



**COMMISSION
FOURTEENTH REGULAR SESSION
Manila, Philippines
3 – 7 December 2017**

2017 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**WCPFC14-2017-04
24 October 2017**

Paper by the WCPFC Secretariat

1. INTRODUCTION

1. This report is provided pursuant to Rule 13 of the Commission's Rules of Procedure. It highlights the main work programmes and activities of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and its Secretariat for 2017.

2.

3. The regular session of the Commission last year in Fiji determined the key priorities for the Commission for 2017. Pursuing those priorities underpinned the work programmes of the Commission and its Secretariat for 2017. Progressing the draft bridging measure for tropical tunas was one of those key priorities. With the financial support from the FAO managed Areas Beyond National Jurisdictions (Common Oceans) Tuna Project and the kind assistance of the Government of the USA in providing the venue, the Commission convened its intersessional meeting to progress the tropical tunas measure in Honolulu, Hawaii in August. That made the month of August in 2017 the busiest month with the intersessional meeting and the meetings of the Scientific Committee and the Northern Committee all occurred in the same month, as well as having draft Compliance Monitoring Reports issued for Commission members, cooperating non-members and participating territories (CCMs) initial reviews and comments. The process to progress the draft bridging measure for the South Pacific albacore resulted in a one day meeting which was tagged to the back of the meeting of the Technical and Compliance Committee in October and funded by New Zealand. The independent review of the Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) is underway with the review panel instituted and the review making good progress.

4. The work of the Commission and its Secretariat in 2017 continued to be extensive with the intersessional processes sanctioned for the year. This was on top of the work in support of the annual meetings of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission. Generally, the work undertaken in the reporting period was delivered on time with intended objectives and outcomes accomplished. Some of the key highlights include:

- i) successful convening of the intersessional meetings to progress the draft bridging measures for tropical tunas and for the South Pacific albacore;
- ii) successful convening of the annual meetings of the Scientific Committee, Northern Committee and the Technical and Compliance Committee;
- iii) timely completion and delivery of the draft Compliance Monitoring Report;
- iv) appointment of the independent panel to review the Compliance Monitoring Scheme and good progress on the ongoing review;

- v) steady progress on the development of electronic reporting and monitoring standards;
- vi) progress on the comprehensive approach to shark and ray conservation and management;
- vii) stock assessments undertaken on bigeye, yellowfin, South Pacific swordfish, North Pacific albacore, North Pacific blue shark and Pacific bigeye thresher shark, and risk assessment on southern hemisphere porbeagle shark; and
- viii) good progress on the implementation of the ABNJ and WPEA projects.

2. INTERSESSIONAL MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION

5. The Commission at its regular session in 2016 sanctioned two separate intersessional processes to progress two draft conservation and management measures (CMMs) that were presented for initial discussions namely the Draft Bridging CMM on Tropical Tunas and the Draft Bridging CMM on South Pacific Albacore. The intersessional processes culminated in two intersessional meetings of the Commission to progress negotiations of those draft measures.

2.1 Draft Bridging CMM on Tropical Tunas

6. The current tropical tuna measure (CMM 2016-01) will cease effect at the end of 2017. In anticipation of that eventuality, the Commission Chair Ms Rhea Moss-Christian of the Marshall Islands initiated a consultative process in 2016 to develop a successor measure for the tropical tunas. A draft consultative measure was developed and presented to the Commission at its meeting in 2016. The Commission considered the draft measure and agreed to convene an intersessional meeting to progress the draft measure on tropical tunas.

7. The Commission in sanctioning the intersessional meeting did not provide for a budget to support the meeting. So, the Secretariat had to fundraise and seek funding support for the meeting. The FAO managed Area Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) (Common Oceans) Tuna Project was able to provide financial support to support the attendance of representatives from developing state members and participating territories of the Commission. With the kind assistance of the Government of USA in providing the meeting venue, the intersessional meeting was convened in Honolulu, Hawaii from 22nd to 24th August 2017 and was chaired by the Commission Chair.

8. In advance of the Honolulu meeting, the Chair circulated Rev4 of the draft measure to provide the basis for discussions and negotiations at the meeting. The meeting was attended by about 160 participants and the negotiations were constructive and progressive in that members were able to identify the priority issues that remain outstanding and the extent of efforts needed to resolve them. A key outcome of the Honolulu meeting was a further revision of the draft measure Rev5 which was circulated to members and observers after the meeting on 8th September 2017 and will be the basis of further discussions and negotiations. It was heartening to observe constructive engagement of members and the positive momentum and spirit to work cooperatively towards reaching a meaningful and effective measure. The members agreed to convene a one day meeting before the annual meeting to further progress the draft Bridging CMM on Tropical Tunas. This meeting will be held on Friday 1st December 2017 in Manila, Philippines.

2.2 Draft bridging CMM for South Pacific Albacore

9. At WCPFC13 the Commission agreed to task New Zealand, on behalf of FFA, to advise members of a proposed process for progressing the Draft Bridging CMM on South Pacific Albacore. As a result of consultations with New Zealand and the rest of the membership, a one day intersessional meeting funded by New Zealand was held immediately following TCC13 in Pohnpei, on 4th October 2017, to progress the draft Bridging CMM on South Pacific Albacore. The Commission Chair opened the meeting with some opening remarks and then handed it over

to New Zealand who presided over the remainder of the proceedings. The meeting proceedings were organized in a working group format facilitated by Mr Ian Cartwright. There was a great deal of lively and productive discussions, especially around the timing and level of an interim target reference point. New Zealand and FFA have undertaken to consider comments from members and continue to work on the draft measure, with a view to submitting a revised draft for consideration at WCPFC14.

