



**COMMISSION
FIFTEENTH REGULAR SESSION**
Honolulu, Hawaii, USA
10 – 14 December 2018

**PROPOSAL FOR ESTABLISHING A TARGET REFERENCE POINT
FOR SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE**

**WCPFC15-2018-DP10
13 November 2018**

FFA Member CCMs



9 November 2018

Feleti P. Teo OBE
Executive Director
Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
PO Box 2356, Kolonia
Federated States of Micronesia

Dear Feleti,

Proposal for Establishing a Target Reference Point for South Pacific Albacore

This proposal is made on behalf of the 17 members of the Forum Fisheries Agency. The proposal is for a brief, simple Conservation and Management Measure that will establish an interim Target Reference Point for the stock that is of primary importance to the tuna fisheries of Pacific Islands in the south of the region. It reflects a management objective that will benefit the vessels of all CCMs with a direct interest in the fishery: that of maintaining south Pacific albacore catch rates at a level that will give all vessels in the southern longline fishery, including SIDS domestic longline fisheries, a reasonable chance of remaining economically viable.

FFA CCMs have discussed this matter on several occasions and agreed that for this to occur the CPUE needs to be 17% higher than the 2013 level. Until empirical indicators have been developed and tested, the proxy for this interim TRP would be a model-based estimate of longline-vulnerable biomass (i.e. that part of the South Pacific albacore stock that is targeted by longline fishing – the larger adult fish). As well as promoting economic viability of SIDS longline operations, achieving this iTRP would keep the spawning biomass at a level that would entail no risk of breaching the agreed Limit Reference Point.

This proposal has emerged from the discussion and evidence presented at WCPFC Scientific Committee meetings, and it has been discussed at the WCPFC Management Objectives Workshops and Harvest Strategy Workshop, the 2017 WCPFC Consultation on a Bridging Measure for South Pacific Albacore Tuna, several WCPFC Scientific Committee meetings, and the last WCPFC Technical and Compliance Committee, as well as meetings of the Tokelau Arrangement and the FFA Management Options Consultation.

Following these formal meetings, and recent more informal meetings, FFA members feel that CCMs with an interest in fisheries for South Pacific Albacore now have a much better understanding of each other's objectives, concerns and constraints.

We note that WCPFC14 agreed that "WCPFC15 shall adopt a Target Reference Point for South Pacific albacore". And that "CCMs will work together in advance of WCPFC15 to develop TRP proposals". The seventeen FFA CCMs have worked together to achieve consensus on this TRP proposal. We have also called for other CCMs to share their views with us on this proposal and/or to propose alternatives. To date we have not received any alternative proposals from other CCMs. We look forward to hearing the views or questions of others over the coming month on the FFA proposal in order to work together

to achieve agreement on a south Pacific albacore TRP - one that will allow all CCMs involved in this fishery to benefit from this fishery into the future.

Our proposal would give all longline vessels actively fishing for south Pacific albacore a reasonable chance of remaining in business, including through the periodic downturns experienced in this fishery. During those periods, Pacific Island-based fishing vessels cannot relocate to other fishing grounds in the way that distant water fishing vessels can.

Our iTRP proposal is expressed in terms of relative catch rate for several reasons:

- (a) because targeting a certain level of CPUE more appropriately expresses our main management objective of ensuring economic viability of longline operations. CPUE is the one element of fishing vessel financial viability that is under the control of fishery managers (unlike market price and fishing costs). Maintaining spawning biomass is completely appropriate for limit reference points, but TRPs express fishery management objectives;
- (b) a TRP that is relative to a reference year, rather than an absolute level, is more robust in the face of variability in biomass estimates emerging from stock assessments. Albacore stock assessments do not have as much reliable information going into them as tropical tuna assessments. Methodologies and data improve from time to time and the 2012, 2015 and 2018 assessments have each resulted in a different estimate not only of current biomass, but of historical biomass. However, the trend from year to year in each assessment remains similar.
- (c) setting a TRP based on the total spawning biomass does not take into account that, unlike in the North Pacific, the vast majority of South Pacific albacore is taken by longliners, and longliners target a limited portion in the size structure of the population. Although there is very low fishing mortality of young fish, there is high mortality of older fish - and it is the number of these older fish that influences the viability of fishing operations. Longline-vulnerable biomass – the CPUE proxy – provides a much more useful estimate of the condition of this particular fishery for management purposes.

