



**COMMISSION
SEVENTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**
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8 – 15 December 2020

**LETTER FROM PARTICIPANTS OF THE US PACIFIC TUNA GROUP FISHERY
IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (FIPS) IN THE WCPO**

**WCPFC17-2020-OP12
3 December 2020**

Submitted by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

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Dear Delegates,

The vessel owners and industry participants of the **US Pacific Tuna Group** fishery improvement project (FIPs) in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean submit this letter—in line with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) position statements—to acknowledge progress to date in the WCPFC and to request additional support from Cooperating Non- members and Participating Territories (CCMs) for measures that will further tuna conservation at the Commission meeting beginning 7 December, 2020.

These FIPs recognize—and are experiencing—the unprecedented challenges presented by COVID-19 and its economic and social impacts on the fishery sector in the Pacific Ocean. However, we do not believe that these current circumstances should prevent the WCPFC from taking action to ensure sustainable management of tuna stocks and marine ecosystems. Indeed, there is more than ever a dire and critical need for coordination among industry, fisher communities, and relevant governments to achieve these outcomes.

The priorities reflected here are included in the FIP to help the fishery be eligible to meet the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standard for certification. The FIP outcomes-to-date include best-practice examples of how these FIPs are working to achieve conservation outcomes within the WCPFC.

2020 Priorities

Precautionary and comprehensive management measures and harvest strategies

There are several critical measures and issues that require immediate attention by WCPFC this year:

- We support maintaining a robust tropical tuna conservation and management measure along the lines of *CMM 2018-01*, while recognizing that it could be strengthened in both the long and short term to achieve an improved and more equitable conservation outcome;
- Support and endorse further implementation of *CMM 2014-06* to establish harvest strategies for key tuna species with proposed timelines;
- Establish a revised replacement target reference point (TRP) for skipjack;
- Establish precautionary TRPs for bigeye and yellowfin;
- Endorse steps toward adoption of a harvest control rule (HRC) for the skipjack purse seine fishery; and
- Endorse the continued development and implementation of limit reference points (LRPs) and TRPs for proper management of all stocks, including sharks as a priority.

Reduce the environmental impacts of purse seine fishing

We encourage the WCPFC to develop and implement science-based and enforceable FAD management measures to mitigate harm to ecosystems. We support research, strategies and incentives that promote a transition to more biodegradable FADs within a determined set timeframe. These FIPs are committed to providing data on FADs, such as electronic position data, to improve the monitoring and accountability of FAD usage.

We urge that any required actions are accompanied by compliance systems that are both effective and fully implemented. Therefore, we recommend an amendment to *CMM 2018-01* this year, or a new CMM in 2021.

Effective and fair enforcement

At this year's meeting, we urge the Commission to undertake any opportunity to further review and amend its transshipment regulation (*CMM 2009-06*) and adopt substantive improvements to curtail opportunities for IUU fishing, trafficking, and labor abuses.

We seek required real-time (or near real-time) reporting of transshipment activity and for any vessels that fail to comply to be added to the draft IUU vessel list. Transshipment at sea should be only allowed on fishing vessels with 100% observer coverage (human and/or electronic), and tuna transshipped at sea without observer certification should not access the market.

Additionally, we support adopting a formal, binding CMM on Crew Welfare based on *Resolution 2018-01*.

We support all actions to ensure a strong compliance process and contribute to transparent, fair, and effective enforcement within the WCPFC. The members of the Commission should present a compliance action plan for the identified infractions. The WCPFC should continue discussions on how to respond to repeated and significant non-compliance.

Data quality and quantity

This FIP recognizes that comprehensive observer coverage is critically needed to contribute data to understand the health of stocks, as well as to monitor compliance. To this end, we collaborate in initiatives that support enriching data collection and compliance.

During normal operations, the major purse seine vessels represented here continue to implement 100% observer coverage and support substantially increased coverage for other vessels, especially for major longline vessels. A progressive program to increase levels of observer coverage (human and/or electronic) to 100% for all vessels should be established. To achieve eventual 100% coverage, this program should immediately adopt best practices in electronic monitoring (EM) and electronic reporting (ER) standards, such as e-logbooks. Additionally, we continue to support measures to ensure on-board observer safety.

FIP outcomes to-date

- Approved a comprehensive FAD Management Plan, based on the ISSF *Best Practices for FAD Management*, that commits to the following [non-exhaustive] actions to support the WCPFC program:
 - Comply with flag state and WCPFC reporting requirements for fishery statistics by set type, including filling out completely and accurately the logbooks by set type and submitting the data to required authorities and the WCPFC;
 - Voluntary reporting of additional FAD buoy data as requested by RFMOs to support approved and budgeted scientific research. This may include both raw positional and echosounder data with sufficient time lag to ensure confidentiality;
 - Support science-based limits on the overall number of FADs used per vessel and/or FAD sets made. The vessels in the FIP have agreed to voluntary limits on the number of FADs deployed well below the limits established by WCPFC as well as FAD time area closures;
 - A timely transition to the use of fully non-entangling FADs to reduce ghost fishing;
 - Not deploying any "high entanglement risk" FADs according to the *ISSF Guide for Non-Entangling FADs*;
 - Testing of biodegradable materials for use in FAD construction;
 - Participation in collaborative research and testing of biodegradable FADs; and
 - The development and implementation of FAD recovery policies, best practices and programs.

- Collaborating with a tuna fishing gear manufacturer in Ecuador on an innovative biodegradable FAD design, which is currently undergoing early stage testing. A larger scale test by the fleet is planned for the 4th quarter of 2020 or 1st quarter of 2021. The results of this work may be shared with key scientists,

management authorities, overlapping FIPs and other stakeholders, including working groups under the IATTC.

- Participating in a FAD retrieval feasibility study with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) to identify potential hot spots for FAD beaching in the Pacific Islands, including the tracking of some FADs deployed in the WCPFC management area. Ten years of archived locational data will be released to SPC by the buoy service providers.
- Supporting the SPC Tuna Tagging Programme by providing real time echosounder buoy data to the tagging cruise vessel. Due to the support provided by the USPTG fleet, the SPC reported that a record number of tunas were tagged during the cruise.

For more information, access this FIP's *FisheryProgress.org* profile [here](#).

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