



**SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE ROADMAP INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP
(SPA-Roadmap-IWG)**

ELECTRONIC MEETING
9.00am - 1.00pm Pohnpei time, 5th May, 2023

Chair's Summary Report of the Fourth South Pacific Albacore Roadmap IWG Meeting

WCPFC-SPALB-RM-2023-00

SPA-Roadmap-IWG Chair

CHAIR'S SUMMARY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE ROADMAP INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP MEETING

WCPFC-SPALB-RM-2023-00

AGENDA ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

1.1 Opening Remarks

1. The Fourth South Pacific Albacore Roadmap Intersessional Working Group Meeting was held electronically on 5th May 2023. The meeting was opened by a new Chair from Fiji, Mr. Netani Tavaga.
2. The Chair introduced the objectives of the meeting, which included discussing the SPA Management Objectives and TRP, as well as the Harvest Strategy for SPA (with a focus on the Management Procedure).
3. The list of participants to this virtual meeting is in **Annex A**.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda

4. The Chair referred the IWG participants to WCPFC-SPALB-RM-2023-01 on the provisional agenda.
5. The agenda was adopted without objections or amendments from the IWG participants (**Annex B**).

AGENDA ITEM 2. SPA Management Objectives and TRP

2.1 SSP presentation on iTRP

6. Graham Pilling (SPC-OFP) presented SPA-RM-IWG04/WP-01 (*Further analysis to inform discussion on South Pacific albacore objectives and a potential iTRP*) which provided updates on the catch projections used to inform the discussions of objectives and a potential iTRP.
7. There were no comments from members on the SSP presentation on the objectives and a potential iTRP.

2.2 New proposal on iTRP

8. Poi Okenese (Niue) on behalf of the 6 members of the South Pacific Group (SPG) and Australia presented their proposal on a revised TRP for South Pacific albacore (SPA-RM-IWG04/WP-03).

The SPG proposed a new iTRP that utilized the average depletion of the South Pacific albacore tuna stock over the period of **2017-2019** ($SB_{2017-2019}/SB_{F=0}$). Using the most recent stock assessment (2021), this depletion level is estimated at 49% ($SB_{2017-2019}/SB_{F=0} = 0.49$). It was mentioned that it now included considerations not only of catch rates but also the economic benefits of foreign fleet activity within the EEZs. It was indicated that to achieve the depletion value in 2017-2019 (49%) would require a reduction in catch of 14% (a catch scalar of 0.86). The risk of the spawning biomass depletion declining below the LRP was estimated at 17% for this scenario, well below the 20% WCPFC threshold. This provides an approximate catch level of 62,500mt in the WCPFC-CA, with

catches in the Eastern Pacific Ocean assumed to remain at their 2017-19 average (15,600mt). The SPG further noted that the proposal was presented to allow for further discussion on the matter.

9. James Larcombe (Australia) further supported the proposal, backed multiple reference years for the TRP, supported the use of average depletion ($SB_{2017-2019}/SB_{F=0}$) for TRP for simplicity and consistency, and additionally noted the 17% risks of breaching the LRP, but acknowledged that it is too early to estimate the risk noting that the MSE evaluation will be done in coming months and over next year (Work plan – **Annex C**) and will await the outcomes on deliberations regarding the albacore operating models (OM).

10. Jason Philibotte (USA) requested more time to consider the proposal and review any preliminary concerns they might have around the iTRP and the related catch/effort issues as this is the first time to see the proposal.

11. The SPG Chair requested all CCMs to reach out to the SPG if they have any further questions or clarifications on their iTRP presentation.