3. WORK OF THE COMMISSION SUBSIDIARY BODIES

10. The Commission has four subsidiary bodies through which the bulk of the work of the Commission is transacted. The subsidiary bodies include the Scientific Committee, Northern Committee, Technical and Compliance Committee, and the Finance and Administration Committee. Their annual meetings in 2017 were scheduled in advance of the annual session of the Commission to take place in December 3rd to 7th, 2017 in Manila, Philippines. The outcomes and recommendations of the meetings of the subsidiary bodies will be considered for decision by the Commission at its WPFC14 Manila meeting.

3.1 *The Scientific Committee*

11. The Scientific Committee (SC) was established to ensure the Commission obtains for its consideration the best scientific information available. Its regular session in 2017 which was its thirteenth (SC13) was held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, from 9th to 17th August 2017. The meeting was chaired by Ms Berry Muller of the Marshall Islands and was attended by over 180 participants. The meeting agenda continued to be structured around the four key themes and each thematic discussion was facilitated by Theme Conveners, namely for the Data and Statistic theme by Dr Valerie Post (USA) supported by Mr Peter Williams (SPC); Stock Assessment theme by Dr Jon Brodziak (USA) and Dr Hiroshi Nishida (Japan); Management Issues theme by Dr Robert Campbell (Australia); and the Ecosystem and Bycatch Mitigation theme by Dr John Annala (New Zealand) and Mr Aisake Batibasaga (Fiji).

12. SC13 considered the stock assessment outcomes for bigeye, yellowfin and South Pacific swordfish which were undertaken by SPC-OFP in 2017. Of special note is the work done under Project 35 on the age, growth and maturity research of bigeye tuna, which was presented to SC13 by Dr Jessica Farley (Australia). This work informed the 2017 bigeye tuna stock assessment where SC13 concluded that the bigeye stock status was likely not overfished and overfishing was likely not occurring. This advice was a shift from the earlier stock assessment advice that the bigeye tuna stock was in an overfished state and overfishing was occurring. The stock assessment advice on the bigeye and yellowfin stocks was timely as it informed the discussions and negotiations at the Intersessional Meeting to Progress the Draft Bridging Measure for Tropical Tunas in Honolulu, held the week after SC13.

13. The other stock assessments conducted in 2017 include stock assessments for North Pacific albacore and North Pacific blue shark by the International Scientific Committee (ISC); and the Pacific bigeye thresher shark and risk assessment for southern hemisphere porbeagle shark led by the ABNJ Project. Details on the results of these assessments and management advice are summarized in the SC13 Summary Report, including the proposed work SC programme and budget for 2018 – 2020.

14. The status and progress of the 2017 SC work programme and science-related projects undertaken during the reporting period are set out in *Annex I* to this report. The finalized Summary Report of SC13 will be posted on the Commission website by the time of WCPFC14.

15. The SC Chair, Ms Berry Muller of the Marshall Islands advised the meeting that she would be unavailable to continue after the meeting due to changes in her working arrangements. The participants at SC13 acknowledged with appreciation Ms Muller's excellent work and role in presiding over the last two SC meetings. A new Chair will be appointed by the Commission at WCPFC14.

3.2 *The Northern Committee*

16. The Northern Committee (NC) was established to consider and make recommendations on the implementation of measures adopted by the Commission for the area north of the 20 degree parallel of north latitude and the formulation of measures for fish stocks which mostly occur in that area. Its regular session in 2017 which was its thirteenth (NC13) took place in Busan, Korea, from 28th August to 1st September 2017. Mr Masanori Miyahara of Japan chaired the meeting.

17. During the NC13 meeting, the 2nd joint IATTC - WCPFC NC working group meeting was held to discuss the management of the Pacific bluefin tuna stock. The working group meeting was chaired by co-chair Mr Masanori Miyahara and Ms Dorothy Lowman. Key conclusions of the joint meeting included:

- a) Recruitment scenarios were selected for spawning stock biomass (SSB) projections;
- b) Management objectives are:
 - i) rebuilding the SSB to the historical median by 2024 with at least 60% probability; and
 - ii) after reaching the historical median, rebuilding the SSB to 20%SSB_{F=0} by 2034 with at least 60% probability;
- c) For management after reaching 20%SSB_{F=0}, ISC is requested to develop management strategy evaluation (MSE) for Pacific bluefin tuna by 2024; and
- d) An emergency rule is established to cope with the adverse effects on the rebuilding of the stock due to drastic drops of recruitment.

18. The other recommendations by NC13 are that the Commission:

- a) adopt the Harvest Strategy for Pacific Bluefin Tuna Fisheries;
- b) adopt a revised CMM for Pacific Bluefin Tuna to incorporate the adoption of Harvest Strategy;
- c) adopt the attached revision to the title of previously adopted precautionary management framework for North Pacific albacore, so that it may be recognized as a harvest strategy;
- d) develop a rebuilding plan for the North Pacific striped marlin stock be developed as a matter of priority; and
- e) decide if North Pacific blue shark stock should be designated as a northern stock based on the available information from ISC, SPC and the advice of SC.

19. NC13 agreed to hold the 3rd meeting of the Joint Working Group between WCPFC NC and IATTC in conjunction with NC14. The Summary Report for NC13 is published on the Commission website.

3.3 *The Technical and Compliance Committee*

20. The Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) was established to advise the Commission on the technical aspects of implementation of CMMs and compliance with such measures. Its regular session in 2017 which was its thirteenth (TCC13) was held at Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia from 27th September to 3rd October 2017. The meeting was chaired by Ms Alexa Cole of the USA and over 190 participants attended the meeting. TCC13 established small working groups to progress discussions on the margins of the meeting on the matters of

cooperating non-member applications; and developing a comprehensive approach to shark and ray conservation and management. Two members of the Independent Review Panel for the Compliance Monitoring Scheme observed TCC13 proceedings and actively engaged with delegates to obtain their views on the operation and workings of the scheme.

