

TECHNICAL AND COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE
TWENTY-SECOND REGULAR SESSION

23-29 September 2026

Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (Hybrid)

WCPFC and IATTC and the Overlap Area: Issues

WCPFC-TCC22-2026-05
11 August 2026

Submitted by the Secretariat

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to bring to the attention of TCC certain issues relating to the management of fisheries in the overlap area, which is within the mandates of both WCPFC and IATTC. Both Commissions recognise the need for closer coordination on conservation and management, including of South Pacific albacore. As a first step to enhanced collaboration, this paper recommends addressing measures to improve data sharing on fisheries operations in the overlap area; reaffirming the need for CCMs to notify the measures to be applied in the overlap area; and enhancing clarity and transparency with respect to reporting obligations.

Background

2. The Convention Areas of WCPFC and IATTC overlap in a rectangular area bounded by 50° S. latitude, 4° S. latitude, 150° W. longitude, and 130° W. longitude. Article 22 of the WCPF Convention and Article XXIV of the Antigua Convention provide for both organisations to cooperate in the overlap area to avoid the duplication of measures in respect of species in that area which are regulated by both organisations.
3. Between 2011 and 2012, consultations took place on the options for management of the overlap area. This culminated in a [joint paper](#) by the Executive Directors of both organisations presented to the respective Commission meetings. WCPFC9 agreed to accept the Recommendation of the 84th extraordinary meeting of the IATTC regarding the overlap area and [decided](#) the following on a “short term” basis:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Vessels listed exclusively in the WCPFC record of Fishing Vessels shall apply the conservation and management measures of the WCPFC when fishing in the overlap area;ii. Vessels listed exclusively in the IATTC register shall apply the conservation and management measures of the IATTC when fishing in the overlap area.iii. In the case of vessels listed in the record/register of both organizations, the corresponding flag Member shall decide and notify to both Commissions under which of the two Commissions those vessels shall operate when fishing in the overlap area, as regards the application, for a period of not less than three years, of the conservation and management measures of that Commission. |
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iv. In the case of vessels listed in the record/register of both organisations, the vessels of a Cooperating Non-Member shall apply the conservation and management measures of the Commission of which it is a member, when fishing in the overlap area.

4. WCPFC9 also recommended:

that the joint working group which was to be established should also give consideration to the following matters: how VMS data from the overlap area would be made available; how high seas boarding inspection procedures would be handled; the notification procedures and rules for those vessels which are able to choose between the two t-RFMOs; and how to handle when only one of the t-RFMOs has measures on a certain topic and whether there should be detail or minimum standard measures such as implementing joint requirements including for VMS, observers, catch report.

5. The two Commissions agreed at that time to initiate in parallel a longer-term process through the establishment of a joint working group to explore avenues for management of tuna stocks in the entire Pacific Ocean. More recently, both Commissions recognised the need for closer coordination on the conservation and management of South Pacific albacore and [discussions](#) took place during 2025 on the establishment of a South Pacific albacore Joint Working Group. The Joint Working Group held its first meeting in March 2026 ([SPAJWG01](#)).
6. There is considerable cooperation between WCPFC and IATTC, including under the auspices of cooperative Memoranda of Understanding, including data sharing arrangements, consistent with the respective data protection rules. This cooperation was summarised in [WCPFC20-2023-31](#) of 2 November 2023. WCPFC20 requested the WCPFC Secretariat to provide an annual update of collaboration between the two organisations. The Secretariat accordingly reported to [WCPFC21](#) and [WCPFC22](#) on such collaboration.
7. There are three sets of issues, which are relevant to TCC, that arise in relation to the overlap area: fisheries operations in the overlap area and related data issues; notification of measures to be applied; and compliance-related measures in the overlap area. These are examined in turn below.

Fisheries Operations in the Overlap Area and Data Issues

8. Information on fishing operations in the WCPFC-IATTC overlap area for 2015 was provided in an information paper [WCPFC13-2016-IP12](#) that was [reissued](#) for SPAJWG01. The Secretariat has prepared a paper for TCC22 on an Analysis of Trends in Fisheries in the Overlap Area (WCPFC-TCC22-2026-RP06_suppl01). One noticeable issue arising from the paper is that any data solely collected by or provided to the IATTC by its members was not included in the analysis. Therefore, it is difficult to present to WCPFC CCMs a complete picture of fisheries operations in the overlap area.
9. One noticeable trend in the available data provided in the paper is the increase since 2016 in transshipments that take place within the overlap area, reaching to nearly 25% in 2021 and stabilising at around 18–20% in 2022–2024. This data includes only the transshipment data arising from transshipment events submitted to the WCPFC Secretariat. It is therefore difficult to accurately estimate the exact number and extent of transshipments taking place in the overlap area. The data provided would exclude, for example, vessels and fish carriers that are registered only on the IATTC register of vessels.

