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Greenpeace priorities at the 14th Regular Session

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Fifty six percent of the world tuna catch is taken in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). Fisheries under the purview of the WCPFC are of immense social and economic importance and its parties must make sure that agreed conservation and management measures maintain all exploited and associated fish populations at abundant levels.

While current stock assessments indicate a varying degree of probabilities that the main tuna species exploited by this Commission are not currently overfished or suffering overfishing, there are strong reasons to be cautious, including important uncertainties in the stock assessments, or lack of clarity about whether recent improvements on some stocks have been due to environmental conditions, management measures or other factors.¹

Of concern is that bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks have been declining for about 60 and 50 years respectively;² South Pacific albacore may continue to decline under current conditions; the poor status of Pacific bluefin tuna population represents a major failure for this Commission; several shark species are threatened and for most shark populations the Commission continues to fail to gather the information needed to ensure their conservation. The dominant industrial fishing gears continue to gain space while smaller-scale operations continue to decline.³

Below we outline a non-exhaustive list of priority measures that Greenpeace believes can bring about progress to management of WCPO tuna fisheries if adopted at this 14th Session. They refer to **(1) data collection; (2) management of fishing capacity (including FADs); (3) conservation of fish stocks; (4) Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS), including transshipments; and (5) Harvest control rules, and target and limit reference points.**

1. Data collection

Timely collection of comprehensive data across WCPO tuna fisheries underpins the work of the Commission. Data must be statistically significant for assessing the range of issues and impacts relevant to these fisheries. Independent observers on-board fishing vessels collect vital data for science and compliance, but their safety continues to be a concern. Progress must be made on electronic monitoring, but needs to be tested and seen as a way to increase observer coverage, not to meet minimum thresholds. This 14th Session of the WCPFC must agree on measures that:

- strengthen mandatory reporting requirements to ensure that all **data needed to manage fishing capacity and effort** are effectively collected for all tuna, billfish and shark fisheries, so as to allow for the best performance of the Scientific Committee and a sound basis for Conservation and Management Measures;

¹ See paragraph 51 of the Report from the 13th Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee. Available at <https://www.wcpfc.int/meetings/sc13>.

² See paragraphs 52 and 72 of the Report from the 13th Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee.

³ The 2016 pole and line catch (199,457 mt) was the lowest annual catch since the late-1960s. The 2016 South Pacific troll albacore catch (2,097 mt) was the lowest catch since 2009. See paragraphs 13 and 22 of the Report from the 13th Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee.

- require a **clearly-defined, representative, 20% observer coverage on longline fleets**. Where human on-board observers are not feasible for certain fleets or vessel sizes other alternatives, such as electronic monitoring systems, must be assessed and put in place subject to minimum technical requirements that ensure the reliability of the system;
- ensure the **health and safety of all observers**⁴ by developing robust safety and security measures, and transparent reporting mechanisms for infractions and actions taken against any operators or crew members that harassment, intimidation, harm or in any way prevent observers from performing their duties;
- ensure that **failure to comply with data provision obligations has deterrent consequences** (in the form of sanctions, penalties or loss of access to fisheries).

2. Management of fishing capacity, including FADs

The ever-increasing level of fishing capacity and effort in the region⁵ represents a fundamental failure to meet the obligation under the Convention to “*take measures to prevent or eliminate overfishing and excess fishing capacity.*” Recent analysis on the purse seine sector demonstrates that overcapacity is substantial.⁶ dFAD numbers and improved dFADs technology play a key role in that regard. Despite years of increased proliferation, it is very concerning that basic numbers about FADs use remain unknown. This 14th Session of the WCPFC must agree on measures that:

- make it mandatory for any vessel using dFADs to **provide access to the raw data from the dFAD buoys by the WCPFC Scientific Committee**, including historical information, subject to adequate confidentiality requirements, but ensuring transparency and sharing of information at the appropriate level;
- **prohibit the use of supply and tender vessels**, taking into account their role in increasing dFAD efficiency and that dFAD effort in the fishery is already too high;
- address the impacts of dFADs by agreeing, together with the FAD ban season adopted through the bridging tropical tuna measures, on a significant and **precautionary reduction in the number of dFADs buoys and sets allowed**. These FAD management options should be such that they ensure with high probability that bigeye tuna mortality does not increase from current levels;
- make the use of **biodegradable and non-entangling FAD designs mandatory**, with clear definitions based on data available to the scientific committee;
- ensure an **assessment of the capacity of longline fisheries** is conducted within the shortest time possible, including assessing the role of transshipments in increasing effective capacity and effort, and adopt measures to eliminate overcapacity where it exists.

3. Conservation of target and non-target fish stocks

While current stock assessments indicate a varying degree of probabilities that the main tuna and billfish species exploited by this Commission are not currently overfished or suffering overfishing, there are strong reasons to be cautious, including important uncertainties in the stock

⁴ In 2016 there were 20 reports of intimidation, harassment or interference of observers. See paragraph 146 of the Report of the 13th Regular Session of the WCPFC Technical and Compliance Committee.

