



TECHNICAL AND COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE

Fifteenth Regular Session

25 September – 1 October 2019

Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia

**INFORMATION PAPER FOR A DRAFT CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT
MEASURE ON MOBULID RAYS CAUGHT IN ASSOCIATION WITH FISHERIES IN THE
WCPFC CONVENTION AREA**

WCPFC-TCC15-2019-DP05_rev1¹

19 September 2019

Paper submitted by Australia

Explanatory note

This paper presents a working draft of a CMM on mobulid rays, which is for information and discussion during TCC15. It is anticipated the paper will be developed into a full proposal, taking into account any feedback received, for the consideration of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission at its 2019 annual meeting.

Mobulid rays (species of the family Mobulidae, which includes manta rays and mobulid rays) are found in both coastal and offshore waters around the world. However, they have one of the most conservative lifecycles among elasmobranchs and can be rapidly depleted by even low levels of fishing mortality. Mobulids are globally threatened through both high levels of bycatch and targeted exploitation and they are currently at risk of extinction. This, coupled with a deficiency in data about catches, warrants a precautionary approach to management.

This paper presents a proposed CMM to achieve this, which focuses on prohibiting the targeting and retention of mobulid rays, and on improving the availability and quality of data about mobulid rays. Similar measures have been adopted by both the IATTC and the IOTC and the paper also reflects the listing of mobulid species under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Australia welcomes the views of all WCPFC members, including any Small Island Developing States and Territories in respect of matters raised under CMM 2013-06.

¹ Rev 1 includes an explanatory note

**CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURE ON MOBULID RAYS
CAUGHT IN ASSOCIATION WITH FISHERIES IN THE WCPFC CONVENTION
AREA**

Conservation and Management Measure 2019-XX

The Commission for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (the Commission),

In accordance with the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (the Convention):

Considering that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) International Plan of Action for Sharks calls on States to cooperate through regional fisheries management organizations to ensure the sustainability of shark stocks;

Recognizing the ecological and cultural significance of sharks and rays in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO);

Noting that manta and mobula rays are listed in Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals and that the parties to that Convention have a range of obligations related to the conservation of such species;;

Further noting that manta and mobula rays are also listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora for which trade shall be closely controlled under specific conditions including, inter alia, that trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild;

Acknowledging the 13th Regular Session of the Commission designated six species of manta and mobula rays as key shark species for assessment and called for the development of safe release guidelines for manta and mobula rays;

Further acknowledging the 14th Regular Session of the Commission adopted non-binding guidelines of best handling practices for the safe release of manta and mobulids for both purse seine and longline fisheries;

Noting that the 13th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee confirmed that as species of special interest, manta and mobula rays will have all required data collected under the Regional Observer Programme Minimum Standard Data Fields;

Concerned that the species of the family Mobulidae, which includes manta rays and mobula rays, are considered extremely vulnerable to overfishing as they are slow-growing, experience late sexual maturity, have long gestation periods, and often give birth to only a few pups;

Also concerned about the possible impacts on these species by the different fisheries occurring from coastal areas to the high seas;

Adopts in accordance with Article 10 of the Convention, the following Conservation and Management Measure:

1. This Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) shall apply to all fishing vessels flagged to Members, Cooperating Non-Members and Participating Territories (CCMs), and on the WCPFC record of fishing vessels or authorized to fish for highly migratory fish stocks in the Convention Area.
2. For the purpose of this CMM, “mobulid rays” means species of the family Mobulidae, which includes manta rays and mobula rays.
3. CCMs shall prohibit all vessels from intentionally setting any gear type for targeted fishing of mobulid rays in the Convention Area.
4. CCMs shall prohibit all vessels from retaining onboard, transshipping, landing or storing, any part or whole carcass of mobulid rays caught in the Convention Area.
5. CCMs shall require all their fishing vessels to promptly release alive and unharmed, to the extent practicable, mobulid rays as soon as they are seen in the net, on the hook, or on the deck, and to do so in a manner that will result in the least possible harm to the individuals captured. CCMs shall require their fishing vessels to implement the handling practices [for purse seine and longline vessels] detailed in Annex 1, while taking into consideration the safety of the crew.
6. Notwithstanding paragraph 4, in the case of mobulid rays that are unintentionally caught and frozen as part of a purse seine vessel’s operation, the vessel must, at the point of landing, surrender the whole mobulid ray to the responsible governmental authorities, or other competent authority, or discard them. Mobulid rays surrendered in this manner may not be sold or bartered but may be donated for purposes of domestic human consumption.
7. CCMs shall report the information and data collected on interactions (i.e., numbers surrendered, discarded and released) with mobulid rays by vessels through logbooks and/or through observer programs. The data shall be provided to the [scientific services provider or Secretariat] by [xx of xxx].
8. CCMs shall ensure that fishers are aware of and use proper mitigation, identification, handling and releasing techniques and keep on board all necessary equipment for the safe release of mobulid rays in accordance with the handling practices of Annex 1.
9. CCMs are encouraged to investigate at-vessel and post-release mortality in mobulids including, but not exclusively, the application of satellite tagging programs to investigate the effectiveness of this measure.
10. The scientific services provider shall review the data available via the Regional Observer Program and Scientific data to be provided to the Commission and identify any additional data requirements to undertake a [detailed] assessment, either via traditional stock assessments or on the basis of quantitative risk assessments, ecological risk assessments, indicators assessment or other data-poor analytical techniques.

