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**AN UPDATE ON THE TRANSHIPMENT TRENDS IN THE WESTERN AND CENTRAL
PACIFIC FISHERIES CONVENTION AREA AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
MANAGEMENT**

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Submitted by the Pew Charitable Trusts

An Update on the Transshipment Trends in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention Area and Recommendations for Management

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In 2018, 66% of tuna landings came from the Pacific and generated an end value of \$26.2 billion.¹ For many of these catches, transshipments continue to be a critical component of the seafood supply chain; however, current monitoring and regulatory controls over at-sea transshipment are inadequate, as there are few guarantees that all transfers are being reported and observed.

In a recent five-year period, the number of annual at-sea transshipments occurring within the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Convention Area increased by 166% - from 554 transfers in 2014 to 1,472 in 2019.² Furthermore, as of November 13, 2020, 62% of vessels on the Record of Fishing Vessels (RFV) were authorized to transship in the high seas.³ These data indicate that high seas transshipments are the norm, rather than the exception. This is counter to the WCPFC Convention text and the Conservation and Management Measure on Transshipment, ([CMM 2009-06](#)), which states that to the extent practicable, transshipment must be conducted in ports.

In response to the global spread of COVID-19, WCPFC, along with several other regional fishery management organizations (RFMOs), have suspended some monitoring, control, and surveillance measures (MCS) to limit the potential exposure of fishers, observers, and inspectors to the virus. While these steps are necessary, they also increase the urgency of updating and strengthening WCPFC's transshipment measure to ensure proper monitoring and reporting.

In 2018, the 15th Regular Session of the Commission (WCPFC15) recognized the need to review the management and monitoring of transshipment at-sea by forming an intersessional working group (IWG) to study the effectiveness of [CMM 2009-06](#). To help support the work of the IWG, this paper updates Pew's analysis of the publicly available information on transshipment operations (WCPFC16-2019-OP03) within the Convention Area and provides key findings and recommendations for consideration by both the 17th Regular Session of the Commission (WCPFC17) and the IWG.

¹ R. McKinney et al., "Netting Billions 2020: A Global Tuna Valuation," The Pew Charitable Trusts (2020), <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2020/10/netting-billions-2020-a-global-tuna-valuation>

² Including events in the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) waters; Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, "Annual Report on WCPFC transshipment reporting. WCPFC-TCC16-2020-RP03," Technical and Compliance Committee (2020), <https://www.wcpfc.int/node/47672>.

³ Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, "WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels," Accessed 13 November 2020, <https://www.wcpfc.int/record-fishing-vessel-database>.

Summary of Pew's Key Findings and Recommendations

Key Findings to be considered at WCPFC17	Recommendations
1. Observer reporting forms and submission requirements need to be improved	WCPFC should modify the Regional Observer Program (ROP) Standards and Guidelines document to require observers to submit all transshipment observer reports directly to the Secretariat and develop standardized carrier observer data collection protocols, forms, procedures, and training.
2. There is insufficient sharing of data on transshipment operations between WCPFC, IATTC, and NPFC	WCPFC should strengthen information-sharing agreements with the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC) and IATTC to require the sharing of all transshipment-related information, including declarations and observer reports, especially when carrier vessels on a single voyage transship species managed by both organizations.
Key Findings to be considered by the IWG	Recommendations
3. Discrepancies exist in transshipment reporting within WCPFC	In order to provide a full accounting of all the activities of carriers that operate in the Convention Area, the IWG should recommend flag States provide all transshipment reports and declarations from carriers to the Secretariat in a standardized format, regardless of where the transshipping event occurs (high seas, EEZ, or in port).
4. Additional sources of information are needed to effectively verify reported transshipment operations	The IWG should consider the usefulness of automatic identification systems (AIS) as a supplement to vessel monitoring systems (VMS) and other reporting data, especially as it relates to transshipment and any needed modifications to the Transshipment Analysis Tool (TAT) detection criteria.
5. A review of the WCPFC CMM 2009-06 found key areas that need improvement	The IWG should consider recommending near real time reporting of declarations and reports to the Secretariat and the development of a standard transshipment declaration form, along with other recommendations included at the end of this brief.