21. TCC13 committed at least three and a half days to the review of the full draft Compliance Monitoring Report covering 2016 activities prepared by the Secretariat in accordance with CMM 2015-07. The review continued to be held in closed session to the exclusion of observer delegations. In addition, recommendations were made regarding the 2015 and 2016 assessments of Capacity Assistance Needed and Flag State Investigations. TCC13 agreed to recommend a provisional Compliance Monitoring Report to the Commission for consideration at WCPFC14. A majority of CCMs at TCC13 supported recommending to WCPFC14 that the Commission extend CMM 2015-07 while the Independent Review Panel completes its review work.

22. The routine annual reports of the WCPFC MCS Programmes administered by the Secretariat were also presented and reviewed by TCC13, and they covered the Vessel Monitoring System, Regional Observer Programme (ROP), High Seas Transshipment Monitoring, High Seas Boarding and Inspection, Record of Fishing Vessels, Eastern High Seas Pocket Special Management Area, Secretariat Integrated-MCS Information Management Systems and online reporting IT tools, Administration of Data Requests and gaps in Scientific data submissions.

23. TCC13 also received papers containing draft electronic-reporting standards for observer data and high seas transshipment notifications and declarations. CCMs were provided an opportunity to submit further comments on the draft standards, and SPC-OFP and the Secretariat will submit revised versions of the draft standards to WCPFC14 for consideration.

24. TCC13 also recommended that the three vessels currently on the WCPFC IUU vessel list are maintained. Six cases related to alleged illegal activities undertaken by four vessels during 2016 were reviewed by TCC13, however after receiving updates from the notifying CCMs and responsible flag CCMs involved, TCC13 agreed that no vessels were to be included on the Provisional IUU vessel list.

25. A full record of the TCC13 meeting is posted on the website and the outcomes and recommendations will be discussed at WCPFC14. The Provisional CMR documentation is available to CCMs and their authorized users through the WCPFC intranet and a copy has also been posted on the secure side of the WCPFC website. The key TCC related activities in 2017 are set out in *Annex 2* to this report.

3.4 The Finance and Administration Committee

26. The Finance and Administration Committee (FAC) is responsible for reviewing and advising the Commission on its budget and other financial and administrative requirements. Its eleventh session (FAC11) will be held immediately prior to and as necessary throughout WCPFC14 and will be chaired by Co-Chair Magele Etuati Ropeti of Samoa. The other Co-Chair Paul Callaghan of USA has advised of his inability to continue in the role and a replacement is necessary and nominations for his replacement will be considered by WCPFC14. The Commission owes Paul Callaghan a vote of thanks for his services.

27. As expected, FAC11 will consider the routine matters relating to personnel, the work programme and budget and a host of administrative matters relating to the work of the Commission including issues associated with the headquarters office. In addition, the FAC will consider a paper from the Chair of the Intersessional Special Requirements Funds (SRF) working

group, Dr Liz Brierley of Australia, on a new structure for managing contributions and requests for the use of the fund. The report and outcomes of FAC11 will be presented for discussion and decision at WCPFC14.

4. INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

4.1 Strategic Planning

28. The Commission underwent an agreed process in 2016 to develop a Strategic Plan that culminated in a draft Strategic Plan presented for consideration at WCPFC13 in December 2016. The Commission noted the draft plan and tasked the Executive Director to work with interested members to further refine the plan and initiate the development of a corporate plan. In light of other key priorities of the Commission for 2017, there was no further progress achieved in developing a Strategic Plan. The Secretariat will seek further guidance from the Commission at its WCPFC14 meeting as to the value of pursuing the development of a Strategic Plan.

4.2 Staffing matters

29. The number of Secretariat staff remain relatively stable with 24 established staff positions comprising of 9 professional staff, including the Executive Director, and 15 support staff. There are currently two vacancies for support staff. The Secretariat also hosts the WCPFC Technical Coordinator-Shark and Bycatch; Dr Shelley Clarke, for the ABNJ (Common Oceans) Tuna Project Bycatch Component that is implemented by the WCPFC. Mr Dale Withington, a part time Project Manager for the WPEA New Zealand funded Activity was recruited in the middle of the year. A new addition to the staff in 2017 is Ms Eliza Sailas who was recruited for the local staff position of Receptionist/Secretary. The position of the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Manager was advertised in 2016 and Mr Albert Carlot was reappointed in early 2017.

30. At WCPFC13 the Secretariat had proposed the establishment of a full-time ER and EM position, and FAC10 had directed that the full funding for the new position is to be included in the 2018 budget. The Secretariat is proposing that in 2018 the E-reporting implementation activities at the Secretariat should continue to be supported through consultancy arrangements.

4.3 Annual accounts and contribution

31. The 2016 financial statements were completed, audited and circulated to Members within the specified time frames, together with the External Auditor's Reports. The Auditor reported that the statements and accounts compiled were compliant with the required accounting standards as well as the Commission's Financial Regulations, and presented a fair view of the financial position. The Auditor's report will be presented for the review and final consideration of WCPFC14.

32. Article 18 (3) of the Convention provides that if a member's contributions are in arrears for the preceding two full years the member concerned shall not participate in the taking of decisions by the Commission, subject to the Commission permitting such a member to vote. It is gladly reported that currently there are no members who are affected by that conventional provision.

4.4 Financial and administrative arrangements

33. The financial and administrative arrangements of the organization have operated satisfactorily during the year with the continued use of QuickBooks Enterprise as the Commission's financial management system. Management of the headquarters building services and grounds continued

to be a challenge; however, by implementing a regular maintenance schedule of the buildings and grounds with budgetary support meant those properties and assets continue to be in good order. The Secretariat continued to benefit from its solar panel installation accruing saving to the tune of \$60,000 a year from electricity bills. It has also embarked on a greening policy by limiting with the aim of eliminating the use of plastic bottles on Secretariat premises.

34. At the start of 2017 a cut to the fiber optic cable linking Pohnpei to the rest of the world was identified. The Secretariat worked with FSM Telecommunications to ensure services for key systems would be operational via a satellite connection during the repairs. The support provided by FSM Telecommunications was commendable and minimal downtime was experienced by the office.

