJWG participants at the end of each calendar year. This review will:

- Assess the progress made toward each planned activity;
- Identify and record completed or terminated actions;
- Flag any activities requiring adjustment, rollover, or intensified follow-up in the following year.

The results of the annual review shall inform the planning of subsequent SPAJWG meetings and be

reported to both Commissions. Any resulting comments or recommendations made by either Commission are reported back to the SPAJWG.

RESOURCE PLANNING AND BUDGETING

Consistent with the relevant provisions of the Terms of Reference, and in recognition of the resource requirements to implement certain activities under this Workplan, the two Commissions will consider and endeavor to accommodate budgetary needs as appropriate.

YEAR 1: 2026 — INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

A. First SPAJWG Meeting in the first half of 2026

1. Implementation of the SPAJWG Workplan

- The SPAJWG will review and consider the time frame, specific needs, and expected outcomes of the Workplan as needed

2. Overview of the SPA Management

- Summary of recent stock status based on stock assessment for WCPO only, Pan-Pacific scale, and EPO only.
- Overview of current SPA management approaches adopted by both Commissions, including arrangements for the overlap area.
- Introduction to the development of Harvest Strategies for SPA by each Commission.

3. Review of Management Procedure Evaluations (subject to the progress of the SPA MP at WCPFC22)

- Review the adopted WCPFC SPA MP (draft schedule provided in **Table 1**), the outcomes of the first running of the MP, and the adopted SPA MP implementation CMM.
- Review the application of the WCPFC's 2025 MP outputs to SPA management for 2026.
- Review of the scope of the SPA MP in the context of the geographic area (including the overlap area) and the mixed fishery structure
- Review of the IATTC components (fishing level) in the SPA HS framework
- Develop a detailed plan of harvest strategy-related SPAJWG activities for 2026 and beyond.

Table 1. The WCPFC's South Pacific Albacore Management Arrangements in a repeating 3-year schedule (Proposed by the South Pacific Group¹ and Australia in December 2024; [WCPFC21-2024-DP11 Rev01 Updated](#))

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 2026- 2028.	- Develop/Review the SPA Management Arrangements CMM for 2026-2028 , taking into account the output of the MP.
2026		- Monitor the performance of the MP.	- Apply the SPA Management Arrangements CMM.

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

2027	- Perform full stock assessment (y _{last} = 2025).	- Monitor and review the performance of the MP, including potential exceptional circumstances, and advise the Commission.	- Apply the <i>SPA Management Arrangements CMM</i> . - 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 the Commission on the MP outputs for the next management period (2029-2031).	- Review and revise the <i>SPA Management Arrangements CMM for 2029-2031</i> , taking into account the output of the MP.
2029		- Monitor the performance of the MP.	- Apply the <i>SPA Management Arrangements CMM</i> .
2030	- Perform full stock assessment (y _{last} = 2028).	- Monitor and review the performance of the MP, including potential exceptional circumstances, and advise the Commission.	- Apply the <i>SPA Management Arrangements CMM</i> . - 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 the Commission on the MP outputs for the next management period (2032-2034).	- Review and revise the <i>SPA Management Arrangements CMM for 2032-2034</i> , taking into account the output of the MP.
etc.	-	-	-

4. Compatible management measures

The SPAJWG will consider the effectiveness of the MP across both Convention Areas to develop and recommend to both commissions compatible management measures, including quantitative limits, monitoring, reporting, data sharing arrangements, and coordination of the overlap area.

5. Preparing WCPFC's 2027 SPA stock assessment

- Establish a clear framework for coordination between SPC and IATTC scientists, including the development of intersessional meetings and communication channels to address key elements of the assessment, such as:
 - Input data requirements and exchange
 - Modeling approaches
 - Regional structure assumptions
 - Determining the scope of the assessment, including whether it will be Pacific-wide or RFMO-specific, with separate components for WCPFC and IATTC.

The SPAJWG will facilitate this discussion and establish a timeline for data sharing between the two organizations.

- Promote methodological alignment between SPC-OFP and IATTC in stock assessment practices to ensure comparability and consistency of outputs.
- Explore the development of SPA-wide projection models that incorporate both catch numbers and catch weight, to enhance the robustness of future management advice.