⁵ The majority of candidate effort creep indicators have increased over the recent period when examined both within and outside PNA EEZs. The number of sets made per day has gradually increased over time, reflecting an increase in effective effort within fishing day limits. See: Pilling G, Tidd A, the PNA Office, Norris W, Hampton J (2016). Updating indicators of effort creep in the WCPO purse seine fishery. WCPFC-SC13-2017/MI-WP-04.

⁶ Tidd A, Pilling G (2016). Preliminary capacity utilization of the WCPO purse seine fleet using Data Envelopment Analysis. WCPFC-SC12-2016/MI-IP-03.

assessments. The aspirations of the Commission must go beyond “*not increasing fishing mortality from current levels*” to rebuilding populations to abundant levels.

Urgent action is required on fisheries targeting the highly depleted Pacific bluefin tuna and North Pacific striped marlin, as well as to ensure the recovery of shark populations. While north Pacific blue sharks appear to have recovered from a period of overfishing, oceanic whitetip sharks and silky sharks populations have been devastated by both longliners and purse seiners. We do not have enough data to adequately assess other shark species, but a new approach for assessing fishery impacts on data poor shark species has highlighted that current fishing pressure on bigeye thresher is unsustainable.⁷ Despite these issues, WCPFC parties continue to resist developing even the most basic Shark Management Plans. This 14th Session of the WCPFC must agree on measures that:

- result in a **precautionary decrease of fishing mortality on bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks**, particularly **juveniles**;
- adopt the rebuilding plan for **Pacific bluefin** recommended by the Northern Committee (NC) as a minimum action and call on the NC to continue to review it and increase its ambition. Given the status of the stock it should be a priority that any **catches in excess of the quotas** be paid back by those States responsible;
- continue work to develop a **comprehensive shark CMM** so as to ensure that all targeted shark fisheries are subject to management plans that limit mortality to sustainable levels, including measures to improve the quality and quantity of data recorded and reported for all sharks caught, details of the gear types used and the condition of each animal on release (dead, injured, alive) and a requirement that all sharks are landed with their fins naturally attached;
- prohibit **retention of thresher sharks, and manta and mobula rays**;
- banning **both wire leaders and shark lines** in fisheries that are not declared as targeted shark fisheries to reduce the mortality of prohibited species;
- ensure that any **failure to provide data on sharks** results in a prohibition to retain shark catches.

4. Monitoring, control and surveillance, including transshipments

The current measure requiring a 5% observer level for longline fleets has been in force for a decade, so it is about time that the failure by many fleets to meet this threshold results in consequences. There should be strict deterrent consequences for the lack of compliance by Members and Cooperating Non-Members and their vessels to ensure management objectives are met.

Transshipments at sea continue to provide an easy access point for illegal fishing vessels to unload their illegal catches into the supply chain, away from coast guards and port authorities. This can make it impossible to track a shipment of fish back to the vessel that caught it and to detect fraud. In the worst situations, transshipment enables slavery at sea as crews can be kept at sea for months or even years at a time without getting back to a port, making it difficult – if not impossible – to report on, or to escape from, physical abuse, poor working conditions, violence and even murder on board fishing vessels.

Finally, NGOs have consistently pointed out to the lack of transparency in the work of the WCPFC Technical and Compliance Committee, which is counterproductive to the objectives of the Commission and fails to acknowledge the contribution that civil society has made on this matter over the years. This 14th Session of the WCPFC must agree on measures that:

⁷ See paragraphs 388-413 of the Report from the 13th Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee.

- **Phase out all transshipment at sea.** In the interim, all transshipment must have observers on board both the fishing and carrier vessels and provisions on real-time reporting must be put in place. Any violation detected in transshipment must result in the loss of transshipment authorization;
- require a clearly-defined, representative, **20% observer coverage on longline fleets**;
- adopt **Port State Measures** provisions equivalent to those of the 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) and invite all WCPFC parties to ratify and implement the FAO PSMA;
- impose **penalties for cases of non-compliance** to ensure that States comply with all their data reporting requirements, such as the *No Data, No Fishing* measures agreed at other tuna commissions;
- improve **transparency** and facilitate compliance work by removing barriers to NGO and IGO observer access to the compliance monitoring processes and relevant meetings.

5. Implementation of applicable international law: target and limit reference points

Greenpeace would like to recall that the adoption of stock specific target and limit reference points and management strategies, is a requirement under international law, namely under article 6 of the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement, which has been in force now for over 15 years. This 14th Session of the WCPFC must agree on measures that:

- ensure that work on establishing further target and limit reference points and harvest strategies for all tuna and shark stocks in the WCPO continues **and is well resourced and funded, consistent with proposed timelines**;
- ensure finalization of a harvest control rule in the skipjack purse seine fishery and the urgent implementation of interim precautionary target reference points for North and South Pacific albacore, bigeye and yellowfin tunas.

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