4.5 Trust Funds

35. There have been continued contributions to the Voluntary Fund in 2017. Canada contributed USD 50,000 to the Voluntary Fund and USD 50,000 to the Special Requirements Fund (SRF). In addition, the United States of America provided USD 35,000 towards the SRF. Korea provided USD 173,590 to the Voluntary fund for the Tuna Tagging Project.

36. The European Union is set to provide USD 595,260 in funding in 2017 for long term tagging of bigeye tuna, development of potential measures to reduce interactions with bigeye tuna in the purse seine fishery, simulation testing of reference points and estimation of post-release shark and ray survival on long line and purse seine fisheries. There are ongoing discussions with the EU for additional funding in 2017. An update on the progress of those discussions will be provided at FAC11 and WCPFC14.

37. The Japan Trust Fund made available USD 139,290 for 2017 to support projects aimed for capacity building in fisheries statistics, regulation and enforcement in small island developing states. The specific projects that received funding support from the JTF are included in the report on the fund to be tabled at FAC11 in working paper referenced *WCPFC14-2017-FAC11-06*.

38. At WCPFC13 New Zealand signed an agreement with WCPFC to provide funding for the West Pacific East Asia Project Fund. This year, USD 1,004,7300 was received towards that project. In addition, UNDP continued to fund the WPEA project and has provided USD 595,260 in funding in 2017. There are ongoing discussions with New Zealand for additional funding in 2017 on E-reporting implementation. An update on the progress of those discussions will be provided at FAC11 and WCPFC14.

39. The FAO's Area's Beyond National Jurisdiction Project continued this year and USD 1,133,529 has been provided in funding for this project this year. It is worth noting that this project also made available USD 96,912 to support the attendance of representatives from developing state members and participating territories of the Commission at the intersessional meeting to progress the draft CMM on tropical tunas in Honolulu, Hawaii.

40. The Chinese Taipei Trust Fund was established in late 2016 and USD 400,000 was received in 2017. This fund was made available to support projects aimed for capacity building in fisheries in small island developing states. The specific projects that received funding support from the CTTF are included in the report on the fund to be tabled at FAC11 in working paper referenced *WCPFC14-2017-FAC11-06*.

4.6 Information Technology Systems

41. As in previous years, the Commission corporate network maintained operations and support to CCMs and the Secretariat at more than 99% systems availability. In response to increased spamming and attempted intrusions (world-wide trends), additional levels of protection were implemented. That was an important part of the work between the Secretariat and its services level agreement partners. The key strategic changes for 2017 included: the Information Technology Officer has completed 12 months of services since he joined the Secretariat; development of the information technology and security policies and procedures that would replace the current Information Security Policy and address the priority issues flagged by the Deloitte security review of the vessel monitoring system, the information management system and the Record of Fishing Vessels; more reliable fast internet capacity to support online systems and applications used by members and streamline backup and redundancy operations; and further alignment of the IT resources to support the priority work of the Secretariat, particularly the compliance case file management system, compliance monitoring reports and online IT tools as requested by members to assist MCS personnel in efficiently discharging their responsibilities.

42. Over the last twelve months, in addition to its usual duties, the IT team continued to actively support the VMS team and members with their collective effort to include all vessels tracking agreement form (VTAF) or mobile transceiver units (MTU) information received from members in the MTU Register so that all vessels on the record of fishing vessels are reporting as required. The Secretariat was able to deliver on its key online compliance monitoring reporting systems and website applications, working together with its services level agreement partners and external developers. The results of such collaborations were evident in the work of the compliance and science teams and the resulting annual reports of the vessel monitoring system, record of fishing vessels, compliance monitoring scheme and the regional observer programme (ROP).

43. The Secretariat's data warehouse facility and data marts continued to support the Secretariat's business intelligence and analytical capability in support of the Commission and members' activities for 2017. New lists to support the Compliance case file management system were made available to members on the Commission intranet and new online IT tools were delivered by the Secretariat to support MCS activities of authorized CCM users. The availability of all data sets submitted to the Commission to support the conservation and management work of members and the Secretariat was a worthwhile exercise. It is fair to observe that the Secretariat now has more integrated systems and databases delivering the level of analysis and reporting results currently requested by members, and has the potential to address further needs as required.

5. SERVICES PROVIDERS FOR THE COMMISSION

44. When the Commission was established in 2004, the Convention that established it acknowledged that some of the functions expected of the Commission were already undertaken by then existing regional organizations and arrangements. So, the Commission was encouraged to take advantage of those existing capacities and avoid duplicating them. The Commission now maintains contractual arrangements with other regional organisations and arrangements for the provision of certain services.

5.1 The Oceanic Fisheries Programme of the Pacific Community

45. The Oceanic Fisheries Programme of the Pacific Community (SPC-OFP) continued in the role of conducting data management, statistical analysis, stock assessments and related analytical services, management analyses and member performance monitoring, and other advisory and technical services for the Commission. In 2017, SPC-OFP authored and co-authored 58 papers

and reports for SC13 and provided *ad hoc* advice and support throughout the year. In addition, SPC-OPF provided the necessary technical and scientific advisory support for the following activities:

- a) Meetings of WCPFC13, TCC13, and the intersessional meetings to progress the draft measures for tropical tunas and South Pacific albacore;
- b) WPEA Project workshops for tuna data review and annual tuna catch estimates;
- c) The Pacific Tuna Tagging Project and coordinated the project steering committee meeting;
- d) The 2017 Workshop on the Analysis of CPUE for Stock Assessments;
- e) The Pre-Assessment Workshop, to obtain advice and other inputs from CCMs on the stock assessments conducted in 2017;
- f) Advice on the completeness of scientific data provision by CCMs, ROP data submission and available information on purse-seine and longline observer coverage, and catch and effort table summaries for tropical tuna CMMs (CMM 2016-01) and south Pacific albacore (CMM 2015-02); and
- g) In 2016/17, SPC-OPF colleagues have also provided considerable assistance to the Secretariat so that ROP-data could be used as a source in the online Compliance Case File system.

