

OUTCOMES ON ISSUES OF INTEREST AT THE WESTERN AND CENTRAL PACIFIC FISHERIES COMMISSION FIFTEENTH REGULAR SESSION (WCPFC15)

This paper summarizes outcomes from the December 2018 WCPFC15 meeting that are likely to be of most interest to the Council. Issues are presented according to the agenda numbers in the WCPFC15 meeting agenda and in line with the issues discussed in [Agenda Item J.3, Supplemental Attachment 3, November 2018](#). This document references meetings of the following subsidiary bodies:

- Science Committee (SC)
- Northern Committee (NC)
- Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC)

Agenda Item 3 Membership and Other Applications

Applications for Cooperating Non-Member (CNM) status were received from Ecuador, El Salvador, Liberia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Thailand, and Vietnam. CNM status was granted to all these countries except for Mexico. In rejecting Mexico's application Members cited Mexico's refusal to accept high seas boarding and inspection (HSBI), although they have no vessels authorised to fish in the WCPO. Also, Mexico was in arrears in making their assessed financial contribution. The Commission also defined participatory rights for each country granted CNM status.

Ecuador insisted that the WCPFC should have a legal and transparent procedure for accession to full membership of the WCPFC. The United States reiterated its position that there should be a clear process for gaining membership while recognizing that some Members view the Commission as closed and new members can only be admitted by consensus. It offered to further discuss this issue intersessionally. The EU also agreed that countries should have the opportunity to become full members of the WCPFC. The small island developing state (SIDS) bloc generally opposes admitting new members.

Agenda Item 6.2.2 South Pacific Albacore Target Reference Point

Although MSY-based reference points indicate the stock is not subject to overfishing ($F_{\text{recent}}/F_{\text{MSY}} = 0.23$) nor overfished ($SB_{\text{latest}}/SB_{\text{MSY}} = 3.42$), fisheries in SIDs have become unprofitable due to low CPUE. Over the past decade or more China and Taiwan longline fleets have substantially increased participation in the fishery, contributing to CPUE declines.

WCPFC14 created an intersessional working group to develop a "roadmap for effective conservation and management of South Pacific albacore." The Chair of the SPA-VIWG introduced [WCPFC15-2018-SPalbroadmap](#): *Intersessional activity report from the South Pacific albacore roadmap virtual working group*, which included a draft workplan. WCPFC15 tasked the SPA-VIWG, Chaired by New Zealand, to continue work intersessionally to develop the Roadmap for Effective Conservation and Management of South Pacific Albacore.

The Commission considered [WCPFC15-2018-10_rev1](#): *Potential target reference points for south*

Pacific albacore (prepared by SPC). Fiji, on behalf of Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) members, introduced [WCPFC15-2018-DP10](#): *Proposal for establishing a target reference point for south Pacific albacore*. They proposed an interim target reference point of an increase in CPUE by 17% from 2013 levels. This would require a 33% reduction in catch from the 2013-15 average. China argued for a biomass-based reference point. After much negotiating in a small working group format, WCPFC15 agreed on an interim target reference point (TRP) for south Pacific albacore at 56 percent of spawning stock biomass in the absence of fishing (0.56 SBF=0) with the objective of achieving an 8 percent increase in catch per unit of effort (CPUE) for the southern longline fishery as compared to 2013 levels.

Agenda Item 6.3.1 Review of CMM 2017-01 (Bigeye, Skipjack, Yellowfin)

A number of the provisions in CMM 2017-01 are applicable for one year, or subject to review. These include interim management objectives for bigeye, skipjack, and yellowfin tuna;¹ various fish aggregating device (FAD) management measures; purse effort controls; and bigeye tuna longline catch limits. The Commission adopted [CMM 2018-01](#) to address these provisions.

The EU introduced [WCPFC15-2018-DP01](#): *Proposal for amending CMM 2017-01 for the use of non-entangling FADs in WCPFC fisheries* to address paragraph 22. Language consistent with the EU proposal was incorporated into paragraph 19 in two non-prescriptive bullets describing specifications. CMM 2018-01 calls on the Commission to revisit these provisions in 2020.

Paragraph 28 of CMM 2017-01 was discussed. It states, in part: “By 2019 the Commission shall agree on hard effort or catch limits in the high seas of the Convention Area and a framework for the allocation of those limits in the high seas amongst all Members and Participating Territories. The idea of conducting a workshop in early 2019 to address this provision was discussed. However, further discussion revealed divergent views on whether a workshop should focus on limits for stocks throughout their range or just on the high seas. Without agreement on the task, the idea of a workshop was shelved and a decision was deferred to 2020.

Expiring provisions in CMM 2017-01 are found in paragraphs 16 and 17 on FAD set management, paragraph 29, a provision to alleviate American Samoa economic hardship stemming from high seas purse seine effort controls, and paragraph 39, bigeye longline catch limits. FAD set management provisions and bigeye catch limits were the subject of intense negotiations throughout the meeting in a small working group format. Paragraphs 16 and 17 were extended for 2019 and 2020. Paragraph 29 was allowed to expire without objection from the United States. Bigeye catch limits (paragraphs 39-42, Attachment 1, Table 3) were rolled over without change.