1. Observer reporting forms and submission requirements need to be improved

a. Observer reports are not submitted to the Secretariat

The 2020 WCPFC Annual Transshipment Report notes that “[t]he majority of [Commission Members, Cooperating Non-Members, and Participating Territories (CCMs)] who were involved in high seas transshipment in 2019 seemed to affirm that all high seas transshipments conducted in 2019 were 100% covered by observers.” Yet, the report does not include any information about observer reports received by the Secretariat.² In 2017, the Secretariat reported at the 13th Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC13) meeting that they had received only one observer report for the 955 high seas transshipping events that were reported to have occurred in the Convention Area in 2016.^{2,4} Since there has not been any other reported observer report submissions to the Secretariat, one could assume that the Secretariat has received only one observer report for the 4,965 transshipment events that occurred between 2016 and 2019.² While most other tuna RFMO Secretariats have access to transshipment observer reports, the lack of access for the WCPFC Secretariat undermines its ability to independently verify the information reported by transshipping vessels.

b. There are insufficient observer reporting standards

The WCPFC ROP comprises national, regional and sub-regional observer programs. Observers are required to collect scientific data and information on compliance with WCPFC regulations. However, transshipment observers on carrier vessels are not provided with any specific training or protocols to ensure consistent data collection. Other tuna RFMOs, such as the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and IATTC, have ROPs that have specialized training for observers onboard carrier vessels. In these RFMOs, observer reports include extensive detail on each transshipment event and are submitted to the relevant Secretariat. However, in WCPFC, protocols, submission processes, data collection procedures, and forms guiding carrier observer duties have yet to be developed and agreed upon by the Commission.

Recommendation: WCPFC should modify the ROP Standards and Guidelines document to require observers to submit all transshipment observer reports directly to the Secretariat. This will allow for independent verification of transshipment related data received from carrier vessel transshipment declarations. In addition, the Secretariat should work with members to develop standardized carrier observer data collection protocols, forms, procedures, and training. By standardizing and then cross-certifying observers, WCPFC can efficiently improve information sharing between programs.

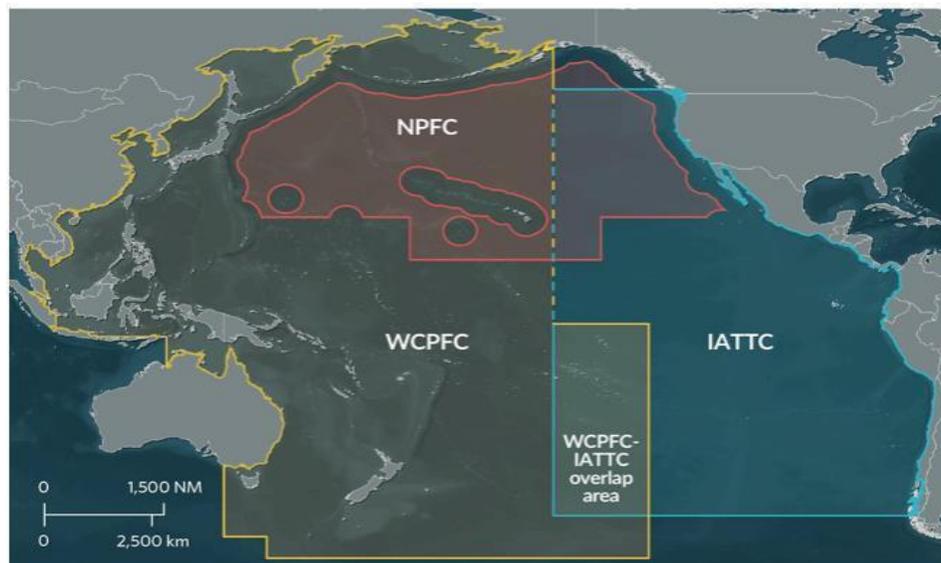
⁴ Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, “Summary Report of the Thirteenth Regular Session of the Technical and Compliance Committee WCPFC14-2017-TCC13,” Technical and Compliance Committee (2017), https://www.wcpfc.int/system/files/TCC13%20Summary%20Report%20final_issued%2014%20Nov%202017.pdf.

2. There is insufficient sharing of data on transshipment operations between WCPFC, IATTC, and NPFC

a. Potential unreported transshipments occur in WCPFC overlap areas.