46. In addition, SPC-OPF facilitated access by researchers to samples contained in the WCPFC Tissue Bank and actioned various requests for access to WCPFC data, as approved by the Executive Director.

5.2 The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency

47. The Commission continued its association with the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) through its service level agreement for VMS services, and since 30 June 2016, the service provider used by FFA has been TrackWell (www.trackwell.com). The Pacific VMS system continues to operate as two separate and distinct entities to protect the integrity of the Commission VMS data and the FFA VMS data. Currently there are almost 3,780 vessels reporting to the Commission VMS, and nearly 33% report through the FFA VMS system with position transfer to the WCPFC (the Commission separately maintains VMS contracts for airtime services for positions from the WCPFC-VMS direct reporting vessels). The Commission VMS system under the services level agreement provided continued and ongoing support to routine VMS services, “flick the switch” implementation and members’ high seas MCS operations.

5.3 The International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean

48. The International Scientific Committee (ISC) continued to be the scientific services provider for the Northern Committee and provided scientific information and advice as requested by the Northern Committee regarding northern stocks and other tuna-like stocks in the North Pacific Ocean. In 2017, ISC conducted stock assessments for North Pacific albacore, Pacific blue marlin and North Pacific blue shark. The ISC provided the following stock status for North Pacific tuna and tuna-like species that:

- a) North Pacific albacore tuna are not overfished nor experiencing overfishing;
- b) Pacific bluefin tuna are overfished and experiencing overfishing;
- c) the western and central North Pacific Ocean swordfish stock is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing and the East Pacific Ocean swordfish stock is not overfished but likely experiencing overfishing;
- d) the Pacific blue marlin stock is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing;
- e) the North Pacific striped marlin stock is experiencing overfishing and is overfished; and

f) North Pacific blue shark is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing.

49. The other activities and information provided by ISC for 2017-2018 include:

- a) the 1st Pacific Bluefin Tuna International Stakeholders Meeting hosted by ISC to consider the Commission's request on rebuilding Pacific bluefin tuna SSB to 20% unfished SSB by 2034 and development of emergency rules;
- b) an Ad-Hoc Working Group to be formed to explore development of an international highly migratory species tagging program with an initial focus on Pacific bluefin tuna and NP albacore tuna;
- c) the ISC work plan for 2017-18 includes completing North Pacific swordfish, Pacific bluefin tuna, and shortfin mako shark assessments, as well as hosting a shortfin mako shark ageing workshop, close-kin workshop and the 3rd MSE workshop; and
- d) John Holmes (Canada) was elected as the next ISC Chairman and Eric Chang (Chinese-Taipei) as the ISC Vice Chairman.

6. RELATIONS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

50. As required by the WCPFC Convention, it is imperative that the Commission cooperate and collaborate with the FAO and other specialized UN agencies and other relevant organizations, in particular the other four tuna regional fisheries management bodies, namely, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), to share information and exchange views on areas of common interest and best practices.

6.1 UNFAO

51. There was no scheduled meeting of the UNFAO that the Commission attended in 2017. However, the Executive Director attended the annual meeting of the steering committee of the ABNJ project in Rome and had the opportunity to interact and update senior officials of the FAO fisheries departments on the work and key priorities of the Commission in 2017. The biennial meeting of the FAO Committee on Fisheries is scheduled for 2018.

6.2 The UN Oceans Summit

52. The Executive Director represented the Commission at the inaugural UN Ocean Conference in New York, USA from 5 to 9 June 2017. The Assistant Compliance Manager was also in attendance, courtesy of the UN-Nippon Foundation of Japan Fellowship Programme Alumni meeting. The conference's main objective was to support the implementation of sustainable development goal (SDG) 14 and sought to mobilize actions for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources. The relevant target of SDG14 is the one that aims by 2020 to effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield. The Conference was co-chaired by Fiji and Sweden and the Pacific regional organisations like FFA, SPREP and SPC had a large and visible presence as they had stalls and co-hosted several side events. The Executive Director was able to contribute and share the achievements of the Commission in terms of its integrated MCS programmes in the areas of high seas within its convention area and the suite of measures the Commission has adopted to ensure the WCPO stocks are managed sustainably and within sustainable levels. The Secretariat was invited and attended the Pacific preparatory meeting that strategized the participation and contribution of the Pacific to the UN Ocean conference processes held in Suva, Fiji in March 2017.

6.3 Tuna RFMOs

53. Relations with the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission remain one of the key relationships for WCPFC because of our shared boundaries, joint management area over overlapped convention areas and potentially shared tuna stocks. In this regard, the Secretariats of the WCPFC and IATTC maintained close liaisons and cooperated in various areas. In 2017, the WCPFC through the Northern Committee had its second joint meeting with IATTC to continue consideration of management issues for the Pacific bluefin tuna stock. The outcomes of the joint meeting are set out in paragraph 16 of this report. Training for cross accreditation of observers continued in 2017 and so as ongoing collaboration under the by-catch component of the ABNJ project. The Executive Director attended the annual meeting of the IATTC in July 2017 and had the opportunity to meet and exchanged briefs with the IATTC Director Dr Guillermo Compean.

54. The Commission Chair in April of this year signed two memoranda of cooperation with CCSBT, one on the endorsement of ROP observers for observing transshipments on high seas of the WCPFC convention area; and the other on the exchange and release of data between CCSBT and WCPFC.

55. The Secretariat has also maintained close liaison with other regional organizations and have participated in their meetings and workshops. The meetings and workshops that the Secretariat attended are set out in *Annex 3*.