Agenda Item 6.3.1.1 FAD Definition

The Commission considered two proposals, from the United States ([WCPFC15-2018-DP03](#)) and Korea ([WCPFC15-2018-DP17](#)). The existing FAD definition is found through cross reference to paragraphs 3 to 7 of CMM 2009-02, which further cross-references footnote 1 in CMM 2008-01. Taken together the definition is: “...any man-made device, or natural floating object, whether anchored or not, that is capable of aggregating fish” (footnote 1) interpreted by CMM 2009-02 as

¹ The interim target reference point for bigeye and yellowfin is the average SB/SB_{F=0} 2012-2015 and for skipjack 0.5SB_{F=0}.

“any object or group of objects, of any size, that has or has not been deployed, that is living or non-living, including but not limited to buoys, floats, netting, webbing, plastics, bamboo, logs and whale sharks floating on or near the surface of the water that fish may associate with.” No redefinition of a FAD was adopted but paragraph 18 was modified to qualify the existing FAD definition such that “any set where small amounts of plastic or small garbage that do not have a tracking buoy attached are detected shall not be considered to be a FAD set for the purposes of the FAD closure.” This provision is applicable to 2019 only.

Agenda Item 6.4 Pacific Bluefin Tuna

As previously discussed ([Agenda Item H.3.b, Supplemental NMFS Report 2](#), September 2018), the Northern Committee did not reach consensus on the Joint Working Group recommendations due to a reservation made by Japan on paragraphs 1-3 in the Joint Working Group report.

To address Japan’s reservation the NC reconvened on the margins of WCPFC 15 and endorsed WCPFC15-2018-DP25: *Proposal for amending Conservation and Management Measure for Pacific bluefin tuna (CMM 2017-08)*, which the Commission adopted as [CMM 2018-02](#).

Agenda Item 6.6.1 Designation of North Pacific Striped Marlin as a Northern Stock and Rebuilding Plan

The Commission reviewed information from SC14 as to whether the North Pacific striped marlin stock can be designated as a northern stock. The United States argued that the SC14 report provided sufficient information to designate it a northern stock under the purview of the NC based on the criterion that at least 50% of total stock biomass occurs north of 20°N. The EU, Canada, and Japan generally endorsed the United States position. However, the SIDS bloc argued there was insufficient information to make the determination. As a result, the Commission was unable to agree on the designation of North Pacific striped marlin as a northern stock.

The Commission acknowledged that North Pacific striped marlin is experiencing overfishing and is overfished while noting that the ISC work plan for 2018-19 includes completing a benchmark North Pacific striped marlin assessment, which will be presented to SC15. Members argued that adoption of a rebuilding plan be deferred until the results of the new assessment are available. In the absence of any action to date, the Commission strongly encouraged those CCMs whose fleets are catching North Pacific striped marlin to submit a draft rebuilding plan to WCPFC16 to provide for the update of CMM 2010-01, Conservation and Management Measure for North Pacific Striped Marlin.

Agenda Item 7 Harvest Strategy

In 2015, the Commission adopted the [Agreed Work Plan for the Adoption of Harvest Strategies under CMM 2014-06](#).

It was noted that harvest strategies for Pacific bluefin tuna and North Pacific albacore have been adopted by the Commission and work has started on a harvest strategy for North Pacific swordfish.

The Executive Director presented [WCPFC15-2018-21: Terms of reference for a science management dialogue](#). The objectives of the dialogue are to (i) enhance mutual understanding and

capacity building, (ii) facilitate the iterative process of harvest strategy decision-making by the Commission and its committees, and (iii) to refine candidate harvest strategy options and forward a reduced number of acceptable candidates to the Commission to increase effectiveness. Members expressed varied views on establishing the dialogue as a formal subsidiary body, the matters to be considered, and the timing of a meeting. With respect to timing, Members were divided on whether to hold the dialogue in conjunction with SC or hold a two-day session prior to the annual meeting. In the absence of a compromise on the question of timing, the Chair proposed the harvest strategy discussion be held during the Commission regular annual session and the Commission agreed to hold a 6-day annual meeting in 2019 with additional time devoted for the Commission to discuss harvest strategies.

The Commission adopted the Updated Workplan for the Adoption of Harvest Strategies under CMM 2014-06 (WCPFC15-2018-HS_SWGWorkPlan_01, to be provided as Attachment I to the final meeting report).²

Agenda Item 8 WCPO Shark Stocks and Bycatch Mitigation

The IWG-Sharks Chair reported on the development of a consolidated shark CMM, which would bring together elements in existing shark-related measures and potentially incorporate new requirements. During WCPFC15 a small working group was established to review and refine the draft measure. A key issue that stymied consensus was whether and how to implement a fins naturally attached requirement or comparably effective alternatives, to replace the current requirement of a 5 percent fins to carcass ratio, which is generally considered unenforceable. In the small working group Japan submitted a proposal to replace paragraph 7 of CMM 2010-07 to address full utilization of sharks, which was not agreed to. The Commission tasked TCC15 with considering the outputs of the shark intersessional working group and encouraged interested Members to submit proposals to TCC15.

