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Review of Non-Target and Associated or Dependent Species (NTADS) in the WCPO: Cetaceans

WCPFC22-2025-28e

29 October 2025

Submitted 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 measure (CMM) for cetaceans. Relevant recommendations to the Commission from subsidiary body meetings (SC21 and TCC21) in 2025 are included in this paper and are also found in the relevant subsidiary body meeting reports.

Stock Status and Scientific Research

2. The WCPFC does not conduct stock assessments for cetaceans 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.¹ This process is supported by the Data and Statistics Theme in improving reporting requirements under the Scientific Data (SciData) provisions and implementing CMM 2024-07. At SC21, SPC-OFP presented [SC21-ST-WP-08](#) on cetacean interaction data reporting requirements, and the PNA Office presented [SC21-EB-IP-07](#), which analysed observer data on interactions with false killer whales and rough-toothed dolphins in the PNA purse seine fishery. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) presented [SC21-EB-WP-10](#) proposing the joint development, with SPC and the WCPFC Secretariat, of a *Cetacean Identification Guide for the Pacific Ocean* to improve species identification, data quality, and support the implementation of CMM 2024-07. Collectively, these initiatives strengthen data standards, enhance observer capacity, and contribute to the scientific review of cetacean interactions within tuna fisheries in the WCPO.

Management Framework

3. The current CMM for cetaceans is contained in [CMM 2024-07](#)², with supplementary information found at [suppl CMM 2024-07-2](#)³ and [suppl CMM 2024-07-1](#)⁴. CMM 2024-07 took effect on 1 July 2025.

¹ [SC20 Summary Report, para 767](#)

² Conservation and Management Measure for Protection of Cetaceans from Purse Seine and Longline Fishing Operations

³ Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans (Graphics)

⁴ Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans

4. After the adoption of the first measure for cetaceans ([CMM 2011-03](#)) by WCPFC8, the Commission, this CMM was not considered again until 2019 when Korea proposed an amendment to the CMM to WCPFC16. Although the proposed amendments were not agreed, the Commission decided to task SC16 with the development of best handling practices for cetaceans, to recommend to the Commission at WCPFC17. The WCPFC Scientific Services Provider (SSP⁵) was also tasked to review available data to provide estimates of fishery interaction types and levels with cetaceans in the WCPF Convention Area, and to provide a report to SC16.⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic prevented SC16 from addressing this issue and the matter was taken up at SC17, with recommendations on best handling practices (suppl_1) adopted at WCPFC18, and accompanying graphics (suppl_2) adopted at WCPFC19.
5. In December 2024, WCPFC21 adopted [CMM 2024-07](#) which included best practices for the safe handling and release of cetaceans ([suppl CMM 2024-07-2](#), [suppl CMM 2024-07-1](#)). CMM 2024-07 builds on and strengthens CMM 2011-03 by extending protections in purse seine operations to longline fisheries, prohibiting the retention or landing of any cetaceans, and requiring best-practice safe release procedures. It also enhances reporting and Secretariat oversight, making it a more comprehensive framework for mitigating fishing impacts on cetaceans in the WCPO. **Table 1** below gives a comparison of WCPFC cetacean conservation and management measures.

Table 1. Comparison of WCPFC cetacean conservation and management measures		
Aspect	CMM 2011-03 (in force Jan 2013)	CMM 2024-07 (in force Jul 2025)
Scope	Applies only to purse seine operations in EEZs and high seas areas of the Convention Area	Applies to purse seine and longline operations in EEZs and high seas areas of the Convention Area
Prohibition on setting nets	Purse seine vessels prohibited from setting on tuna schools associated with cetaceans	Same prohibition maintained for purse seine vessels
Retention / landing	Not addressed	Prohibits harvesting, retaining, transshipping, or landing any cetacean (whole or parts) for purse seine & longline vessels
Safe release	Purse seine: masters must take all reasonable steps for safe release of encircled cetaceans	Purse seine: same requirement; Longline: must immediately release entangled cetaceans using Best Practices for safe handling and release

⁵ Oceanic Fisheries Programme- Pacific Community (OFP-SPC)

⁶ See [SC16-ST-IP-12](#), updated in [SC17-ST-IP-10](#). See also [WCPFC16 Summary Report](#) paragraphs 519-521.