A recent geospatial [report](#) published by The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew) cross-referenced satellite AIS data track histories of carrier vessels and movement patterns consistent with transshipment behavior against publicly available information on carrier vessels and transshipments reported by the WCPFC Secretariat and Commission members. The report found that in 2016 there were high concentrations of carrier vessel activity and potential unreported transshipments in two WCPFC overlap areas —the IATTC/ WCPFC overlap area and where the NPFC Convention Area (Figure 1) spans part of the WCPFC high seas area off Japan.⁵ These three RFMOs all have different reporting and observer carrier requirements, making it difficult to determine which RFMO rules and procedures a carrier vessel is, or should be, operating under in dually managed waters at any given time. As a result, the amount and type of species transshipped by a carrier vessel in such waters may go unreported to the appropriate RFMO authorities.

Figure 1 – WCPFC, IATTC, and NPFC overlap areas



Sources: The Pew Charitable Trusts (2019); WCPFC and IATTC, via United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), FAO species: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; NPFC; and Land and Bathymetry from Natural Earth.

b. There is high carrier vessel activity in the NPFC and WCPFC overlap area

Pew’s geospatial report found that over 1,500 potential transshipment events may have occurred on the high seas in WCPFC waters, far more than the 955 such events reported by carrier vessels to WCPFC in 2016.^{2,5} At least 26 WCPFC-authorized carriers, primarily flagged to Panama and Chinese Taipei, operated on the high

⁵ The Pew Charitable Trusts, “Transshipment in the Western and Central Pacific,” (2019), https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2019/09/international_fisheries_transshipment_report.pdf.

seas in the northwest quadrant of the WCPFC Convention Area that overlaps with the NPFC Convention Area -including the high seas off Japan.⁵ However, the WCPFC Secretariat Annual Reports have indicated that no high seas transshipping events were reported in this part of the WCPFC Convention Area. While it is possible these carriers exclusively transshipped NPFC-managed fish, it is also possible that WCPFC-managed fish were also transshipped (such as longline caught North Pacific albacore, yellowfin, bigeye tunas and swordfish). The insufficient transshipment reporting and observer protocols within NPFC, coupled with the lack of a formal data-sharing agreement between the WCPFC and NPFC Secretariats, limit the ability for both organizations to clearly understand the activities of carrier vessels operating in this part of the WCPFC Convention Area, and to what extent these vessels might be transshipping mixed quantities of WCPFC and NPFC managed species.

c. Transshipments go unobserved due to captain's discretion

The [2019 WCPFC Annual Report on Transshipment](#) notes that *"high seas transshipment events were reported to have occurred more often in the tropical eastern Pacific, particularly within and around the overlap area with IATTC."*⁶ MRAG Americas, the IATTC carrier observer service provider, reported that: *"MRAG does not currently have an agreement with the WCPFC to collect data on transshipments in the Western Pacific....If the carrier vessel takes transshipments west of 150W, these will be designated WCPFC transshipments. The observer is to [observe] these transshipments at carrier vessel captain's discretion."*⁷ Due to the lack of an agreement on transshipment observation between the WCPFC and MRAG, 42 transshipments that were reported to have occurred in the WCPFC Convention Area were not observed in 2018, despite the presence of an IATTC observer onboard.⁷ This is solely because a vessel captain has discretion whether a transshipment event is observed or not. These unobserved events, with an average transfer weight of 56 metric tons from the 486 transshipments observed, potentially represent over 2,350 metric tons of WCPFC product that went unreported in 2018.^{7,8}

d. It is unclear if information on WCPFC transshipments observed by IATTC observers are included in WCPFC Commission reports

There is no specific mention of the 486 WCPFC transshipment events that were observed in 2018 by IATTC

⁶ Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, "Annual Report on WCPFC Transshipment Reporting WCPFC-TCC15-2019-RP03," Technical and Compliance Committee (2019), <https://www.wcpfc.int/doc/wcpfc-tcc15-2019-rp03/annual-report-wcpfc-transshipment-reporting-secretariat>.