Like North Pacific striped marlin, designation of North Pacific blue shark as a northern stock was considered. The United States stated that data provided by SC14 did not allow making a determination that the stock is mostly located north of 20°N and it could not support designation as a northern stock at this time.

The Commission adopted the Best Practice Guidelines for Safe Release of Sharks (to be provided as Attachment J to the final meeting report and presented in Attachment G to the [SC14 Outcomes Document](#)).

Agenda Item 8.4 Review of CMM 2017-06 on Seabirds

SC14 and TCC14 recommended changing the southern area of application of CMM 2017-06 from south of 30° S to south of 25° S to reduce bycatch risks to the Antipodean wandering albatross and other seabirds. Both committees also recommended a revision of CMM 2017-06 to add the use of hook shielding devices, specifically hookpods, as an optional stand-alone seabird bycatch mitigation measure. New Zealand introduced a proposal, which was progressed in a small working group as WCPFC15-2018-DP16_rev2. The Commission adopted the revised proposal as [CMM](#)

² At the time of compilation of the advanced briefing book a draft meeting report was available on the Commission website for members to review. The [pdf version of the draft meeting report](#) includes the referenced attachments.

[2018-03](#), Conservation and Management Measure to Mitigate the Impact of Fishing for Highly Migratory Fish Stocks on Seabirds. Under this measure vessels fishing in the region from 25°S to 30°S must use weighted branch lines, tori lines, or hook-shielding devices. These measures for the area from 30°S to 25°S will not come into effect until 2020.

Agenda Item 8.5 Review of CMM 2008-03 on Sea Turtles

TCC14 recommended consideration of revisions to the Regional Observer Program (ROP) minimum standard data fields, based on a discussion paper submitted by the United States ([TCC14-2018-DP04_rev1](#)). These changes would improve data on fishery interactions with sea turtles.

The United States introduced WCPFC15-2018-DP06: *Revisions to CMM 2008-03 Conservation and Management Measure of sea turtles* and [WCPFC15-2018-DP07: Amendments to the WCPFC Regional Observer Programme minimum standard data fields](#), both of which seek to increase sea turtle protections. The main purpose of DP06 was to remove ambiguity about what vessels are subject to mitigation measures, among other clarifications and emendations. DP06 was progressed through several revisions ([see rev3](#)) and adopted by the Commission as [CMM 2018-04](#), Conservation and Management Measure for Conservation and Management of Sea Turtles.

Regarding WCPFC15-2018-DP07, the United States noted that work to modify the ROP minimum data standards was ongoing, and stated that it would work further on the issue.

Agenda Item 10 Compliance Monitoring Scheme

TCC14 conducted its eighth annual compliance monitoring review and submitted its provisional Compliance Monitoring Report for further review at the Commission meeting. The Commission adopted the 2018 Final Compliance Monitoring Report (covering 2017 activities) ([WCPFC15-2018-finalCMR](#)).

The Commission adopted [CMM 2018-07](#) Conservation and Management Measure for Compliance Monitoring Scheme to replace the expiring measure adopted in 2017. The measure is again applicable for one year only, 2019. It also lays out a multi-year workplan of tasks to enhance the CMS, with the aim of making it more efficient and effective by streamlining processes. The measure is to be “enhanced” in 2019 by addressing the relevant elements of the workplan.

Agenda Item 11 Adoption of the 2019 Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Vessel List

The Commission adopted the 2019 WCPFC IUU Vessel List, to be provided as Attachment W to the final meeting report. WCPFC15 agreed to maintain the WCPFC IUU list for 2018 as the WCPFC IUU list for 2019. Three vessels are on this list.

Other Issues

The Commission adopted two other conservation and management measures:

1. TCC14 recommended amendments to CMM 2007-01 as [CMM 2018-05](#), Conservation and

Management Measure for the Regional Observer Programme, which adds a new paragraph (as paragraph 11) to facilitate the flow of observer information in support of investigations.

2. The Commission agreed to amend CMM 2017-05 to expand the requirements for IMO numbers, and adopted [CMM 2018-06](#) Conservation and Management Measure for WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels and Authorisation to Fish, based on DP05 submitted by the United States.

The Commission adopted the following schedule for meetings in 2019:

1. SC15: August 7-15 in Pohnpei, FSM;³
2. NC15: September 2-6 in Portland, Oregon, USA;
3. TCC15: September 25-October 1 in Pohnpei, FSM;
4. WCPFC16: December 5-11 in Port Moresby, PNG.

³ In February 8, 2019, the WCPFC Chair notified that these dates were unworkable because the facility was not available and proposed August 12-20 as an alternative.