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Wider Issues for Consideration Within the Harvest Strategy Workplan

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Executive Summary

This paper explores broader planning and scheduling considerations for development, adoption and implementation of key tuna stock harvest strategies and proposes high-level revisions to the harvest strategy schedule that would inform the Harvest Strategy Workplan. It also summarises the outcomes of SC21 discussions on this issue. The following points and assumptions are used as a foundation:

- **Three year cycle.** It is assumed that management procedures (MPs) will generally be run on a regular three-year cycle. It is highly desirable that stock assessments and running of MPs do not occur in the same year.
- **Aligning MPs with their Implementing CMMs.** Each MP requires the identification of an implementing mechanism for catch or effort control that gives effect to MP outcomes. It is assumed that the mechanism for the three tropical tunas will be the Tropical Tuna Measure (CMM 2023-01) while South Pacific Albacore will have its own implementing CMM. Given Commission workloads, it is desirable to align timing of the running of tropical tuna MPs to a three-year review cycle of the Tropical Tuna Measure.
- **Managing congestion (in 2026).** The Commission and its subsidiary bodies require adequate time during their scheduled sessions to properly consider harvest strategy matters. Delays over the years have resulted in a backlog of items now falling due over a relatively short period. It would be particularly desirable to reduce overall congestion in the year 2026.
- **Commission progress.** Finally, it is assumed that Commission decisions on the South Pacific albacore and bigeye MPs are made according to the revised schedule, and that the technical work and subsidiary body advice is available to allow those decisions to be taken.

A high-level revision of the harvest strategy schedule that seeks to address the above planning considerations is provided in Table 1. The major change seeks to bring the three tropical tuna stocks into alignment, so that MP outputs from these stocks can be incorporated into the Tropical Tuna Measure at the same time. To achieve this, it is proposed that the skipjack tuna MP, as a one-off, be extended to four years in its first cycle to synchronise with the anticipated first running of the bigeye tuna MP. Similarly, the Tropical Tuna Measure (CMM2023-01) review schedule would be shifted to synchronise with the running of skipjack and bigeye MPs – commencing in 2027 and then every 3 years thereafter. Any additional measures that may be required for yellowfin under the mixed fishery framework would also be implemented through this cycle.

The proposed high-level revisions to the harvest strategy schedule require Commission consideration and decision. Any changes would also need to be properly reflected in a revision to the Indicative Harvest Strategy Workplan.

In paragraphs 628 and 629 of its draft Summary report, SC21 noted that this is primarily a matter for Commission consideration, but that the proposal to extend the skipjack current MP application from 3 to 4 years required SC advice. SC21 refers the Commission to the results of the skipjack monitoring strategy report from SC21 and noted the following relevant considerations:

- The 2025 stock assessment indicates spawning potential depletion, and average fishing mortality rates have remained relatively stable since 2010 (SC21-SA-WP-02).

- That assessment indicates recent stock depletion is close to the recalibrated TRP and is within the range expected through the MSE testing of the adopted interim skipjack MP.
- Stochastic projections indicate relative stability of stock depletion in the future when recent (2024) conditions are assumed (SC21-SA-WP-02).
- The FAD closure period has been determined to have very little impact on the performance of the skipjack MP (SC21-MI-WP-02).

Based on these considerations, **SC21 recommended that the Commission support a one-time extension of the current skipjack MP application period from 3 to 4 years.** SC21 noted that such a change would need to be reflected in an amendment to CMM-2022-01.

WCPFC22 is invited to consider the overall proposed schedule and the proposed extension of the first MP application period to four years, considering the outcomes of SC21.

Introduction

The Indicative Harvest Strategy Workplan schedules technical work and decision making for the development of harvest strategies across the four key tuna stocks, as guided by CMM 2022-03. The workplan focuses on the following harvest strategy elements: Objectives, Reference Points, Acceptable Levels of Risk, Monitoring, Harvest Control Rules and Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE). It provides a timeline focussed on high level activities and decision making by the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, and it drives the technical work of the Scientific Services Provider required to facilitate those decisions. It is a living document and has been updated annually to reflect actual progress as well as other needs and developments. The most recent plan can be found within the WCPFC 21 Summary Report, Attachment 16.

The scheduling within the plan gives consideration to proper sequencing of decisions and technical work to develop harvest strategies, as well as the workload and capacity of the Commission, its subsidiary bodies and the Scientific Services Provider. This paper explores broader planning and scheduling considerations beyond the harvest strategy itself – in particular the need to consider the likely implementing mechanism for each of the key tuna Management Procedures. These, together with other considerations are used to propose a high-level revision of the harvest strategy schedule that can inform the Harvest Strategy Workplan.