⁷ Review of the IATTC Regional Observer Programme Covering the period January 1, 2018 to February 26, 2019 March 23, 20189. MRAG Americas Inc. https://iattc.org/Meetings/Meetings2019/IATTC-94/Docs/_English/CAF-07_ADDENDUM%201%20MRAG%20Americas%20Program%20to%20monitor%20transshipments%20at%20sea.pdf

⁸ MRAG Americas Inc., "Review of the IATTC Regional Observer Programme. Covering the period January 1, 2018 to February 26, 2019," Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (2019), https://www.iattc.org/Meetings/Meetings2019/IATTC-94/Docs/_English/CAF-07-03_ADDENDUM%201%20MRAG%20Americas%20Program%20to%20monitor%20transshipments%20at%20sea.pdf.

observers in the 2019 WCPFC Annual Report on Transshipment.⁷ This is a recurring theme in WCPFC annual transshipment reports and it is unknown if the WCPFC Secretariat received information from IATTC on these events and whether this information was included in the Annual Reports.

Recommendation: WCPFC should strengthen information-sharing agreements with NPFC and IATTC to require the sharing of all transshipment-related information, including declarations and observer reports, especially when carrier vessels on a single voyage is transshipping species managed by both organizations. These agreements should include a mandate for carrier vessels to notify the Secretariat of their intent to transship WCPFC-managed species when the carrier vessel enters WCPFC waters. The current data-sharing agreement between WCPFC and IATTC should also be extended to cover MRAG Americas - the IATTC carrier observer service provider - to ensure that all transshipping events occurring in the WCPFC Convention Area be observed, documented, and reported directly to the WCPFC Secretariat. The Secretariat should then provide a clear accounting of the number and flags of offloading and receiving vessels involved in transshipping in the WCPFC Convention Area that are documented in IATTC transshipment reports.

3. Discrepancies exist in transshipment reporting within WCPFC

a. There is non-compliance with notification and declaration requirements

CMM 2009-06 requires that offloading and receiving vessels provide advanced notifications and post-transfer declarations for each transshipment. The 2020 WCPFC Annual Report on Transshipment reveals discrepancies in notifications and declarations received from offloading and receiving vessels. For instance, Panama reportedly received 380 transshipments yet provided only 318 notifications and 377 declarations for the 2019 reporting period (Table 1). Other members and cooperating nonmembers have similar inconsistencies, with only China and Liberia meeting the notification and reporting requirements for all transshipments. In total, 95 notifications and 4 declarations were not submitted by CCM carrier vessels, and 57 advanced notifications and 17 declarations were not submitted by CCM fishing vessels that transshipped in 2019.²

Table 1: 2019 high-seas transshipment events reported to the Secretariat by flag vessels²

CCM	Count of Vessels in Reports Received		Count of Reported Transshipment Events				Notifications and Declarations not received	
	As Receiving Vessels	As Offloading Vessels	Receiving Vessel	Offloading Vessel	Advance Notifications received	Declarations received	Advanced notifications <u>not</u> received	Declarations <u>not</u> received
China	2		120		120	120	0	0
		137		293	293	293	0	0
Japan							NA	NA
		3		3	2	3	1	0
Republic of Korea	7		187		177	186	10	1
		71		113	107	110	6	3
Liberia	3		146		146	146	0	0
							NA	NA
Panama	8		380		318	377	62	3
							NA	NA
Chinese Taipei	45		489		466	489	23	0
		233		825	780	811	45	14
Vanuatu	1		31		31	31	0	0
		42		122	117	122	5	0
Receiving Vessels	66		1,353		1,258	1,349	95	4
Offloading Vessels		486		1,356	1,299	1,339	57	17

Source: WCPFC-TCC16-2020-RP03, "Table 2. Provisional summary of transshipments events reported to WCPFC through annual reports for the 2019 calendar year as at August 2020, which may not include CCMs updates provided as part of the dCMR process."

b. There are discrepancies between member and cooperating non-member reports and information from the WCPFC annual transshipment report

In reviewing the data from countries that frequently transship on the high sea, discrepancies were found in the information provided within the 2020 Annual Transshipment Report and the CCM Annual Report Part 1.⁹ It should also be noted that within the 2020 annual transshipment report, there are inconsistent figures in the tables outlined in pages 7, 8, and 21- and captured in tables 2 and 3. In analyzing the available data, it is assumed that the summary of CCM reporting of 2019 number of annual transshipments events should match the total number reported within the Annual Report Part 1 2020, however due to various reporting methods employed by the CCM this may be difficult to compare.

⁹ Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, "Annual Report to the Commission Part 1: Information on Fisheries, Research, and Statistics," Accessed on 13 November 2020, Scientific Committee (2020), <https://www.wcpfc.int/meetings/16th-regular-session-scientific-committee>.

