



TECHNICAL AND COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE
Eleventh Regular Session
23 - 29 September 2015
Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia

INFORMAL NOTE – SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE MANAGEMENT

WCPFC-TCC11-2015-DP-06
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PAPER BY FFA MEMBER CCMs

This paper is to inform all CCMs of FFA member plans for improving the management of South Pacific albacore tuna.

Key issues in the fishery

A new South Pacific albacore tuna stock assessment was carried out by SPC-OFP in 2015 and was presented to SC11. The 2015 assessment made several methodological improvements over the 2012 assessment—including being able to compartmentalise the model into several regions for the first time – and incorporated new data, not just updated catch and effort, but tagging data. The new assessment was welcomed by SC11 and provides a much improved overview of the status of the stock, the connectivity between model regions, and information relevant to management.

In addition, SC11 considered economic trends of relevance to the management of the fishery – particularly management to achieve any future Target Reference Point for the stock – and it was noted by many CCMs that SC will need to increase the collection and analysis of economic statistics if the Committee is to achieve its mandate of providing WCPFC with the best scientific information available.

The new south Pacific albacore assessment is considerably more pessimistic about the status of the stock. Although the stock remains within the agreed biomass Limit Reference Point, its economic viability, particularly in relation to any reasonable Target Reference Point, is in even more doubt. SC11 recommended *“that longline fishing mortality and longline catch be reduced to avoid further decline in the vulnerable biomass so that economically viable catch rates can be maintained”*.

Current management arrangements

CMM 2010-05 remains the only WCPFC measure directly addressing the conservation and management of this stock. There have been several proposals by FFA members to improve the measure, without agreement, and the primary operative clause of this measure – a commitment by CCMs not to increase the number of their vessels *“actively fishing for South Pacific albacore in the*

Convention Area south of 20°S above current (2005) levels or recent historical (2000-2004) levels” remains difficult to assess by TCC in terms of compliance. Even if CMM 2010-05 were effectively implemented, it would at best maintain the status quo, and would not address the SC10 and SC11 advice to reduce longline fishing mortality and catch of south Pacific albacore.

To improve the management of south Pacific albacore FFA member CCMs have been taking their own regionally-coordinated actions, applying harmonised minimum standards across their EEZs, including agreements on EEZ catch limits, and the development of consensus on a primary regional stock management objective. Key measures were developed by the FFA Subcommittee on South Pacific Tuna and Billfish Fisheries (SC-SPTBF), and are now being more formally articulated and applied through the Tokelau Arrangement. The future of this fishery can only be assured through zone-based, not flag-based, management.

Tokelau Arrangement

The first meeting of the Participants in the Tokelau Arrangement (TKA) was held in Tuvalu on 8th & 10th May 2015. Currently these Participants are Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Papua New Guinea is planning to join soon. Participants discussed the design characteristics for a catch management scheme, and for setting an interim Target Reference Point for the South Pacific Albacore stock for TKA management purposes. It also agreed to develop a mechanism for potential accession by Territories; it formalised the existing agreement on EEZ catch limits; and discussed how the TKA South Pacific Albacore Tuna Catch Management Scheme would interact with the PNA Longline Vessels Days Management Scheme (in EEZs where both apply).

The second TKA meeting will take place in Honiara on 22-23rd October 2015, and will further discuss the Catch Management Scheme and consider the TKA stock management objective to the new stock assessment and refine the interim TRP, among other matters.

The TKA2 meeting will be followed by the FFA members’ 11th Management Options Consultation which will discuss and agree the FFA proposals to be made to WCPFC12.

Potential FFA joint member CCM proposals to WCPFC12 on south Pacific albacore tuna

Tokelau Arrangement Participants have agreed to propose their interim Target Reference Point for adoption by WCPFC as part of, and consistent with, the Harvest Strategy process outlined in CMM 2014-06. This is a biomass-based TRP, and addresses the objective of not only keeping south Pacific albacore at sustainable levels, but also restoring the stock biomass to a level that supported economically-viable Pacific Island-based albacore longline fisheries in the past. The scientific analysis to identify this level, based on the new stock assessment will be discussed at TKA2 in October. The timeframe for reaching this TRP, which is likely to be at a slightly higher level of biomass than is currently available, will also need to be discussed.

Noting the timeframes in the draft Harvest Strategy work plan, FFA members would be happy to continue to discuss management objectives and a TRP for the south Pacific albacore stock with interested CCMs in the margins of this meeting and informally by correspondence before WCPFC12.

FFA members are also likely to propose revisions to CMM 2010-05 that will be aimed at making compliance and the effectiveness of the CMM more amenable to assessment by WCPFC CCMs. According to SPC, it is not possible to identify the vessels actually targeting south Pacific albacore, based on the information available, so adherence to the commitment not to increase the number of such vessels operating south of 20°S above 2005 or 2001-4 average levels cannot be objectively assessed. It may also be proposed that the area of application of this measure be broadened, and it is also clear that if vessels actively fishing for south Pacific albacore are to be accurately identified, then a commitment will need to be made to the provision of operational data – both for the baseline period and for recent years.