6. Support and Review Project 100c (CKMR)² Outputs

- Review results from CKMR³ sampling (2023–2025) and explore data integration into management advice. (SPC, SC, SPAJWG, etc.)
- Begin planning CKMR-informed stock assessments or MSE tests for the 2029–2031 MP cycle.

B. Intersessional Activities toward 2027

The following issues, among others, may be discussed, subject to the availability of supporting documents and time constraints.

1. SPAJWG reference document

- Develop one reference document for SPAJWG, covering a summary of stock structure, stock status, catch and effort levels, current management system, harvest strategy framework, climate change impacts, etc.
- Develop a list of areas where monitoring, reporting, and data sharing could be improved

2. Data issues

- Recommend to both Commissions to consider the adoption of shared data standards and timelines for stock status evaluations – comparing assessments from the WCPO-only, Pan-Pacific, and EPO-only approaches – and review existing data exchange and monitoring mechanisms, including plans for CKMR sampling and integration with ongoing tagging programs under SPC coordination.

3. SPAJWG Research plan and budget

- With the support of both Secretariats, develop a scientific research plan for the SPAJWG's work, including any necessary budget implications, and recommend it to each Commission.
- Prior to the SPAJWG meeting, the respective research plans should be shared and consolidated, and the research responsibilities clearly assigned to each Commission to facilitate budget allocation between them.

² *Preparing WCP tuna fisheries for application of CKMR methods to resolve key stock assessment uncertainties, 2023-2025*

³ Accurately estimating absolute spawning biomass is a key challenge in WCPFC stock assessments. Close-Kin Mark-Recapture (CKMR) offers a practical solution, providing not only biomass estimates but also insights into population structure, connectivity, and natural mortality to improve management decisions.

Annex. The provisional and indicative schedule for SPAJWG Meetings, aligned with the regular meeting calendars of both Commissions, with a provisional proposed agenda for each meeting.

2025		2026	
		Jan-Mar.	Secretariats: Preparation for the 1st SPAJWG Meeting (Hybrid) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting time • Venue • Agenda
20 May	1st Informal SPAJWG Meeting (online) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of DRAFT TOR • Consider elements to be included in the workplan (see Annex 1) • Confirm the 2nd Informal SPAJWG meeting date (29 July – 1 August) 	March	1st Formal SPAJWG Meeting (a 3-day hybrid meeting) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of recent stock status from stock assessments • Review of the scope of the SPA MP in the context of the geographic area and the mixed fishery structure • Review of the WCPFC-adopted SPA MP, outcomes of the first MP run, and the SPA MP Implementation CMM • Review of the IATTC components (fishing level) in the SPA HS framework • Develop a scientific research plan with budget implications as needed for the SPAJWG work, assisted by both Secretariats, and recommend it to each Commission
June – July	Secretariats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a DRAFT workplan and timeline • Communicate with CCMs (WCPFC) and CPCs (IATTC) to refine the workplan • Both Secretariats draft the SPAJWG meeting cycles and decision-making structure 		
2-6 June	IATTC-SAC16	Early June	IATTC-SAC17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the SPAJWG budget and recommend it to the Commission if needed
29Jul (Tue)-01Aug (Fri)	2nd Informal SPAJWG Meeting (online) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize TOR • Review and finalize the Workplan and timeline prepared by both Secretariats • Recommend the meeting date, duration, (hybrid?), and meeting venue for the 1st in-person (?) SPAJWG meeting, SPAJWG-01 (this is important) 	Late July-early August	2nd Formal SPAJWG Meeting (if needed) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
13-21 August	WCPFC-SC21	Mid-August	WCPFC-SC22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the SPAJWG budget and

			recommend it to the Commission if needed
1-5 September	IATTC-103 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt TOR • Finalize and recommend the workplan to be adopted at the 1st SPAJWG in 2026 • Recommend the meeting date and venue for the 1st in-person (?) SPAJWG meeting, SPAJWG-01 	Early September	IATTC-104 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and endorse the SPAJWG budget
1-5 December	WCPFC22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt TOR – subject to the decisions by both RFMOs, the SPAJWG will be established. • Review the IATTC-recommended workplan and endorse/recommend it to SPAJWG-01 for adoption • Recommend the meeting date and venue for the 1st in-person (?) SPAJWG meeting, SPAJWG-01 	Early December	WCPFC23 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and endorse the SPAJWG budget