Thus the SP-ALB TRP proposals made by FFA members at WCPFC12 and 13 (45% SB/SB_{F=0}) and WCPFC14 and now 15 (117% CPUE₂₀₁₃), are essentially the same – they are compatible in outcome – by seeking to restore or maintain average longline CPUE of south Pacific albacore at 17% above 2013 levels.

We stress that this iTRP is a target. It is not an immediate hard limit. It is intended to implement a management objective for the stock that is agreeable to all - whereby the south Pacific albacore stock is maintained at a level (measured in terms of longline-vulnerable biomass) that can support albacore longline target catch rates 17% higher than the 2013 average level.

Where are we at the moment? The 2018 South Pacific Albacore Stock Assessment indicates that in 2016 the SP-ALB vulnerable biomass was actually 16% higher than it was in 2013 (Table 2 in SPC WCPFC paper on TRP) and, as the fishing industry has reported, conditions in 2016 were similar to the period that Pacific Island longline operators had previously identified as being the time when they last experienced decent conditions for fishing, in 2007.

However, like 2006-08, this is likely to be a peak before catch rates drop into the next trough. Longliners don't want to experience viable catch rates for only 3 or 4 years out of every 16. The CPUE

trend should not *peak* at the TRP – vessels need the CPUE to *vary around* the TRP. The good years need to be the norm, not the exception.

Importantly, we are **not** proposing that this TRP be turned into an immediate hard limit. Vulnerable biomass will need to be tracked, and adjustments made through the harvest control rule to achieve the iTRP. Progress will need to be made on setting limits that maintain the stock at that level over time.

We look forward to constructive and productive dialogue at WCPFC15 and would welcome any inquiries on the subject, which can be directed to the FFA Secretariat (matt.hooper@ffa.int and tim.adams@ffa.int).

We look forward to the deliberations in Honolulu and would greatly appreciate if you could please make this letter available to other CCMs.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tapaeru Herrmann', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tapaeru Herrmann, Chair
Forum Fisheries Committee

ATTACHMENT 1

Application of CMM 2013-06 to the FFA South Pacific Albacore TRP CMM proposal

The following information is offered to assist the Commission to meet the requirements of CMM 2013-06 in respect of this draft CMM.

a. Who is required to implement the proposal?

All CCMs will be required to implement this proposal in their cooperation to establish a harvest strategy for WCPO south Pacific albacore tuna.

b. Which CCMs would this proposal impact and in what way(s) and what proportion?

This measure concerns the South Pacific Albacore stock which, by definition, only occurs in the Pacific south of the equator. And in practice is taken primarily only by vessels fishing south of 5°S. It therefore concerns coastal States with EEZs extending south of the equator, and the flag or chartering CCMs of vessels fishing on the high seas south of the equator.

Achieving and maintaining a TRP that restores economic viability in the fishery will require reductions in effort. These reductions will be spread over time, but will undoubtedly come at some cost to stakeholders. The implementation of this proposal through future Harvest Strategy actions, in the course of restoring the fishery to sustainable levels of financial viability will therefore have a short-term impact on all CCMs involved in fishing for WCPO south Pacific albacore tuna.

Medium-term impacts will be greatest on SIDS in whose waters fishing for south Pacific albacore tuna largely takes place, noting that around 70% of the catch is taken in EEZs, and will particularly affect those for whom albacore fisheries are a significant proportion of the national economy. There are also several SIDS that have not yet developed fisheries for south Pacific albacore in their own waters, but do have intentions to take up the opportunities afforded to them under the WCPFC Convention. The longer-term impact on SIDS will depend on how the Commission implements the TRP in future Harvest Strategy mechanisms, noting the importance of the Commission giving full recognition to the special requirements of SIDS, but it is expected that the long-term benefit of a fully bioeconomically-sustainable fishery at the national scale will greatly outweigh the shorter-term impacts – by rebuilding profitability that has been eroded through lack of regulation of expanding catches in the past.

c. Are there linkages with other proposals or instruments in other regional fisheries management organizations or international organizations that reduce the burden of implementation?

Yes, a subregional standard for a South Pacific albacore interim TRP, of the kind referred to by Article 5c of the WCPFC Convention, has already been set by the Participants in the Tokelau Arrangement. FFA member are seeking a commission TRP that is compatible and comparable in effect with this, although expressed in different terms (catch rate rather than proportion of unfished spawning biomass). Tokelau Arrangement Participants are committed to developing and applying national EEZ management measures that support the achievement of the TKA iTRP, but would prefer to be aligned with a region-wide TRP adopted by the Commission, provided this can achieve a similar improvement in catch rate over time.

d. Does the proposal affect development opportunities for SIDS?