6.4 Pacific Regional Organisations

56. The Commission continued to maintain close links with the relevant Pacific regional organisations. The Commission Chair and the Executive Director attended the annual meeting of the FFA ministerial meeting in Mooloolaba, Australia in July 2017. They took the opportunity of the meeting to update FFA ministers of fisheries on the key priorities for the Commission for 2017. Side meetings were also organized with officials to brief them on preparations for the Honolulu meeting on the draft bridging measure on tropical tunas and the arrangements to progress the South Pacific albacore. The Executive Director also attended the FFA Officials meeting held before ministerial meeting.

57. The Executive Director attended the annual meeting of the Pacific Islands Leaders in Apia, Samoa and was invited to be a panelist on a panel discussion with leaders on the theme of maritime domain awareness – regional mechanisms to counter maritime illegal activities. The Executive Director informed the leaders gathering of the suite of monitoring and surveillance programmes the Commission administered, specifically on the high seas within its convention area to combat IUU fishing. The meeting attended by head of states and governments of the Pacific is the premier annual regional political gathering for the Pacific. Fisheries was agreed to be a permanent agenda for the leaders meeting.

58. The SPC hosted the biennial meeting of Heads of Fisheries of SPC members in March 2017 and the Executive Director represented the Commission at the meeting. The Executive Director also attended the annual officials and ministerial meetings of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement.

7. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

7.1 ABNJ (Common Oceans) Tuna Project Bycatch Component

59. A portion of the bycatch component of the ABNJ (Common Oceans) Tuna Project is implemented by the WCPFC under an Execution Agreement signed by the FAO and WCPFC on 25 October 2014 for a 3.2 million USD package of work designed to reduce bycatch and other adverse ecosystem impacts on biodiversity in global tuna fisheries. The project is overseen by a Steering Committee which meets annually to review its progress. The 2017 annual meeting of the Steering Committee was held in Rome, Italy in July and it reviewed the progress of the various components of the project and considered and endorsed the work programme and budget for the project for onward years. The Executive Director was accompanied to the Rome meeting by the WCPFC Technical Coordinator-Shark and Bycatch (TCSB).

60. The key achievements of the project in 2017 include:

- a) An expert panel was convened in Wellington, New Zealand in January to support the development of a survey design for the ABNJ- and EU-funded shark post-release mortality tagging. The panel's report, which includes a recommended survey design as well as best practice principles on equipment selection, statistical stratification and deployment, was presented to SC13 as an information paper.
- b) Shark post-release mortality tagging studies for longline fisheries were initiated in May with the support of the New Zealand observer programme. As of 30th September, 29 of a target number of 33 shortfin mako sharks have been tagged. A second phase of post-release mortality studies involving tagging silky and shortfin mako sharks is underway in Fiji with training sessions for observers and crew held on 6th and 13th September.
- c) An ABNJ Tuna Project proposal for a bycatch data exchange (compilation) protocol (BDEP) based on a Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) model was populated by WCPFC for a second year. The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission's Scientific Committee agreed the template in December 2016 and the IOTC Secretariat is now working to populate the template from existing data holdings.
- d) At the request of the CCSBT Secretariat the TCSB prepared and presented papers on harmonization of bycatch condition codes and shark mitigation at the CCSBT's 12th Ecologically-related Species Working Group in March.
- e) The first of four stock status assessments, on the southern hemisphere porbeagle shark (*Lamna nasus*), was completed as a joint effort between CCSBT and WCPFC and participating scientists from New Zealand, Japan, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. The assessment was presented to SC13.
- f) The second stock status assessment, on the Pacific-wide bigeye thresher shark (*Alopias superciliosus*), was completed in September 2016 and presented to SC13.
- g) A third stock status assessment for Pacific-wide silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) was initiated in collaboration with IATTC. Joint analysis of purse seine data produced a co-authored paper for the IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee in May and a WCPFC-authored paper for SC13 in August.
- h) The Bycatch Management Information System (BMIS) was launched with an all new interface in May at major fisheries meetings for both the Eastern and Western Pacific. The site provides a portal to >1000 curated references, species identification and safe release guides, and social media links (<https://www.bmis-bycatch.org/>).
- i) The results of the joint analysis workshop on the effectiveness of sea turtle mitigation measures were presented to SC13.
- j) The WCPFC-led components of the ABNJ Tuna Project contributed 9 papers for WCPFC SC13 and TCC13.

7.2 West Pacific East Asia Project.

61. The GEF-funded UNDP Project, *Sustainable Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the West Pacific and East Asian Seas* (WPEA), was originally a three-year full size project which commenced in October 2014. The participating governments were Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam.

62. In early 2017, the UNDP conducted a mid-term review of the project. Based on the findings of the mid-term review, it was unlikely that several of the envisaged results will be achieved by the planned closure date of 28th October 2017 due to the delayed start of project activities, around a year, in Indonesia and Vietnam. Accordingly, the Project Board at the 4th Board Meeting in May 2017 agreed to a no-cost extension of the project, and recently the UNDP approved the extension for 18 months (by 28th April 2019).

63. The WPEA Project is linked with the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) and the Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Project (YSLME) under the Project Framework Document (PFD). Under the Project Framework Document, PEMSEA, YSLME and WCPFC should cooperate in the implementation of the three projects for regional and sub-regional programmes and mechanisms for coast and ocean governance.