Planning Considerations and Assumptions

Several decisions and assumptions have been made as the WCPFC harvest strategy process has developed. This section details some of the key elements that have implications for the harvest strategy timeline and which a revised workplan could aim to address.

Three year cycle. Following the adoption of a management procedure, it is here assumed that the management procedure (MP) will generally be run on a regular three-year cycle. This cycle can accord with the three-year cycle of stock assessments for the key tuna species. Under the harvest strategy approach, the stock assessment becomes a key part of the monitoring strategy. It is regarded as best practice to avoid conducting the stock assessment and running the MP in the same year.

Aligning MPs with their Implementing CMMs. The Commission's approach to date is for the MP to be captured within its own Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) while the mechanism of catch or effort control for implementing the MP outcome is contained in a separate CMM.

- Under the adopted skipjack tuna MP (CMM 2022-01), the Tropical Tuna Measure (CMM 2023-01) is specified as the implementing mechanism. To this end, the Tropical Tuna Measure is scheduled to be opened for review in the same year as the skipjack MP is run so it reflects the latest MP outcomes.
- In the case of bigeye tuna, and the purposes of this paper, it is assumed that the implementing mechanism for the future MP will also be the Tropical Tuna Measure.
- In the case of yellowfin tuna, under the mixed fishery framework it is envisioned that this stock will be managed indirectly through the combined effects of the other three tuna MPs. This

approach has not yet been formally tested through management strategy evaluation. For the purposes of this paper, it is assumed that any additional measures required for yellowfin would be implemented through the Tropical Tuna Measure.

There is a need to consider the timing of tropical tuna MPs (particularly skipjack and bigeye) within the Harvest Strategy Workplan to align their timing with planned reviews of the Tropical Tuna Measure. Given the workload of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies it is considered desirable that the Tropical Tuna Measure be subject to a single review every three-years to incorporate the outcomes of both the skipjack and bigeye MPs as well as any requirements for yellowfin.

- In the case of South Pacific albacore, the Commission has agreed to develop a new CMM to act as the implementing mechanism for the MP (see WCPFC21 Summary Report, Para 716).

The implementing CMM for South Pacific albacore would therefore also be reviewed every three-years to incorporate the outcomes of the MP.

Managing congestion (in 2026). The workplan should provide a schedule of harvest strategy work that sequences items appropriately and seeks to avoid excessive congestion in any one year. The SSP needs adequate time for the technical work on MP development and evaluation – this is alongside the other regular work of the SSP. The Commission and its subsidiary bodies also require adequate time during their scheduled sessions to properly consider harvest strategy issues alongside a broader set of agenda items.

The workplan has always reflected a sequence of MP development starting with skipjack and proceeding through South Pacific albacore and then bigeye/yellowfin. However various delays over the years have resulted in a backlog of items now falling due over a relatively short period. It would be desirable to reduce overall congestion in the year 2026 noting that the following substantial and inter-related items are currently scheduled:

- 2nd Skipjack MP run.
- Bigeye tuna MP adoption.
- Bigeye and yellowfin tuna stock assessments.
- Tropical Tuna Measure review (requiring substantial technical support work and potential dedicated TTM meetings).

This would be supplemented by any harvest strategy issues that are carried over from WCPFC22 in December.

Commission progress. The suggested modifications to the harvest strategy workplan are based upon the assumption that the technical work of the scientific services provider and the advice of the Commission's subsidiary bodies enable decision making by the Commission according to the updated schedule.

Draft Revised Workplan

A high-level revision of the harvest strategy schedule that seeks to address the above planning considerations is provided in Table 1. The table shows the cycles of stock assessments, the cycles of stock management procedures and the associated cycle of implementing arrangement revisions.

The major change seeks to bring the three tropical tuna stocks into alignment, so that MP outputs from these stocks can be incorporated into the Tropical Tuna Measure (identified as the mechanism of catch or effort control) at the same time. To achieve this, the skipjack tuna MP has, as a one-off, been extended to four years in its first cycle to synchronise with the anticipated first running of the bigeye tuna MP. Similarly, the Tropical Tuna Measure (CMM2023-01) review schedule has been shifted to synchronise with the running of the skipjack and bigeye MPs – commencing in 2027 and then every 3 years thereafter. Any additional measures that may be required for yellowfin would also be implemented through this cycle.

Revisions of the Tropical Tuna Measure are a very significant undertaking so aligning the tropical tuna cycles should help constrain the workload across the Commission, the subsidiary bodies and the scientific services provider to a tractable level.

