



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
SIXTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**

ELECTRONIC MEETING
12-19 August 2020

INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

WCPFC-SC16-2020/GN-IP-06 ([Rev.01](#))

Secretariat

Introduction

This purpose of this paper is to inform the Scientific Committee (SC) of the relevant science-related activities undertaken since SC15.

I. Summary Report of the 15th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee

1. The Secretariat posted on the SC15 website the SC15 Outcomes Document on 29 August 2019 and the intersessionally adopted SC15 Summary Report including the Executive Summary on 15 November 2019.

II. Science Services from the SPC-OFP

2. In 2006, the Commission signed the first memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Commission's Scientific Services Provider (SPC-OFP) to provide scientific and data management services. The MOU is composed of two sections: 1) general scientific, financial and administrative agreement which will be updated every three years, and 2) Annex I of the MOU (*Agreement for the Provision of Scientific Services to the Commission and Assistance to Members by the Pacific Community*), which will be updated each year to accommodate scientific services as requested by the Commission for each calendar year. In December 2009, the Commission and the SPC agreed to revise the MOU to provide for a three-year arrangement as directed by the Commission. The revision of the MOU was made in 2010, 2013, 2016 and 2019, which included implementation of the Shark Research Plan and development of management strategy evaluation to support the implementation of the WCPFC harvest strategy framework. In 2019, the term MOU was changed to the MOA (Memorandum of Agreement).

3. The SPC-OFP produced or involved in producing around 70 papers and reports for SC16, covering all four theme issues of the SC plenary agenda and online discussion forum topics, and provided *ad hoc* advice and support throughout the year. In addition, the SPC-OFP assisted the following activities:

- Participated in TCC15 and WCPFC16, producing several additional key scientific papers and presentations for each meeting;

- Assisted the WPEA Project by supporting electronic meeting of the Tuna Data Review and Annual Tuna Catch Estimates Workshops hosted by the Project participating countries (Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam), and ongoing database system and data management support;
- Conducted the Pacific Tuna Tagging Project (PTTP) and coordinated the 14th PTTP Steering Committee meeting electronically;
- Continued the Biological Sampling Programme and hosted the 2nd WCPFC Tuna Tissue bank Steering Committee meeting electronically;
- Hosted the online Tuna Data Workshop to assist compilation of CCM's tuna fishery data;
- Hosted the online Preparatory Workshop for 2020 Bigeye and Yellowfin Tuna Stock Assessments.

III. Progress of the SC Work Programme Activities

4. SC work programmes conducted in 2019-2020 include, with Commission budgets in parenthesis:

a) *Project 35b: WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank (\$ 99,195)*

The WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank (TTB) project has been continued since 2016. The first TTB Steering Committee was convened during SC15 and the second Steering Committee meeting was held electronically on 16 July 2020. CCMs are requested to visit TTB website: <https://www.spc.int/ofp/PacificSpecimenBank>. SC16 will review recommendations in the Steering Committee report (SC16-RP-P35b-03).

b) *Project 42: Pacific-wide tagging project (\$ 645,000)*

WCPFC16 agreed 2020-2022 PTTP Work Plan, and allocated funding of \$645,000 for 2020. In addition to the Korea's contribution of around \$170,000/year, unspent Korea's contribution in 2018 was also reallocated to 2019 and 2020 (\$85,000 each year). Two tagging experiments were planned since SC15: 1) WP5, which commenced in July 2019 with a primary target of skipjack tagging and secondary target of yellowfin tuna, and 2) CP14 which will commence August 2020 with primary targets of bigeye and yellowfin tagging. The 14th Steering Committee meeting was held electronically on 15 July 2020 and SC16 will review recommendations in the Steering Committee report (SC16-RP-PTTP-01).

c) *Project 60: Further paired sampling and unloading data comparisons (\$ 40,000)*

The SPC-OFP published a meeting paper SC16-ST-IP-04 to document the progress of this project.

d) *Project 88: Acoustic FAD Analysis (\$30,000 + EU fund)*

The project is mainly funded by EU with the WCPFC's co-finance of \$30,000 and \$15,000 for 2020 and 2021, respectively. Updates on the Project 88 is detailed in SC16-MI-IP-20.