Yes. As described above, catch and/or effort reductions necessary to achieve a TRP, and will have some medium-term development implications for SIDS. The proposal will contribute to effective management and conservation of the WCPO south Pacific albacore tuna stock. Achieving the TRP will restore catch rates and profitability for fishing vessels, which contributes to development opportunities by ensuring a valuable fishery.

e. Does the proposal affect SIDS domestic access to resources and development aspirations?

Yes, as described above.

f. What resources, including financial and human capacity, are needed by SIDS to implement the proposal?

SIDS will need assistance in the further development and application of the precautionary approach to the conservation and management of WCPO south Pacific albacore tuna, including the application of the TRP that is adopted. This is a recognised priority, with assistance already being provided by the SPC, FFA, the PNAO and the WCPFC, through a range of workshops and technical advisory activities, including the WCPFC Management Objectives Workshops, supported also by Australia, New Zealand, GEF, Pew, WWF and the World Bank. Work in this area will need to continue to be recognised as a priority.

g. What mitigation measures are included in the proposal?

Not applicable to this specific measure, which balances short-term impacts on development activity against long-term improvement of development prospects. The Commission will need to monitor the implementation of this measure, and identify any specific mitigation measures for SIDS that are not already provided for by direct assistance from the donor community.

h. What assistance mechanisms and associated timeframe, including training and financial support, are included in the proposal to avoid a disproportionate burden on SIDS?

Current and projected programmes of assistance are expected to meet the medium-term needs for training and technical assistance to SIDS, provided the current priority is maintained.

ATTACHMENT 2

FFA Proposal for a Conservation and Management Measure for a Target Reference Point for South Pacific Albacore Tuna

The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC):

Recalling that the objective of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (the Convention) is to ensure through effective management, the long-term conservation and sustainable use of highly migratory fish stocks of the Western and Central Pacific Ocean in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (UNFSA);

Recalling that Annex II of UNFSA sets out guidelines for the application of precautionary reference points in conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks;

Recalling also that in article 5 (c) of the Convention, members of the Commission have committed to apply the precautionary approach in accordance with the Convention and all relevant internationally agreed standards and recommended practices and procedures,

Further recalling that Article 6.1 (a) requires members of the Commission in their application of the precautionary approach to apply the guidelines set out in Annex II of UNFSA and determine, on the basis of the best scientific information available, stock-specific reference points and the action to be taken if they are exceeded;

Noting that the Commission has adopted a Conservation and Management Measure on Establishing a Harvest Strategy for Key Fisheries and Stocks in The Western and Central Pacific Ocean and that WCPFC14 decided to agree an interim Target Reference Point for the South Pacific Albacore stock at WCPFC15;

Desiring to make progress on the development of a harvest strategy for fisheries for WCPO south Pacific albacore tuna through the adoption of a Target Reference Point for this stock;

Mindful that many CCMs that are Small Island Developing States intend to develop sustainable fisheries for south Pacific albacore in their EEZs;

Adopts, in accordance with Article 10 of the Convention, the following conservation and management measure on a target reference point for south Pacific albacore:

1. Our shared objective is to deliver a fishery for south Pacific albacore that supports higher longline catch rates than the average obtained in the period 2010-2016.

2. The target reference point for the south Pacific albacore stock shall initially be a vulnerable biomass¹ that is 17% greater than the vulnerable biomass in 2013.
3. This target reference point shall be an interim target reference point, until it is reviewed in accordance with paragraph 6 below.
4. The Commission shall amend or develop an appropriate conservation and management measure that implements a harvest control rule, developed in accordance with CMM 2014-06, with the objective of restoring and maintaining the south Pacific albacore vulnerable biomass at the target levels. The harvest control rule shall be agreed before December 31st 2021 and designed such that the management control to be implemented would result in the target being achieved on average over the long term, taking account of uncertainty.
5. The Scientific Committee shall refer to the target reference point in its assessment of the status of the WCPO south Pacific albacore tuna stock and in reporting to the Commission on management advice and implications for this stock.
6. The target specific to this CMM shall be reviewed by the Commission no later than 2023 and may be reviewed by the Commission any time that relevant new information is made available, such as when any issues are identified resulting from the development of harvest control rules. The Commission shall pay particular attention to any future recommendations of the Scientific Committee relating to the target reference points.

¹ The biomass of south Pacific albacore tuna that is vulnerable to capture in the southern longline fishery, as estimated from time to time by the WCPFC Scientific Services Provider