



**COMMISSION**

**Twenty-Second Regular Session**

1-5 December 2025

Manila, Philippines (Hybrid)

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**FAO Common Oceans Tuna Project II - Updates**

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**WCPFC22-2025-OP08**

**13 November 2025**

**Submitted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)**



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

## COMMON OCEANS PROGRAM



PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND BIODIVERSITY  
IN THE OCEAN AREAS BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION

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# Tuna Project II - UPDATE

## WCPFC 22

## 1 - 5 December 2025

## Manila, Philippines

The Project “Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction” is a continuation of an earlier project (2014-2019) of the same name. The Project seeks to achieve responsible, efficient, and sustainable tuna production and biodiversity conservation in the face of a changing environment.

This is a GEF- funded project, implemented by FAO, with activities carried out by the partners of the project - including intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector.



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### WHAT WE DO

#### Improve tuna fisheries management

Ensure all major tuna stocks are fished at sustainable levels using harvest strategies.

Operationalize ecosystem approach to fisheries management in regional fisheries management organizations.

#### Improve compliance and tackle IUU fishing

Training in monitoring, control and surveillance for more efficient enforcement of regulations.

Improve compliance with fishing regulations by promoting innovative tools like electronic monitoring and traceability systems.

#### Improve environmental performance

Decrease bycatch with better monitoring and promoting best practices in bycatch mitigation and alternative gear.

Reduce impacts by advocating for ocean-friendly fishing devices

## IMPROVE TUNA FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

### Develop capacity to implement harvest strategies

Project partner, *The Ocean Foundation (TOF)*, supports capacity building for Management Strategy Evaluation and Management Procedures in tuna RFMOs, including by hosting quarterly webinars with simultaneous interpretation, and developing educational materials.

- ✓ More information and all materials can be found here [Harvest Strategies | 21st century fisheries management](#).
- ✓ **NEW** – [FAO e-learning course series titled "Management procedures for sustainable tuna fisheries"](#) – The learning tool introduces key concepts needed to understand and develop management procedures, also called harvest strategies. It aims to increase the capacity of fisheries stakeholders to actively engage in the process of management procedure development and implementation.



### Convene joint tuna RFMO workshops

Project partner, *International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) Secretariat*, together with FAO, organizes three joint tuna RFMO workshops on topics of global relevance for managers and scientists. The proposed themes include bycatch, management strategy evaluation (MSE), and stock assessment.

- ✓ The first workshop focused on bycatch and was held from 27-29 January 2025 at FAO headquarters in Rome. A workshop report will be available soon. Read web story here: [Reducing bycatch in tuna fisheries](#).
- ✓ The upcoming workshop will focus on MSE and will be held from 20-22 January 2026 at FAO headquarters.

### **Engaging Tuna Fisheries in MSC Program**

Project partner, the *Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)*, is promoting sustainable fisheries and strengthening the management of tuna stocks in the Western Central Pacific Ocean by engaging tuna fisheries in the MSC Pathways to Sustainability Program. This Program supports small-scale fisheries and fisheries in developing economies in improving their practices, particularly within the pre-certification space.

MSC has completed the mapping stage jointly with FFA and based on agreed criteria and according to the agreed selection process, Advisory Council members have selected tuna fisheries in Palau, Tonga, and Samoa for pre-assessment. Action plans were developed to address the identified gaps for each of the pre-assessed fisheries through in-person workshops which were held in Tonga in November and in Palau in December 2024. The action plan development workshop for Samoa's artisanal alia fleet and domestic longline fisheries is planned for the second half of 2025.

- ✓ Capacity-building workshops and outreach events on the MSC Certification Standard Level 1 were conducted in Tonga, Palau, Thailand, and Fiji in 2024.
- ✓ Two virtual training courses for the Asia-Pacific region focusing on understanding the MSC Certification Standard Level 2 were held in 2025.
- ✓ A study tour with fisheries leaders from across the Pacific Islands was organized for high-level discussions on the application of Electronic Monitoring (EM) fisheries management in Australia in August 2025.

### **Operationalize EAFM, including climate change, in tuna RFMOs**

Project partner, the *International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)*, in collaboration with FAO, supports the operationalization of an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) in tuna RFMOs. The emphasis is on how to formalize the implementation of EAFM, building on the outputs from workshops held in 2016 and 2019.

Three workshops are planned to bring together stakeholders from the tuna RFMOs, including managers and scientists, to discuss approaches to address the integration of ecosystem science and climate change impacts into decision-making processes. The outputs from these workshops will be disseminated broadly.

- ✓ The first EAFM workshop of the second phase of the Project was organized from 21–23 January 2025 at FAO headquarters in Rome. A workshop report will be available soon. Read web story here: [Developing a blueprint for ecosystem-based management in tuna fisheries.](#)
- ✓ The second Technical Workshop on Ecosystem Indicators for EAFM Implementation will be held in March 2026 in Nouméa, New Caledonia.