10. This suggests that there is a pressing need to enhance the data sharing between WCPFC and IATTC on fishing activities in the overlap area, including transshipment. In particular, because CCMs may provide operational level data to both WCPFC and IATTC, there is a need to ensure that there is no double counting of catch and effort in the overlap area. This is particularly important for stock assessment purposes as well as for fisheries management purposes.

Notifications in the Overlap Area

11. Information on notifications by WCPFC CCMs of the application of measures in the overlap area, received by the Secretariat up to 18 March 2026, is contained in a [paper](#) submitted to SPAJWG01. The table below shows the latest notifications by the CCMs that have notified the WCPFC Secretariat of the application of measures in the overlap area.

CCM Notification to WCPFC Secretariat	Measures Applied	Date
European Union	IATTC	2013
Ecuador (WCPFC Cooperating Non-Member)	IATTC	2013
El Salvador (WCPFC Cooperating Non-Member)	IATTC	2013
Panama (WCPFC Cooperating Non-Member)	IATTC – in accordance with participatory rights	
United States of America	IATTC	2020
China	WCPFC and IATTC (catch attributed to WCPFC)	2022
Korea	WCPFC and IATTC (catch attributed to WCPFC)	2024
France (for French Polynesia)	WCPFC	2024

12. The above list of notifications to the WCPFC Secretariat is not identical to the notifications made to the IATTC Secretariat and available on the IATTC [website](#). The [Summary Report](#) for SPAJWG01 noted that the notification requirements, which are central to the operation of the current system, are not always applied consistently in practice. This results in gaps in understanding of how fishing activity in the overlap area is accounted for.
13. It appears that not all CCMs have notified the WCPFC Secretariat (or the IATTC Secretariat) of which measures its vessels will apply. There is a need, therefore, for all relevant Members, Participating Territories, and CNMs to provide notifications to the WCPFC Secretariat of the measures which it applies to its vessels fishing and undertaking fishing activities, in the overlap area.

Compliance Issues in the Overlap Area

14. The overlap poses particular difficulties for ensuring compliance with relevant CMMs in the overlap area. The notification of either WCPFC or IATTC measures that will be applied by a CCM does not absolve a CCM from complying with every measure of the RFMO to which it is a member or cooperating non-member. For example, it is important to emphasise that notifying a choice of measures to be applied in the overlap area does not affect the requirement on a RFMO Member or Cooperating Non-Member to provide operational level data, as required by the relevant rules of the RFMO.
15. Similarly, reporting obligations can include the need to complete, amongst others, the WCPFC Annual Report Part 1, to submit SciData, or a Fish/Did Not Fish status. These reporting requirements are contained in the relevant CMM, and apply equally to both CCMs that have selected to apply WCPFC measures and those that have selected IATTC measures.

16. There is also a potential difficulty where one RFMO has more comprehensive conservation and management measures than the other RFMO. This could lead to a CCM opting to apply the more relaxed conservation and management measures, thereby undermining the conservation and management measures of the other RFMO.
17. According to the [Summary Report](#) for SPAJWG01, the Joint Working Group emphasised the importance of improving the clarity, transparency, and consistency of reporting and attribution of catch in the overlap area. The SPAJWG recommended that issues related to the overlap area be prioritised for further work. The recommendations contained in this paper are a first step in seeking to standardise the reporting in the overlap area in order to assist in management from both a scientific and a compliance perspective.

Recommendations

18. It is recommended that TCC22:
 - a. **Note** the ongoing discussions in the SPAJWG, in particular on the need for improved data sharing in support of scientific and compliance outcomes, and **Request** the Commission to task the Secretariat with engaging with IATTC to enhance the sharing of transshipment data between WCPFC and IATTC;
 - b. **Note** the importance of all CCMs providing notifications to the WCPFC Secretariat of the measures which it applies to its vessels fishing and undertaking fishing activities, in the overlap area;
 - c. **Request** the Commission to task the Secretariat with compiling a list of reporting obligations applicable to CCMs which have opted to report to the IATTC, with a view to circulating these to all CCMs; and
 - d. **Note** the need to further encourage the development of harmonised CMM outcomes to minimise the potential for undermining the conservation and management measures adopted by either RFMO.