

Tuna scientists preparing for major Manila meeting

Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, 28 July 2006. Tuna scientists from around the world are preparing for the second session of the new Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission's Scientific Committee which will meet over two weeks in Manila from 7th August. The Scientific Committee advises the Commission on harvesting levels and the status of tuna and other non-target species taken in fishing operations in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO).

The meeting, involving more than 120 scientists and others associated with the conservation and management of the WCPO's valuable tuna resources, is being hosted by the Government of Philippines. As the harvest of tunas from the WCPO in 2005 is likely to be the highest ever recorded, again exceeding 2 million tonnes, the scientists will have a key role in advising the WCPF Commission, which will meet at Apia, Samoa in December this year, if this level of harvest can be sustained. The Scientific Committee brings together scientists from more than 30 countries that include all Pacific island countries and territories, the major fishing nations, including Japan, Chinese Taipei, Korea, the European Community, the US, and observers from other fisheries management institutions and non-government agencies from within the region and around the globe.

In addition to assessing the current status of the region's main target tuna resources (skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye and albacore) and impacts of fisheries on the sustainability of current harvests, the Scientific Committee will begin to give increased attention to those non-target species that are taken incidentally in tuna fishing operations. Andrew Wright, the Executive Director of the Pohnpei-based Commission Secretariat noted that the December 2005 meeting of the WCPF Commission adopted several conservation and management measures relating to target tuna and non-target species such as sea birds and sea turtles. The Commission called on the Scientific Committee, at its 2006 session in Manila, to prepare further advice for reducing bycatch – particularly of juvenile bigeye and yellowfin tuna and other non-target species. *Ends.*