

WESTERN AND CENTRAL PACIFIC FISHERIES COMMISSION (WCPFC) MEETING, DECEMBER 5-11, 2019

Tuna Conservation

What are the issues?

Effective management measures — consistent with advice from the WCPFC Scientific Committee — are needed to maintain bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack tuna fishing mortality and biomass at sustainable levels.

Why are we concerned?

While all target tuna stocks except bluefin remain classified as healthy, WCPO CMMs must articulate how and when prescribed management measures apply. WCPFC measures should apply to all sources of mortality and be enforceable.

The 2019 skipjack stock assessment indicates that, although the stock remains healthy, spawning biomass is at a historical low while fishing mortality on both adults and juveniles continues to increase. SC15 noted that the spawning biomass trajectory shows a long-term decline with the stock below the interim Target Reference Point (TRP) for the last decade. SC15 highlighted the need for management to ensure that the stock fluctuates around the TRP.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

Adopt a harvest control rule for skipjack that will ensure that the stock fluctuates around the Target Reference Point.

Our Top Asks for WCPFC in 2019:

- 1** Adopt a harvest control rule for skipjack that will ensure that the stock fluctuates around the Target Reference Point.
- 2** Require 100% observer coverage for longline vessels, and all vessels engaged in at-sea transshipment, within five years.
- 3** Adopt science-based measures for FAD limits, FAD marking and tracking and a timeframe for fully non-entangling FADs and biodegradable materials.
- 4** Complete the review of the transshipment CMM and adopt amendments to address significant gaps in its effectiveness.
- 5** Require sharks be landed with fins attached, prohibit intentional setting on mobulid rays, and adopt a rebuilding plan for oceanic whitetip sharks.
- 6** Adopt audit points and accelerate reforms to the CMS, including to provide for observer participation.

Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs)

What are the issues?

In the WCPFC, FAD sets account for about 30% of tropical tuna catches. Comprehensive fleet data on FAD deployments and usage are required to effectively manage the tropical tuna purse seine fishery. Currently deployed FADs should be lower-entangling and be moving towards fully non-entangling using biodegradable materials to mitigate ecosystem impacts.

Why are we concerned?

Tracking data analyses from FAD buoys is valuable for estimating active FADs and determining FAD fates. Recent studies estimate that over 30,000 FADs are deployed each year in the WCPO, of which about half drift out of main fishing areas and 6% end up beached in PNA waters¹. Given the high risk of FAD ecosystem impacts, including beaching, marine debris, and cryptic shark and turtle mortality, it is essential to collect and report FAD data — including the number of FADs being deployed and FAD position data and trajectories — to develop science-based management measures. Effective FAD marking mechanisms also are critical.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

WCPFC needs to develop a comprehensive FAD management program that achieves the following:

- (1) Add a new “FAD Information” section and FAD identification field in the ROP Minimum Standard Data Fields for inventories of FAD buoys on board at the start and end of each trip and adopt requirements for improved reporting on FADs by vessel operators such as those developed by the PNA.
- (2) Set a timeframe to transition to FADs without nets and with biodegradable materials.
- (3) Require fleets to remove previously deployed highly entangling FADs from the water.
- (4) Design FAD-recovery mechanisms and incentives, such as increasing purse seiners’ FAD retrieval and storing capacity, and removing a percentage of FADs from the water relative to the number deployed.
- (5) Adopt science-based limits on FAD deployments and/or FAD sets.
- (6) Require complete FAD position data and acoustic records from echosounder buoys.
- (7) Adopt supply-and-tender vessel measures, including identifying purse seine vessels supported, data collection on FADs being deployed and serviced, identifying on the Record of Fishing Vessels which activities they are engaged in, and applying observer requirements.
- (8) Develop a FAD marking scheme based on the FAO Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear for all new FAD deployments, regardless of vessel type.

Harvest Strategies

What are the issues?

Harvest Strategies — which include target and limit reference points together with harvest control rules — provide pre-agreed rules for managing fisheries resources and acting on stock status changes.

• ¹ WCPFC SC15 2019/MI-WP-12; Escalle et al, Nature, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-50364-0>

Why are we concerned?

The timeframes in the original agreed Harvest Strategy Work Plan have lapsed. WCPFC needs to urgently develop species-specific harvest strategies. The 2019 assessment of skipjack indicates that biomass has been below the target level (TRP) for a decade and this needs to be addressed by management through a Harvest Control Rule. The Scientific Committee has reiterated the need for a dedicated Science-Management Dialogue process to support harvest strategy development. Also, all MSC-certified WCPFC fisheries must meet the Commission's harvest strategy development timeframes in the amended Harvest Strategy Work Plan in 2017 or risk losing their certification.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

- (1) Develop harvest control rules for south Pacific albacore and skipjack, and agree on a target reference point for yellowfin and bigeye tunas, as in the Harvest Strategy Work Plan.
- (2) Establish a Science-Management Dialogue by adopting the Terms of Reference proposed by the Scientific Committee.

Bycatch and Sharks

What are the issues?

Strong management measures and bycatch-mitigation actions are necessary to maximize vulnerable species' post-release survival in both purse seine and longline fisheries. Science-based conservation and management measures to limit fishing mortality on sharks and rays and data collection and reporting requirements are also essential.

Why are we concerned?