e) *Project 90: Fish weights/lengths for scientific analysis (\$ 30,000)*

Project 90 is a 3-year project and indicative budget for 2021 was endorsed by the Commission. Outputs from 2019-2020 work will be the submission of a preliminary report to SC16 (SC16-ST-IP-06) and an annual report for 2020 to the Secretariat by 31 December 2020.

f) *Project 97: Shark Research Plan 2021-2025 (USD 46,000)*

This project is expected to develop the WCPFC Scientific Committee's 2021-2025 shark research plan, and to evaluate progress against the 2016-2020 plan. It also considers the necessary information requirements to support analyses and assessments of WCPFC's elasmobranch. The project report is posted as SC16-EB-IP-01 (The Shark Research Plan: 2021-2025).

g) *Project 98: Radiocarbon aging workshop (USD 35,000)*

The objective of this project is to assess the feasibility of applying the bomb radiocarbon technique to the validation of annual age counts on otoliths of tunas from the WCPO. An online workshop was held in early July 2020, with a design study being developed, using available otolith samples from the WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank and other collections, and a draft research plan proposed for consideration at SC16. The project report is posted as SC16-SA-IP-17 (Report on the bomb radiocarbon age validation workshop for tuna and billfish in the WCPO).

h) *Project 99: Southwest Pacific striped marlin population biology (USD 33,000)*

The objective of this project is to assess age, growth and maturity estimates for Southwest Pacific striped marlin. This is an ongoing work that is expected to be finished February 2021. A preliminary progress report is in SC16-SA-IP-21.

i) *Project 100: Close-kin Mark-Recapture Estimation of the Population Size within the WCPO*

The objective of this project is to hold a workshop to discuss the feasibility and costs of undertaking close-kin mark recapture estimation of the population size of species caught within the WCPO. The WCPFC16 allocated \$7,500 for a workshop but the workshop could not be held due to COVID-19. The preliminary analyses for a Close Kin Mark Recapture feasibility study in WCPO is posted as SC16-SA-IP-15 and no funding was required for this preliminary feasibility study. This paper provides an initial examination of its suitability of CKMR for South Pacific albacore in the WCPO for estimation of population size, reproductive potential, mortalities, and connectivity.

j) *Project 103 – Limit reference points for WCPO elasmobranchs (USD 25,000)*

The project is expected to facilitate a recommendation by SC16 to WCPFC17 on appropriate limit reference points for elasmobranchs in the WCPO. The report of this project is posted as SC16-MI-IP-21 (Appropriate reference points for WCPO elasmobranchs).

5. [The updated progress of 2020 SC projects including comments from the online discussion forum are reflected in Attachment A.](#)

IV. Cooperation with other organizations

6. The Secretariat was represented at the following science-related meetings during the last 12 months:

- SPC Pre-Assessment Workshop, 22-23 April 2020, Online Meeting (Microsoft Teams);

- The 20th ISC Plenary Meeting, 16-21 July 2020, Online Meeting (Microsoft Teams); and
- WPEA Project related workshops and meetings for data review and annual catch estimates workshops and other related meetings were conducted online.

V. Research Projects

Japanese Trust Fund Project

7. The Japanese Government supported the first year of JTF Phase 3 with a total budget of \$232,821, including WCPFC's 7.5% administration fee. Five project proposals were endorsed for 2020: one from Kiribati, one from Palau, and three from Tonga. The Steering Committee meeting this year (2020) will be done through email correspondence. The Steering Committee will review the progress of each project. Detailed progress is described in the JTF Status Report (SC16-RP-JTF-01). The Steering Committee report will be posted in the SC16 website (SC16-RP-JTF-02).

WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank (TTB)

8. Refer to Paragraph 4.a) *Project 35b* above.

West Pacific East Asia Project

9. The current WPEA-ITM Project funded by the New Zealand government continued to conduct key data collection activities in Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam. Details are described in the WPEA-ITM Project Update (SC16-RP-WPEA-01).