Table 1. Comparison of WCPFC cetacean conservation and management measures		
Aspect	CMM 2011-03 (in force Jan 2013)	CMM 2024-07 (in force Jul 2025)
Guidelines	Must follow Commission guidelines for safe release (when adopted)	Must follow Commission guidelines; explicitly requires provision of Best Practices information to all operators
Reporting	Masters must report encirclement incidents to flag State; CCMs must include in Part 1 Annual Report	Reporting required via logsheets or other means; Secretariat to report using observer reports and other reports as appropriate
Crew safety	Paramount when releasing cetaceans (purse seine)	Paramount when releasing cetaceans (applies to both purse seine and longline)
Entry into force	1 January 2013	1 July 2025

6. [CMM 2024-07](#): Paragraph 2(b) requires vessel master's to report any cetacean encirclement incidents through logsheets or other means, providing details of the event, release procedures, and the status of the animal. Paragraph 8 further mandates that the Secretariat report on the implementation of the measure based on observer reports and other relevant sources.
7. The figures below are found in TCC21 paper [WCPFC-TCC21-2025-RP02_rev1](#), on the Annual Report of the Regional Observer Programme (ROP). The paper provides additional details on cetacean interactions in WCPO fisheries.

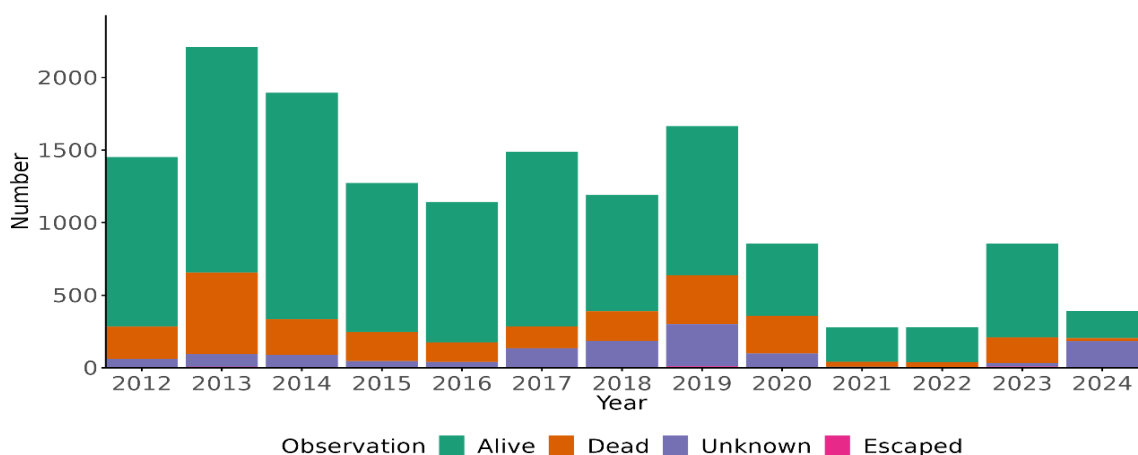


Figure A-1: Number of interactions of cetaceans and pinnipeds in purse-seine fisheries as reported by ROP Observers for the period from 2012 to 2024. Interaction outcomes were reported as alive, dead, escaped before landing, or unknown.