Project partners, *The Pacific Community (SPC)*, *Mercator Oceans International* and, *Conservation International* are extending the SEAPODYM model to simulate spatiotemporal dynamics of tuna populations under the influence of both fishing and environmental pressures in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The goal of this work is to project climate change impacts on tuna distribution and provide this information to decision-makers for appropriate action.

This work builds on work carried out by SPC in the Pacific Ocean to model the effects of climate change on tuna fisheries which showed dramatic shifts eastward in the distribution of tuna stocks in the Pacific, hence predicting changes in the availability of the resources for some Pacific Island countries.

## IMPROVE COMPLIANCE AND TACKLE IUU FISHING

### Develop human capacity for fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS)

Project partner, The *Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency* (FFA), will further develop an Advanced Diploma in Fisheries Management qualification program. This initiative involves a vocational education training program aimed at building the capacity of fisheries officers and staff from other related government agencies (e.g., Immigration, Customs, Ports) in skills critical to fisheries and ocean resource management. Additionally, FFA will design and deliver training modules focused on leadership and data analysis.

FFA will also develop, in close collaboration with ICCAT, a Certificate Fisheries Enforcement and Compliance program for MCS officers operating in the ICCAT convention area. A similar training programme was developed under the first phase of the Tuna Project and is a University of South Pacific accredited qualification delivered online and face-to-face. The course has been a success in educating new MCS Officers and promoting regional cooperation.

Project partner, the *International Monitoring Control and Surveillance Network (IMCS Network)*, continues to convene the Tuna Compliance Network (TCN), which brings together compliance officers from the five tuna RFMOs, to review monitoring processes for compliance in tuna RFMOs and to identify drivers of compliance rates and measures to improve compliance.

- ✓ A comparative review of compliance assessment in the Tuna RFMOs was developed to support contracting parties to better meet their obligations and improve the performance of RFMOs.
- ✓ The sixth Tuna Compliance Network meeting was held from 9-13 June 2025 in Tokyo, Japan.

### Support establishing electronic monitoring (EM) and traceability systems

As of December 2024, four tuna RFMOs (IATTC, IOTC, ICCAT, and WCFPC) have adopted minimum standards for Electronic Monitoring and are poised to remedy the longstanding problem of subpar observer coverage in some fleets.

Project partner, *International Seafood Sustainability Foundation* (ISSF), will convene two workshops involving relevant stakeholders from all tuna RFMOs to identify opportunities for EM standard technical harmonization (1st workshop) and implementation aspects (2nd workshop), to support the further development of regional standards for electronic monitoring systems to improve fisheries sustainability:

- ✓ The first workshop on EM minimum standards harmonization was held from 10–12 December 2024 in San Sebastian, Spain, with a second workshop planned for 2026. A workshop report will be available soon.

Project partner, *World Wildlife Fund* (WWF-US), published a Technical Source Document on the Governance of Electronic Monitoring (EM) Systems for Industrial Tuna Fisheries. The findings were presented to stakeholders as an EM toolkit with two resources:

- ✓ Implementing Electronic Monitoring Governance for RFMO managed fisheries
- ✓ The Governance of Electronic Monitoring Systems for Industrial Tuna Fisheries

### Enhance data interoperability between t-RFMOs

Work on ICCAT's Integrated Online Management System (IOMS) is advancing and enhancements are being made through the development of extensions for automatic data interoperability for the dissemination of information by t-RFMOs to the public.



## IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

### Quantify, mitigate and reduce bycatch

Project partner, the *International Seafood Sustainability Foundation* (ISSF) continues efforts in bycatch mitigation, including a) develop and promote biodegradable/non-entangling FADs; b) holding skippers' workshops to adopt best practices in bycatch mitigation; c) develop acoustic technology to support selective fishing and bycatch avoidance, and d) produced and disseminated policy paper, [ISSF 2024-04: Inputs for Comprehensive Bycatch Management Strategy Evaluation in Tuna Fisheries](#).

### Enhance sustainable management of sharks and rays

A Global Blue Shark Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) Workshop was held in Rome, Italy, from 14–16 October 2025, co-hosted by The Ocean Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, with support from the FAO Common Oceans Program, Oceankind, and the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation. The workshop convened 25 scientists from 10 countries, including leading blue shark experts from ICCAT, IOTC, IATTC, and WCPFC, to advance the development of science-based, precautionary harvest strategies for blue shark fisheries.

Key outcomes included a shared Management Procedure (MP) framework for the five global blue shark stocks, initiation of tRFMO coordination on blue sharks MSE model development, MPs testing, and performance metrics, and hands-on evaluation of prototype MSE simulations to assess candidate harvest strategies. The workshop established a pathway for the first MSE-tested MP for a shark species, providing a foundation for data-driven, harmonized, and adaptive management of blue shark populations across all major ocean basins.