64. In 2017, the Secretariat conducted the following work to implement the WPEA project in the three countries:

- a) Development of detailed annual work plans and budget for the following year;
- b) Review and endorsement of over 30 project activity proposals;
- c) Reporting the progress of WPEA project to GEF through UNDP;
- d) Preparation of Project Board meetings and UNDP's Mid-term Review by an independent consultant;
- e) Supporting and supervision of national project coordinators for their coordination and implementation of WPEA project activities at national level;
- f) Together with national project coordinators, convene *ad hoc* consultation meetings with the three countries to review the progress of project activities, develop terms of references for domestic consultancies, and supervise and facilitate coordination of such consultancy contracts together with UNDP;
- g) Development of a WPEA website portal with PEMSEA;
- h) Supporting and administering participation of the three country representatives in SPC's Tuna Data Workshop, SC and TCC meetings;
- i) Supervision of tuna catch data collection through port sampling, and administering data review and annual catch estimates workshops supported by SPC;
- j) Supervising prior study consultancies and subsequent review workshops on the consultancy outputs regarding climate change and tuna fisheries, tuna supply chain analysis, eco-labelling and certification scheme, reference points and harvest control rules, application of Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) to tuna fisheries; and
- k) Coordinating the 3rd sub-regional workshop with the three countries on EAFM and identification of common issues.

65. The 5th WPEA Project Board Meeting is scheduled to be held in Manila, Philippines, from 8th to 9th December 2017, where annual work plan and budget for 2018 will be reviewed and finalized.

66. The 3rd phase of the WPEA Project, called the *Western Pacific East Asia Improved Tuna Monitoring Activity* (WPEA-ITM), funded by the government of New Zealand for the next five

years, is in progress for its commencement. Mr Dale Withington has been hired as the Project Manager of this Activity.

7. FUTURE WORK

67. This report and the reports of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission will all be presented to the Commission at its WCPFC14 meeting in Manila, Philippines from 3rd to 7th December. The Commission will then decide on the key work areas for 2018 and onward years. Without preempting the outcomes of the WCPFC14 the following activities are envisaged to feature predominately in the work of the Commission and its Secretariat in 2018 and outer years:

- a) The work on harvest strategy will continue and intensify as the Commission and its members gained greater familiarity and level of comfort with this new approach to fisheries management.
- b) Regardless of the outcome on the tropical tuna measure, work will continue to strengthen and support the implementation of this key conservation and management measure.
- c) Work on refining and strengthening the stock assessment outcome for the bigeye stock will continue into 2018 as it is key scientific information that inform discussions on and the implementation of the tropical tuna measure.
- d) The work on the Pacific bluefin tuna will continue to be on the spotlight because of the severe overfished state it is in and the global interest to see effective rebuilding measures.
- e) The work towards the adoption in 2018 of a conservation and management measure that encompasses the comprehensive approach to shark and ray conservation and management will intensify and clear guidelines on this work is required from WCPFC14.
- f) The report of the independent review of the Compliance Monitoring Scheme is expected in March 2018 and its review and analysis will generate a significant and timely report that Members will need to review and consider in advance of the Commission meeting in 2018.
- g) The continued operation of the current compliance monitoring scheme in 2018 will continue to be resource intense and time consuming for the Secretariat's compliance team and for CCMs, but can be capably supported through the use of the existing WCPFC online reporting systems and associated IT infrastructure. Reflecting on the past level and volume of obligations to be reviewed by the Compliance Monitoring Scheme, the Commission will be wisely advised to be more selective and strategic in its selection of those obligations.
- h) The interest in fast tracking the developments in electronic reporting and monitoring will see this body of work grow steadily in the future and with adequate resourcing and clear guidance from the intersessional working group on ERandEM which has been recommended to meet in 2018 there is huge potential to enhance the coverage and quality of data collection to better support the conservation and management of the fisheries of interest to the Commission.

8. RECOMMENDATION

68. WCPFC14 is invited to consider and note the report.

Status of Key SC Work Programme Activities in 2017

- ***Project 15: West Pacific East Asia Project***

The Secretariat continued to manage and implement the GEF-funded WPEA Project (Sustainable Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the West Pacific and East Asian Seas). The fishery monitoring component of the WPEA project will continue under the name of *WPEA Improved Tuna Monitoring Activity* funded by the government of New Zealand.

- ***Project 35: Age, growth and maturity of bigeye tuna in the western and central Pacific Ocean***

The outcomes from this project, presented as SC13-SA-WP-01, are significant, given that they informed the current bigeye stock assessment.

- ***Project 35b: Management of the WCPFC Tuna Tissue Bank***

This project has an ongoing annual budget of USD 97,200. Five external requests to access the tissue bank have been received to date. There have been some minor teething problems which have been resolved by the Secretariat and the Tissue Bank Manager, facilitating a smoother application process.

- ***Project 42: Pacific-wide tagging project (PTTP)***

A PTTP Steering Committee meeting was convened during SC13, and SPC-OFP presented a progress report on 2016-2017 tagging activities and the status of tag recovery. The SC has recommended an increased budget to support this critical work of the Commission of USD 500,000 in 2018. Additional funding has been promised by the EU to focus on tagging of bigeye tuna around FADs.

- ***Project 57: Limit Reference Points - Develop proposed limit reference points for elasmobranchs***

As requested by WCPFC12, SC12 defined the scope of work for this project. However, the funding was later considered inadequate for the work required. SC13 revisited the scope and budget, and raised the latter from USD 25,000 to USD 55,000. Subject to a decision of WCPFC14, the work will be tendered and completed in time to present the outputs to SC14.

- ***Project 60: Purse Seine Species Composition***

SPC-OFP reported on work conducted to date in SC13-ST-WP-02. USD 50,000 was provided to support more data collection in 2017. WCPFC is not asked to fund the sampling in 2018, when the focus will be on consolidation of the analytical work, though additional observer will be obtained when available.

- ***Project 67: Range contraction of tropical tunas, sharks, and billfish (Review of impacts of recent high catches of skipjack tuna on fisheries on the margins of the WCPFC Convention Area)***

The result of the project was reported on in paper SC13-SA-WP-07 (*Impacts of Recent High Catches of Skipjack on Fisheries on the Margins of the WCPFC Convention Area*).