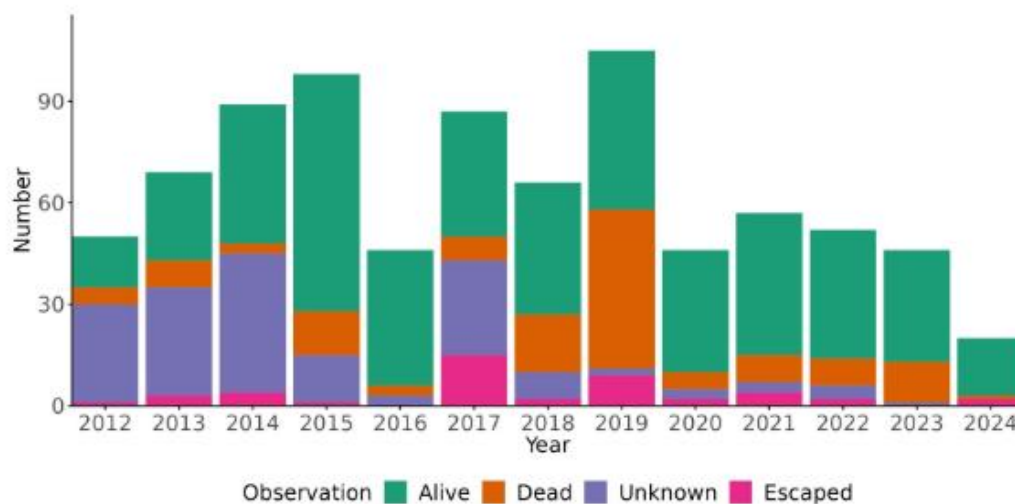


Figure A-2: Number of interactions of cetaceans and pinnipeds in longline fisheries as reported by ROP Observers for the period from 2012 to 2024. Interaction outcomes were reported as alive, dead, escaped before landing, or unknown.

Data Collection Efforts and Monitoring for Cetaceans

8. SC21 reviewed [SC21-ST-WP-08](#) on cetacean interaction reporting and [SC21-EB-WP-10](#) on developing a Cetacean Identification Guide to support WCPFC22 advice and the implementation of CMM 2024-07. The discussions highlighted the need for consistent and robust monitoring across gear types, with observer-collected data as the primary source, and that flag CCMs are also responsible for reporting captures and interactions. Some CCMs noted challenges in species identification, reporting safe release, and limited observer coverage, particularly in longline fisheries, and emphasized the value of training vessel operators and observers to improve data quality.
9. SC21 recommended revisions to the Scientific Data guidelines to strengthen monitoring and reporting of cetacean interactions. CCMs were encouraged to provide targeted training and address reporting gaps. SC21 also endorsed developing a Pacific-wide Cetacean Identification Guide in collaboration with IWC, SSP, the WCPFC Secretariat, and other stakeholders, and encouraged ongoing research on bycatch, population-level modelling, mortality studies, and mitigation strategies for species such as rough-toothed dolphins and false killer whales.
10. Key focuses for monitoring fishing activities are set out in Table 1, above. The WCPFC ROP provides independent data collection and monitoring, and an aggregated summary of data from observers is available each year in the Annual Report on the Regional Observer Programme.⁷ This supplements CCM's self-reported information available through CMM daily logbook reporting requirements ([CMM 2022-06](#) paragraph 2) as well as required reporting in Annual Report Part 1 on instances where cetaceans have been encircled by purse seine nets (CMM 2011-03 paragraph 5).

⁷ The 2025 Annual Report on the Regional Observer Programme (for 2024) is available on the [TCC21 meeting page](#).

Compliance History

11. The Commission first adopted specific provisions for cetacean protection under CMM 2011-03, which was superseded by [CMM 2024-07](#).. There are two supplementary measures setting out best practices for the safe handling and release of cetaceans ⁸ which vessel masters are required to follow.⁹ This measure applies within Exclusive Economic Zones and on the high seas of the Convention Area.
12. The Commission began reviewing compliance with the original CMM in 2014 (covering 2013 activities¹⁰) when compliance with reporting against one obligation was assessed: CCMs included information in their Annual Report Part 1 on instances of their flagged vessels encircling cetaceans in their purse seine nets.
13. Key focuses in the measure for potential compliance reviews include the prohibition on setting purse seine nets on schools associated with cetaceans, and required reporting of encirclement incidents and safe release procedures. There is also a requirement for logbook reporting of cetaceans. Compliance monitoring has revealed that reporting by CCMs has been limited, with few cases included in Annual Reports Part 1, and indications of under-reporting when compared with observer records. This has resulted in minimal findings of non-compliance based on the very limited available data through current reporting and limited compliance evaluations through the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) – 4 assessments under CMM 2011-03 (2013, 2016, 2021 and 2022). While Audit Points were agreed and applied from 1 January 2023, CMM 2011-03 has not been reviewed since that time and the amended CMM 2024-07 (effective 1 July 2025) has new/ amended obligations that require the review and adoption of the amended Audit Points that are to be developed for consideration at WCPFC22.¹¹
14. Table 2 shows the outcome of the final compliance monitoring report (fCMR) for CMM 2011-03 covering 2021 activities (i.e., when it was last reviewed.)