Table 2: Transshipments reported by carrier vessels for calendar year 2019

Country	Annual Report on WCPFC Transshipment Reporting – By Secretariat ²			CCM Annual Report Part 1 ⁹
	CCM reporting (pg. 7)	Count of events by receiving vessel (pg. 8)	Summary of CCM reporting (pg. 21)	
Panama	380	427	1604	1604
China	120	153	117	120
Korea	187	201	678	662
Chinese Taipei	489	498	628	628
Vanuatu	31	39	423*	Not specified
Liberia	146	154	147	147

**Note that Vanuatu did not specify of the 423 total transshipments, which were offloaded versus received.*

Table 3: Transshipments reported by longline vessels for calendar year 2019

Country	Annual Report on WCPFC Transshipment Reporting – By Secretariat ²			CCM Annual Report part 1 ⁹
	CCM reporting (pg. 7)	Count of events by offloading vessel (pg. 7)	Summary of CCM reporting (pg. 21)	
China	293	356	299	299
Japan	3	6	249	249
Korea	113	125	129	129
Chinese Taipei	825	855	1,015	1,015
Vanuatu	122	130	423*	Not specified

**Note that Vanuatu did not specify of the 423 total transshipments, which were offloaded versus received.*

Recommendation: Table 2 and 3 highlight the need for standardized reporting. The mandated use of a uniform reporting formats, which was endorsed by TCC in 2018, would increase the consistency of these reports, reduce instances of mis-reported or unreported data, and simplify the determination of compliance with reporting requirements.

4. Additional sources of information are needed to effectively verify reported transshipment operations

a. Alternative tools for detecting transshipments should be considered

According to the 2019 WCPFC Annual Report on Transshipment, the Secretariat undertook an analysis of VMS data to attempt to detect potential transshipment events. The Secretariat specified that an incident would be counted as an event when “...the reported WCPFC VMS positions related to two vessels, are estimated to be within a distance of 250 metres, over a time period of at least 4 hours.”⁶ Overall, the VMS system only detected 23% of the over 3,200 transshipment events that were reported to the Secretariat during the time period of interest. In order to improve the accuracy of the tool, WCPFC should consider the

supplemental use of AIS data to aid in these analyses. AIS is another useful tool for increasing the transparency of transshipment activity, and can help validate reported information, especially when inconsistencies are found in annual reports. Given that the VMS polling rate for longliners is once every four hours, supplemental use of AIS data could be used to gain a better understanding of the length of time a transshipment at sea takes place within the WCPFC Convention Area- as evidenced in the following paragraph.

b. AIS analysis indicates potential unreported transshipments in 2018

A joint Global Fishing Watch (GFW) and Pew AIS analysis of carrier vessel activity in the Convention Area in 2018 found that almost half of all AIS detected encounters between carrier vessels and fishing vessels occurred in the Convention Area's overlap with that of IATTC. In keeping with findings from the previous years' report, GFW once again found discrepancies in reported transshipment information as provided by CCMs and the Secretariat, complicating efforts to validate reported activity. Regardless of these inconsistencies, AIS data did indicate that encounters between carrier vessels and purse seine vessels occurred inside Island States' EEZs after the purse seine vessels appeared to have fished within those EEZs - activity which was not reported via CCMs or WCPFC's annual transshipment reports. Lastly, GFW's analysis showed that carrier vessels only visited ports in CCMs after an AIS-detected encounter in the Convention Area in 2018. WCPFC's current CMM on Minimum Standards for Port State Measures is opt-in, and CCMs are not required to designate a port for entry under the Measure. Without consistent standards, carrier vessels are subject to a variety of port inspection standards when landing WCPFC-managed catch.

Recommendation: The IWG should consider recommending that the Secretariat modify its VMS transshipment detection criteria and investigate the use of AIS as a supplement to VMS and other reporting data, especially as it relates to transshipment reporting. The IWG should also consider encouraging more uniform inspection schemes among WCPFC ports.