The WCPFC has not adopted rigorous management arrangements for shark fisheries or mobulid rays and the CMMs for minimizing shark bycatch do not reflect scientific advice or best practices. SC15 concluded that the oceanic whitetip shark stock was overfished and subject to overfishing, with the greatest impact from bycatch in longline fisheries. Clearly, the retention prohibition in CMM 2011-04 has been insufficient to end overfishing of this vulnerable stock. Proven bycatch mitigation methods, such as removing wire traces, are not mandatory in all longline fisheries. SC15 also noted that "an evaluation of the 5% [fins to carcass] ratio is not currently possible due to insufficient or inconclusive information" and "there is still no mechanism for generating the data necessary to review the ratio."

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

- (1) Adopt a comprehensive CMM for sharks which includes:
 - (i) Mandatory use of scientifically proven shark mitigation measures by longline fishing vessels, together with high observer coverage needed to assess compliance. For oceanic whitetip sharks, explore additional ways to reduce catches (e.g., via closed hot spots);
 - (ii) Requiring sharks be landed with fins still naturally attached;
 - (iii) Requiring that sharks to which no-retention prohibitions apply, and unwanted sharks, be hauled alongside the vessel before being cut free to facilitate species identification;
 - (iv) A prohibition on the intentional setting on, and retention of, mobulid rays.
- (2) Amend and expand CMM 2018-03 on seabirds to apply to all longline fisheries south of 25° South.
- (3) Develop harvest strategies and recovery plans for all overfished shark species.

Monitoring, Control and Surveillance

OBSERVER COVERAGE AND ELECTRONIC MONITORING

What are the issues?

Comprehensive observer coverage is critical to effective fisheries management, compliance monitoring, and independent verification of catch, effort and species interactions (e.g., sharks, sea turtles and whale sharks).

Why are we concerned?

Many CCMs do not meet the minimum 5% observer coverage requirement for longline vessels adopted in 2007 — 12 years ago. The paucity of longline fishery data hinders both scientific assessment and management recommendations. Although there is a 100% observer coverage requirement for purse seine vessels between 20N and 20S, information presented at SC15 revealed the actual coverage is about 85%.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

- (1) Require 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic) for longline vessels, and all vessels engaged in at-sea transshipment, within five years.
- (2) Adopt best practice e-monitoring and e-reporting standards, including for logbooks for longline and purse seine vessels.
- (3) Identify and sanction non-compliance with the existing minimum 5% longline vessel and 100% purse seine vessel observer coverage requirements.

TRANSSHIPMENT

What are the issues?

If not rigorously and transparently managed, transshipment at-sea can become a conduit for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fish to enter the supply chain.

Why are we concerned?

Reports presented at TCC15 show the number of reported high seas transshipment events has increased by 155% between 2014 and 2018. This includes an increase of 29% between 2017 and 2018. The Secretariat also reported that CCMs are not meeting their reporting obligations. WCPFC must address the deficiencies and loopholes in CMM 2009-06 to ensure complete data collection and timely reporting and to combat IUU fishing. ISSF analyzed the transshipment management arrangements in multiple RFMOs and recommends best practice amendments to the WCPFC CMM.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

- (1) Ensure the review of the effectiveness of CMM 2009-06 is completed and amendments to the transshipment presented to the Commission in 2020.
- (2) Adopt best practice amendments to CMM 2009-06 to:
 - (i) Require real time, or as close to near real-time, reporting for all transshipment activity;
 - (ii) Require CCMs to report on at-sea transshipment conducted inside EEZs;
 - (iii) Extend the transshipment management arrangements to bunkering vessels;
 - (iv) Automatically include in the draft IUU vessel list any vessels that breach the transshipment CMM;
 - (v) Adopt clear criteria for flag State authorization of at-sea transshipment and a process for the Commission to review issued authorizations against those criteria.

What are the issues?

A strong compliance process improves fisheries management by holding members accountable for their implementation of agreed measures. The WCPFC has a work plan for strengthening the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS), including the development of audit points, a risk-based framework and a scheme of responses to non-compliance.

Why are we concerned?

CCMs assessing their own compliance behind closed doors with little to no transparency is not consistent with best practice. The WCPFC is the only tuna RFMO that has a compliance assessment process that is closed to accredited observers. The WCPFC needs to accelerate the completion of the outstanding items in the work plan in CMM 2018-07, including enabling accredited observers to participate in the CMS process and developing of a scheme of responses to non-compliance. ISSF analysed the compliance assessment processes in multiple RFMOs and recommends best practices for the continued refinement of WCPFC CMS.

What is ISSF asking WCPFC to do?

- (1) Adopt the audit points for the initially identified obligations in 2019 and finalize audit points for the remaining obligations in 2020.
- (2) Progress, as a matter of urgency, the remaining items identified in the CMM 2018-07 work plan through the Intersessional CMS Working Group, including allowing accredited observers to attend CMS working group meetings.
- (3) Disclose CCM's plans to address identified areas of non-compliance;
- (4) Make public all non-sensitive elements of the Part II Report to ensure transparency of how CCMs' are implementing their obligations.

Did you know?

ISSF is collaborating on biodegradable FAD research in collaboration with fleets, coastal nations, and other stakeholders.

ISSF resources for vessels include skippers guidebooks on bycatch-mitigation techniques and as well as reports on electronic monitoring and vessel monitoring systems.

ISSF Global Priorities for Tuna RFMOs

Implementation of rigorous harvest strategies, including harvest control rules and reference points.

Effective fleet capacity management, including developing mechanisms that support developing coastal state fishery engagement.

Science-based FAD management & non-entangling FAD designs.

Increased member compliance with all adopted measures, and greater transparency of processes reviewing member compliance with measures.

Strengthened Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) measures and increased observer coverage, including through modern technologies such as electronic monitoring and e-reporting.

Adoption of best-practice bycatch mitigation and shark conservation and management measures.



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