11. The scientific services provider shall present a [detailed] assessment of mobulids to the Scientific Committee no later than 2023.
12. The Scientific Committee is requested to provide, whenever considered adequate on the basis of evolving knowledge and scientific advice, further improvements to the handling practices detailed in Annex 1.
13. Scientific observers shall be allowed to collect biological samples of mobulid rays caught in the WCPFC Convention Area that are dead at haul-back, provided that the samples are a part of a research project approved by the WCPFC Scientific Committee. In order to obtain the approval, a detailed document outlining the purpose of the work, number of samples intended to be collected and the spatio-temporal distribution of the sampling effort must be included in the proposal. Annual progress of the work and a final report on completion shall be presented to the Scientific Committee.

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ANNEX 1

BEST HANDLING PRACTICES FOR THE SAFE RELEASE OF MANTAS & MOBULIDS

Purse Seine

Do's:

- Release rays while they are still free-swimming whenever possible (e.g., back down procedure, submerging corks, cutting net).
- It is preferable that larger rays (>60 kg), that are too large to be lifted safely by hand are brailed out of the net and released using a purpose built large-mesh cargo net or canvas sling or similar device as recommended in document SC08-EB-IP-12 (Poisson *et al.* 2012, Good practices to reduce the mortality of sharks and rays caught incidentally by the tropical tuna purse seiners). It is preferable that release nets or devices are prepared prior to each set.
- It is preferable that small (<30 kg) and medium rays (30-60 kg) are handled by 2 or 3 people and carried by the sides of its wings or preferably using a purpose-built cradle/stretcher while ensuring the safety of the crew.
- When entangled in netting, carefully cut the net away from the animal and release to the sea as quickly as possible while ensuring the safety of the crew.

Don'ts:

- Do not leave a ray on deck until hauling is finished before returning it to the sea.
- Do not punch holes through the bodies of rays (e.g., to pass a cable or line through for lifting the ray).
- Do not gaff, drag, carry, lift or pull a ray by its “cephalic lobes” or tail or by inserting hooks or hands into the gill slits or the spiracles.

Longline

Do's:

- For small rays, gently bring on board and remove as much gear as possible by backing the hook out. If hooks are embedded, either cut the hook with bolt cutters or cut the line at the hook and gently return the animal to the sea.
- For medium to large rays (>30 kg), leave the animal in the water and use a dehooker to remove the hook or a long-handled line cutter to cut the gear as close to the hook as possible (ideally leaving <0.5 meters of line attached to the animal).

Don'ts:

- Do not hit or slam a ray against any surface to remove the animal from the line.
- Do not attempt to dislodge a deeply hooked or ingested hook by pulling on the branch line or using a dehooker.
- Do not attempt to lift medium to large (>30 kg) rays aboard vessel.
- Do not cut the tail.
- Do not gaff, drag, carry, lift or pull a ray by its “cephalic lobes” or tail or by inserting hooks or hands into the gill slits or the spiracles.

Additional recommendation:

Knowing that any fishing operation may catch rays, several tools can be prepared in advance (e.g., canvas or net slings or stretchers for carrying or lifting, large mesh net or grid to cover

hatches/hoppers in purse seine fisheries, long handled cutters and de-hookers in longline fisheries).

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