- ***Project 75: MSE Related work in support of WCPFC Harvest Strategies.***

SPC has employed a modeler to work on management strategy evaluation (MSE) in support of the WCPFC Harvest Strategy Framework. This work is partly supported in 2017 by funds from the EU. Significant funding from NZ will cover the cost of two additional staff to join the MSE team. Relevant papers presented to SC13 include: SC13-MI-WP-01, *Performance indicators and monitoring strategies for South Pacific Albacore compatible with candidate management objectives for the Southern Longline Fishery*; SC13-MI-WP-03 *Performance indicators and monitoring strategies for Bigeye and Yellowfin Tuna compatible with candidate management objectives for the Tropical Longline Fishery* and SC13-MI-WP-04 *Developments in the MSE modelling framework*.

- ***Project 76: Pilot study of the potential for using non-ISSF associated cannery receipt data for the work of the WCPFC (An EU supported project)***

The final report for this completed project was presented to SC13, SC13-ST-IP-05 *Pilot Study of the Potential for using Non-ISSF Associated Cannery Receipt Data for the work of the WCPFC*.

- ***Project 77: Development of potential measures to reduce interactions with bigeye tuna in the purse seine fishery in the western and central Pacific Ocean ('bigeye hotspots analysis')***

This project was reported under SC13-MI-WP-07 and presented to SC13. The SC noted the need for more detailed information on FAD design and deployment etc. to facilitate improved analysis. improved in

- ***Project 78: Draft progress report Analysis of Observer and Logbook Data Pertaining to Key Shark Species in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean***

Feedback on the draft report submitted to SC13 led to the withdrawal of the draft, and agreement that a final report should be submitted for consideration by 31 December 2017 as specified within the contract, and presented (at the consultants own expense] to SC14.

Key TCC Related Activities in 2017

The activities of the WCPFC MCS programme are covered in detail in the Executive Directors Report to TCC13 on Operational Issues with the WCPFC MCS Programmes (*TCC13 working paper WCPFC-TCC13-2017-07*). Some highlights in 2017 include:

- The Compliance Monitoring Scheme (CMS) remained at the core of the Commission's MCS programme. It provided a platform for the TCC to undertake its key task of assessing the level of compliance of CCMs of their obligations under the WCPFC Convention and CMMs. But it is a platform that rests on top of a network of integrated MCS tools that furnished the relevant data and information that inform TCC's assessment.
- The appointment of a three members Independent Review Panel to undertake the Review of the Compliance Monitoring Scheme. The objective of the Review is to assist CCMs to improve compliance with their obligations under the Convention and CMMs and to this end the review will be forward looking and is expected to provide clear recommendations on how best to implement the CMS. The independent review of the CMS is timely and the Secretariat stand ready to support the review with the expectation that the review outcomes that are due by March 2018 will suggest improvements to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the CMS.
- The delivery of a number of new online technical solutions to assist MCS personnel in efficiently discharging their responsibilities that included:
 - a list of vessels that have been previously inspected under the High Seas Boarding and Inspection Scheme specifically, the WCPFC RFV vessel identification number (VID), Vessel Name, International Radio Call Sign (IRCS), date of boarding and Name of inspecting member;
 - updates and expanded coverage of the online WCPFC Compliance Case file system to include two new lists: *GEN-3 pre-notification process of possible alleged infringements* and a *purse seine cetacean and whale shark interaction compliance case list*;
 - a list of Record of Fishing Vessels WCPFC VMS reporting status; and
 - a file providing access to CCMs to historical information from the Record of Fishing Vessels.
- Through the efficient use of a limited budget and with financial assistance assured by New Zealand, the commencement of work to scope and develop a work plan for implementation of MCS/compliance electronic-reporting at the Secretariat. This included the tabling at TCC13 paper presenting proposed draft standards for the E-reporting of high seas transshipment notices and declarations which will be further considered at WCPFC14.

Other Meetings and Workshops Attended by the Secretariat

In addition to the meetings of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, and key regional and international meeting noted in the body of this report, the Secretariat participated in these other meetings and workshops in 2017 as follow:

- IATTC/WCPFC Cross Endorsement Training (Feb 2017), Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia
- Regional Observer Coordinators Workshop (Feb 2017), Nadi, Fiji
- FSM, Marshall Islands, Palau, Solomon Islands E-Monitoring meeting (Mar 2017), Majuro, Republic of Marshall Islands
- Observer training (Mar 2017), Jakarta, Indonesia
- FFA MCS Working Group (Mar 2017), Honiara, Solomon Islands
- Joint Tuna RFMO Compliance Officers meeting (Mar 2017), Vigo, Spain
- Pacific Islands UN Oceans Conference meeting (Mar 2017), Suva, Fiji
- SPC Tuna Data Workshop (Apr 2017), Noumea, New Caledonia
- Workshop on the Analysis of CPUE for Stock Assessments and the Preparatory Workshop for 2017 Stock Assessments (Apr 2017), Noumea, New Caledonia
- Observer training Bureau of Fisheries and Resources (May 2017), Manila, Philippines
- United Nation-Nippon Foundation of Japan Fellowship Programme Alumni meeting in conjunction with The Ocean Conference (Jun 2017), New York, United States of America
- WCPFC-SPC meeting on joint procedures in support of the Online WCPFC Compliance Case file system (Jul 2017), Noumea, New Caledonia
- The 17th Meeting of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (Jul 2017), Vancouver, Canada
- Meeting of Panel for Independent Review of the CMS (Aug 2017), Sydney, Australia
- The 19th National Tuna Congress (Sep 2017), General Santos, Philippines
- The 3rd ISC North Pacific Albacore Management Strategy Evaluation Workshop (Oct 2017), Vancouver, Canada
- FFA/SPC E-monitoring Workshop (Nov 2017), Noumea, New Caledonia
- Blue Economy Forum (Nov 2017), Bangkok, Thailand
- Observer Programme Audits (various dates in 2017), China, Republic of Korea, Papua New Guinea, Chinese Taipei
- Various WPEA Project consultation meetings and workshops, and the 4th and 5th Project Board meetings (2017), Indonesia, Philippines and Viet Nam.