### Seabird Project

Coordinated by the secretariat of the *Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna* (CCSBT), the 'Seabird Project' is providing enhanced education, outreach, and capacity building for the monitoring and implementation of seabird bycatch mitigation measures, as well as an update of the 2016 global seabird risk assessment.

At the Electronic Monitoring (EM) kickoff meeting in early 2024, CCSBT Members proposed an innovative approach to strengthening national compliance processes, specifically, Members recognized the exceptional value of learning



## Tuna project

from Australia's and New Zealand's experiences in implementing national EM systems. With support from the governments of Australia and New Zealand, which have mandated EM systems on southern bluefin vessels since 2014 and 2024, respectively, CCSBT is facilitating capacity development on the use of EM systems with a special emphasis on monitoring the use of seabird bycatch mitigation measures.

To further strengthen these efforts, CCSBT provided capacity building training for observers and compliance officers. The purpose is to provide advice to port inspectors and observers for recording accurate and useful information on seabird bycatch mitigation.

In collaboration with BirdLife International and the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF), CCSBT continues to drive education and outreach initiatives to reduce seabird bycatch and enhance industry engagement by convening 'Skipper Workshops'. These workshops - involving scientists, captains, and fishing crews - foster collaboration to implement minimum required standards and best practices for seabird bycatch mitigation. An infographic providing at-a-glance visual representations of technical, safety and practical aspects of seabird bycatch mitigation regulations and recommendations was produced for fishers.

The Spatially Explicit Fisheries Risk Assessment (SEFRA) model was achieved and agreed on by CCSBT Members. Development of the SEFRA Technical Report is now underway, and engagement with non-Member fleets is being initiated to ensure broad data representation and to strengthen comparison with the 2016 risk assessment.

- ✓ A data preparation meeting, for onboarding other participants into the SEFRA process took place in Sao Paolo, Brazil, August 2025 and a final report is expected in the first quarter of 2026.

The *International Whaling Commission* (IWC) is working in the Indian and Western Pacific Ocean basins to (i) assess cetacean bycatch and identify data gaps, (ii) build regional capacity and raise awareness on cetacean bycatch and available solutions, and (iii) collaboratively develop recommendations to address cetacean bycatch.

- ✓ A joint workshop organized by IWC, WWF, and the South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) on cetaceans of the Western Pacific is planned for 23–28 February 2026 in Nadi, Fiji. A review of cetacean bycatch mitigation methods involving a desktop assessment of available technical and spatial-temporal measures for longline, purse seine, and gillnet fisheries will be presented at the workshop.
- ✓ IWC is also collaborating with the WCPFC and the Pacific Community (SPC) to develop a Cetacean ID guide, a working paper on its layout and species list will be presented at WCPFC22 to receive feedback.

## GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming is "a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated".

The Tuna project and its partners are actively working to improve gender equality and support a balanced participation and equitable benefits across genders within the fisheries sector. This work is being led by the FAO Fisheries Gender Team and will follow a structured three-phase approach, including a stocktaking study to analyze gender roles and gender-based constraints, followed by development of a toolkit to support capacity development efforts, coupled with awareness-raising efforts.

The validation phase of the stocktaking study was completed in March 2025. The main output of this process is a draft work plan for the development of a gender toolkit and capacity-building activities.

# Successes from Common Oceans Tuna Project phase I

From 2014 until 2021, in collaboration with the five tuna RFMOs and partners, including intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector - the Common Oceans Tuna Project phase I supported:

- Enhanced international cooperation to improve the management and environmental performance of tuna fisheries.
- Better decision making in fisheries management and the adoption of harvest strategies for tuna stocks.
- Strengthening MCS systems and showcased the benefits of electronic monitoring and reporting systems.
- Reducing bycatch in tuna fisheries.

These achievements paved the way for future cooperation and knowledge sharing to ensure a positive and lasting impact on the world's tuna fisheries.

The Common Oceans Program is a global partnership funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), promoting sustainable fisheries and biodiversity conservation in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) with a particular focus on tuna and deep-sea fisheries, the Sargasso Sea and cross-sectoral cooperation. Led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Program brings together the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), regional fisheries management organizations, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, civil society and academia.

## COMMON OCEANS | Tuna project

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IN COLLABORATION WITH: Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), BirdLife International (BLI), Conservation International (CI), INFOPESCA, International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF/ISSA), International MCS Network (IMCSN), International Pole and Line Foundation (IPNLF), International Whaling Commission (IWC), Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), PEW Charitable Trusts, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Ocean Foundation (TOF), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).



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## FACTS & FIGURES

25 partners

5 Tuna RFMOs

\$15M  
Project budget

\$200M  
Project co-financing



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