For South Pacific albacore, the schedule reflects the Commission's decision to adopt an MP together with an implementing arrangement in 2025 (WCPFC21 Summary Report, Para 716). The schedule in Table 1 has the MP being both adopted and run for the first time in 2025, with the first year of implementation in 2026.

For all key tuna stocks, the proposed scheduling avoids conducting the stock assessment in the same year as running the MP.

Process

The proposed high-level revisions to the harvest strategy schedule requires Commission consideration and decision. Any changes would then need to be properly reflected in a revision to the Indicative Harvest Strategy Workplan.

Any changes to the skipjack MP schedule would require a minor revision to CMM 2022-01 (Conservation and Management Measure on a Management Procedure for WCPO Skipjack Tuna) to incorporate a one-off extension of the skipjack MP to four years in its first cycle. The agreed skipjack MP monitoring strategy and estimated stock status indicated by the 2025 assessment have an important role in determining if such an extension is appropriate and the objectives of CMM 2022-01 will continue to be met.

SC21 outcomes

SC21 noted the planning and scheduling considerations for the development, adoption, and implementation of harvest strategies for the key tuna stocks provided in SC21-MI-WP-10. SC21 noted that this is primarily a matter for the Commission's consideration, but that the proposal to extend the skipjack current MP application from 3 to 4 years was a matter that required SC advice. SC21 considered the risks of extending the skipjack current MP application period from 3 to 4 years, based on the performance of

the MP and achievement of its objectives. SC21 referred the Commission to the results of the skipjack monitoring strategy report from SC21 and also notes the following relevant considerations:

- The 2025 stock assessment indicates spawning potential depletion, and average fishing mortality rates have remained relatively stable since 2010 (SC21-SA-WP-02).
- The 2025 stock assessment indicates the recent stock depletion is close to the recalibrated TRP and is within the range expected through the MSE testing of the adopted interim skipjack MP.
- Stochastic projections indicate relative stability of stock depletion in the future when recent (2024) conditions are assumed (SC21-SA-WP-02).
- The FAD closure period has been determined to have very little impact on the performance of the skipjack MP (SC21-MI-WP-02).

Based on these considerations, SC21 recommended that the Commission support a one-time extension of the current skipjack MP application period from 3 to 4 years. SC21 noted that such a change would need to be reflected in an amendment to CMM-2022-01. SC21 recommended that SC21-MI-WP-10 be provided to WCPFC22.

SC21 also reconfirmed the importance of capacity building for the implementation of the harvest strategy.

Table 1: Proposed high-level revision of the harvest strategy schedule showing the cycles for the running of the MP, the stock assessment and implementing Measures review. Key changes are in red, with corresponding text element in the current planning struck through as appropriate. Cycles of management procedures are shown in alternating blue and green shading.

	Skipjack	Bigeye	Yellowfin	Tropical Tuna Measure (TTM)	SP Albacore	SPA Implementing CMM
2024					Stock Assessment	
2025	Stock Assessment	Adopt MP			Adopt MP + Run MP	Implementing measure planned adoption
2026	Run MP	Adopt MP Stock Assessment	Stock assessment	TTM Open for review taking account of the SKJ MP		
2027	Run MP	Run MP		TTM Open for review taking account of the SKJ and BET MP and any adjustments to YFT	Stock Assessment	
2028	Stock Assessment				Run MP	Review Implementing Measure
2029	Run MP	Stock Assessment	Stock assessment	TTM Open for review taking account of the SKJ MP		
2030	Run MP	Run MP		TTM Open for review taking account of the SKJ and BET MP and any adjustments to YFT	Stock Assessment	
2031	Etc.				Run MP	Review Implementing Measure
2032					etc.	

Recommendations

WCPFC22 is invited to consider the overall proposed schedule and the proposed extension of the first MP application period to four years, in light of the outcomes of SC21.

Acknowledgements

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References

CMM 2022-01 Conservation and Management Measure on a Management Procedure for WCPO Skipjack Tuna. <https://cmm.wcpfc.int/measure/cmm-2022-01>

CMM 2022-03 Conservation and Management Measure on Establishing a Harvest Strategy for key fisheries and stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. <https://cmm.wcpfc.int/measure/cmm-2022-03>

CMM 2023-01 Conservation and Management Measure for Bigeye, Yellowfin and Skipjack Tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. <https://cmm.wcpfc.int/measure/cmm-2023-01>

WCPFC21 Summary Report of the Twenty First Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. <https://meetings.wcpfc.int/node/25385>