5. A review of CMM-2009-06 found key areas that need improvement

- WCPFC is one of the only RFMOs that allows at sea transshipment exemptions for small scale purse seine vessels, purse seine vessels operating exclusively in-zone, for troll, longline, pole and line vessels, etc. These exemptions and ambiguity make implementation inconsistent and allow for even more transshipments to occur than initially envisioned when Article 29 of the Convention was drafted.¹⁰ The WCPFC transshipment

¹⁰ Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, "Convention on the Conservation and Management of

resolution also differs from those in many other tuna RFMOs in that it does not apply to the whole Convention Area. EEZs are subject to national laws, which could allow transshipments to occur within areas/countries with less stringent regulations. These EEZs may also have limited oversight and enforcement resources, therefore allowing transshipments to occur undetected.

Recommendation: The IWG should consider recommending that transshipment notifications and reporting be submitted on standardized forms and that uniform transshipment regulations be extended to the entire Convention Area to provide greater transparency and contribute to more effective management. At a minimum, the Commission should require that all transshipment reports, including declarations, be sent directly to the Secretariat, regardless of the location of the transfer.

- Paragraph 37 of [CMM 2009-06](#) provides two basic metrics to determine impracticability of in port transshipment: (1) that the vessel would have significant economic hardship and/or (2) that the vessel would need to make significant and substantial changes to its operation. However, “significant economic hardship” and “significant and substantial changes” are not defined. Additionally, there are no definite guidelines that can be used to determine if it is impractical for vessels to transship in-port. A CCM simply notifies the Commission that it is impractical for the operation of their vessel to transship in-port, without any supporting documentation or thorough evaluation.

Recommendation: The IWG should propose that the WCPFC adopt strict guidelines to establish more clarity for vessels permitted to transship under the “impracticable” exemption.

- Paragraph 36 states that *“TCC, shall review the application of the exemptions by relevant CCMs after a period of 3 years and every 2 years thereafter to establish whether monitoring and verification has been effective. After review, the Commission may prohibit transshipment on the high seas by any vessel or vessels in relation to which monitoring and verification of transshipment on the high seas is proven to have been ineffective or establish or vary any conditions for transshipping on the high seas.”* However, it appears that such a review has not been completed in the decade that the measure has been in place.

Recommendation: The IWG should conduct a review of the current CCM exemptions for high seas transshipments. This will ensure that no vessels are taking advantage of the exemption to conduct at sea transshipment with minimal oversight.

- Paragraph 10 of the CMM requires both the offloading and receiving vessels to submit transshipment declarations, yet, WCPFC is one of the only tuna RFMOs that does not provide a transshipment declaration form. Instead, the CMM provides a list of information to be provided by CCMs. Transshipment

declaration forms are an essential piece of a properly regulated transshipment operation; ensuring consistent data reporting for all transshipments. Implementing comprehensive transshipment declaration forms will enable WCPFC reporting standards to be compatible with neighboring RFMOs.

Recommendation: The IWG should consider recommending that a standardized transshipment declaration form be developed and adopted.

- Paragraph 35 of [CMM 2009-06](#) allows vessels to delay transmission of transshipment declarations to the executive director by up to 15 days. Considering that the transshipment declaration form only requires basic information observed during the transshipment event, it is unclear why there is an extended period for submission.

Recommendation: The IWG should consider recommending that declarations be transmitted to all relevant authorities, including the Secretariat as soon as possible upon completing the transshipment. This will limit any opportunity to alter recorded information and allow for prompt verification of data.

- There are no minimum in-port transshipment standards developed by WCPFC, instead all in-port transshipments are subject to individual port States standards. [CMM 2009-06](#) also does not include any requirement for observers to record transshipments occurring in port and does not require that the Secretariat receive in-port transshipment notifications or reports, making in-port transshipment regulation and reporting inconsistent throughout the Convention Area.

Recommendation: Considering the importance of maintaining the scope and integrity of transshipment control measures, and reinforcing traceability of the catches, the IWG should consider recommending that stringent reporting requirements for in-port transshipments should be developed and adopted; such as notifications and reports sent directly to the Secretariat, in-port observer reporting when present, and the requirements that CCMs provide 'nil' reports if no transshipment took place in port during the reporting period. In addition, in-port annual transshipment reports should include the same level of detail required for at-sea transshipment annual reports.

- The current WCPFC transshipment reporting procedures do not require the documenting of International Maritime Organization (IMO) numbers, which is inconsistent with international standards and could hamper cross-referencing between the record of fishing vessels and the authorized list of carrier vessels.

Recommendation: To meet international standards and improve reporting consistency, the IWG should consider recommending that IMO numbers be included in all transshipment reporting from receiving and offloading vessels.