Table 2. 2022 Final Compliance Monitoring Report (fCMR) for CMM 2011-03 covering 2021 activities for the cetacean CMM

CMM 2011-03 (now 2024-07)	Para. 01	Para. 02
Compliant	20	20
Non-compliant	1	
Not applicable	18	18
Capacity Assistance Need		1

⁸ [suppl CMM 2024-07-2](#) Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans (Graphics) and [suppl CMM 2024-07-1](#) Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans

⁹ [suppl CMM 2024-07-2](#) Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans (Graphics) and [suppl CMM 2024-07-1](#) Best Practices for the Safe Handling and Release of Cetaceans

¹⁰ Although the CMM was adopted in 2011, it did not take effect until 1 January 2013.

¹¹ [WCPFC-TCC21-2025-outcomes](#), paragraph 34 (relating to Annex 6 of [TCC21-2025-10](#))

15. With the adoption of CMM 2024-07, the scope of cetacean protection measures have been substantially expanded to include both purse seine and longline operations, alongside prohibitions on retention and landing, mandatory safe release using best practices, and strengthened Secretariat oversight through observer reports and other sources. While compliance history under this new measure is yet to be established, its broader requirements and enhanced reporting framework are expected to provide greater transparency and accountability. Effective implementation will depend on improved alignment between logsheet and observer reporting, as well as targeted training for vessel operators and observers to address persistent data gaps that would support improved data quality and, where required, verification of reporting, the latter of which is unable to be independently verified at this time.

Recommendations and Next Steps

16. The outcomes and recommendations from SC21¹² related to cetaceans are listed below for consideration, support, endorsement, and/or approval at WCPFC22:

Cetaceans: SC21 Outcomes and Recommendations (Reference: para. 9 to 11, 201 to 202, [SC21 Outcomes Document](#))^{9 to 11, 201 to 202, [SC21 Outcomes Document](#)}

- SC21 recommended revising section 1.5 in Annex 1 of the SciData guidelines as follows:
 - ‘Weight of fish caught per set’ to be replaced by ‘Weight of catch per set’
 - Add ‘Number of discarded/released individuals per set’ to capture interactions with cetaceans
- SC21 recommended revising the SciData guidelines in Annex 2 Table A2.2.4 to add footnotes to the text “and other species as determined by the Commission” in the SPECIES CODE reference text field and in the NOTES columns for the following field:
 - DISCARDED/RELEASED NUMBER field to align with the requirements for reporting catches of cetaceans under CMM 2024-07 (Table A2.2.4).
- SC21 encouraged CCMs to promote training for vessel operators and observers where data reporting gaps are identified to facilitate the complete and accurate reporting of cetacean interactions.
- SC21 supported the development of a Cetacean Identification Guide for the Pacific Ocean to support the implementation of CMM 2024-07. SC21 supported the TORs provided by the International Whaling Commission (IWC), which recognised non-budgetary implications for the WCPFC, and recommended this to be produced in collaboration with the SSP, WCPFC Secretariat, and other WCPO stakeholders.
- SC21 noted the research about cetacean bycatch in purse seine fisheries provided by [SC21-EB-IP-07](#). SC21 also encouraged CCMs to do further research about cetacean bycatch and, in particular, recommended the continuation of the following research (*para. 202, SC21 Outcomes Document*):

¹² TCC21 did not have any outcomes or recommendations related to cetaceans for consideration at WCPFC22.

- Extending population-level modelling to assess trends in rough-toothed dolphins and false killer whales using observer data from purse seine and longline fisheries across the Pacific.
- Developing a targeted research plan to investigate the causes of higher mortality rates in rough-toothed dolphins during purse seine operations.
- Considering the development of appropriate strategies to reduce mortality and improve mitigation of cetacean interactions in tuna fisheries.