VI. Voluntary Contributions from Members and Observers

10. Members and Observers of the Commission have voluntarily provided funding supports for the scientific work of the Commission. The European Union has made available to WCPFC EUR 180,000 in 2020-2021 to fund acoustic FAD analyses. The third 5-year programme of the Korean government to support the SPC's Pacific Tuna Tagging Project started in 2019, providing about USD 170,000 per year. The USA conducts SC Project 101 (MC simulation for shark mitigation) and Project 102 (Population projects for oceanic whitetip shark) with their own budget, which will be presented at SC17.

Progress of 2020 Projects including comments from the online discussion forum

Summary of SC work programme titles and budget for 2020, and indicative budget for 2021–2022 (USD)

Project Title	2020	2021	2022	Report to SC16
SPC-OFP Scientific Services	924,524	943,015	961,875	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the 2020 services agreement, around 70 papers and reports were published. • Assisted other Commission activities including WPEA project, data review WS and PAW workshop.
SPC Additional resourcing	241,480 (=166,480 + 75,000)	168,145	169,827	
1) Project 35b - WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank	99,195	101,180	103,204	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPC conducted the 2nd Steering Committee meeting on 16 July 2020 and produced progress report and Steering Committee report. • SC16 will review the Steering Committee recommendations. • Project 35b to be continued in 2021.
2) Project 42 - Pacific Tuna Tagging Program	645,000	730,000	730,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPC conducted the 14th Steering Committee meeting and produced progress report and Steering Committee report. • SC16 will review the Steering Committee recommendations. • Project to be continued.
3) Project 60 – Purse Seine Species Composition	40,000	40,000		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPC. Online Topic 3. • Project to be continued in 2021. • Online Discussion Forum (ODF): No objection expressed in the ODF regarding the extension of Project 60 in 2021.
Project 68 - Seabird mortality			75,000	
4) Project 88 - Acoustic FAD analyses	30,000	15,000		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPC. Matching fund of \$30,000 for EU's support (EUR 180,000) to Project 88; Online Topic 13. • Project to be continued in 2021. • ODF: The PNA supported the continuation of Project 88; no objections were expressed.
5) Project 90 - Length weight conversion	30,000	20,000		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPC. Online Topic 5. • Project to be continued in 2021. • ODF: No objection expressed in the ODF regarding the extension of Project 90 in 2021.

6) Project 97 – Shark Research Plan (SRP) 2021-2025	46,000			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPC. Online Topic 15. • Submission of a final report for Project 97, including the agreed SRP for 2021-2025, to the WCPFC Secretariat by 30 September 2020. • ODF: CCMs expressed no objections to closure of the project, and made various suggestions for updates and changes to improve the SRP.
7) Project 98 - Radiocarbon aging workshop	35,000			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSIRO convened a virtual WS, and the budget of \$35,000 was unspent. Online Topic 7. • SC16 will review a follow-up Project 105. • ODF: CCMs voiced no objections to the report, supported the workshop recommendations that SC16 note the proposed research on bomb radiocarbon age validation for bigeye and yellowfin tuna.
8) Project 99 – Southwest Pacific striped marlin population biology	33,000			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSIRO. SC16-SA-IP-21 (Full implementation of this project was delayed due to COVID-19) • Project to be closed in February 2021 and the results will be presented at SC17.
9) Project 100 - Close-kin mark-recapture (estimation of population size for sharks and tunas)	7,500			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSIRO planned to hold a 2-day workshop at the SPC laboratories in Noumea in conjunction with the 2020 Pre-Assessment Workshop. • No physical workshop was convened due to COVID-19 and no contract was made. • ODF: CSIRO and SPC proposed a follow-up Project 100b.
10) Project 101 – Updated Monte Carlo simulations of the potential of longline shark mitigation approaches incorporating updated knowledge	USA budget			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing and the results of the project will be presented to SC17
11) Project 102 – Population projections for oceanic whitetip shark	USA budget			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing and the results of the project will be presented to SC17
12) Project 103 – Limit reference points for WCPO elasmobranchs	25,000			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSIRO. Online Topic 11. • Project to be closed in 2020. • ODF: No objections to close the project 103.