12. The Chair acknowledged the presentation from the SPG and no further comments came from the floor.

AGENDA ITEM 3. Harvest Strategy for SPA (Management Procedure)

13. Robert Scott (SPC) presented on the progress of South Pacific albacore MSE and work plan.

SPC indicated that the current SPA operating model (OM) grid, per the discussions at SC18 in 2022 required an assessment area that included the EPO. They raised that the reference set of OM's included a range of settings for steepness, movement, size data weighting, the distribution of recruitment and combinations of growth and natural mortality. A potential robustness set of models might then include alternative CPUE indices, effort creep and hyper stability in CPUE. Three areas of investigation into alternative CPUE indices were presented, which included using hooks between floats instead of a species cluster analysis to define fishing operations, the geostatistical VAST model across the WCPFC-CA plus the EPO, and finally several options for regional weightings calculated from different CPUE models.

It was indicated that at the end of the stock assessments period, there was a significant reduction in $SB/SB_{F=0}$ due to very poor recruitments over the 2015-16 period. The model projections into the future for the OM grid predict that further significant reductions in $SB/SB_{F=0}$ are expected in coming years and may be evident in CPUE data for the longline fishery from 2020-2021. Any lack of a corresponding reduction in observed CPUE over this time period might be confounded by recent reporting issues during COVID19 or potentially recent ENSO (El-Nino) conditions; further work will be required to disentangle all factors. The SSP will continue to investigate the cause of this "dip" in the stock assessment models. They proposed to maintain the 72 models in the reference set, and to continue the development of the robustness set scenarios and the estimation model whilst this investigation is ongoing.

Discussion

14. Australia thanked the SSP for the ongoing work on the management procedures. Australia indicated concerns regarding the big dip in the current set of OM's and the associated evaluations of candidate MP's as it has strong implications on the evaluation outcomes in the short term. Australia indicated that the big dip might be an artifact in magnitude and that it needs to be dealt with in the OM and notes that the SSP is

working on this. In terms of the Harvest Strategy Work Plan, a keen eye will be placed on the development of OM's for SPA in particular and the impacts these developments will have on the timing of adopting an SPA MP (proposed for 2024). They suggested that these issues will need to be addressed in the 2024 SPA stock assessment.

15. FFA members thanked the SSP for the continued work on the development of the SPA MP. They noted the significant decline in projected biomass in the recent period does not appear to match the available data observed in the fishery. FFA members would like to understand the drivers behind the decline in projected biomass in the model and what further analysis is required to determine the causes. This is essential so that they can better understand the implications for a Management Procedure based on these projections. They would like the SSP to report back to SC19 on this analysis of the causes of the “big dip” in the projected biomass in the recent period. FFA members would also like to understand what the next steps are in the work regarding hyper-stability of CPUE given that the models are not picking up changes in the stock. FFA further added, that given the level of technology required to fish, FFA members would like to better understand the impact of effort creep and how this is being addressed and incorporated into scenarios. FFA members also requested the SSP to provide advice on the extent of the mixing within the WCPO and between the WCPO and EPO fishery.

16. Lesley Gould (Tokelau) also raised question of the “big dip”, as noted by FFA, and requested the SSP to provide more context on the extent of mixing, particularly between the northern and southern stock, as well as progressing understanding of mixing between the EPO and the WCPO.

17. SPC responded that they are already investigating issues for hyper-stability and approaches to include this option in the OM set. They added that similar scenarios were included in the SKJ OM and SKJ evaluations however, all models currently considered for SPA assume a linear relationship between catchability and biomass; as biomass of the stock declines, so too does CPUE. Under hyper stable CPUE conditions, the fishery is still able to maintain higher catches even though the stock is declining and one potential reason for this might be the schooling of fish where the fishery is still able to find decent size schools, even though the overall stock abundance is declining. The extent to which this occurs in Albacore is the current question that SSP is considering, and development of approaches to address this, and include in the OM set, are scheduled to be presented at SC19 this year.

18. SPC further commented that investigation of movement rates between the EPO and WCPO is important and could potentially be included the OM set but investigations are ongoing. Furthermore, they noted that there is limited tagging data for SPA but those available suggest that there is no significant mixing between Northern and Southern region; noting that the oceanographic conditions in the equatorial region provide an effective barrier to movement between the two regions’ stock.

19. Dave Gershman (Ocean Foundation) thanked SPG and Australia for the proposal on the revised iTRP which they found to be a viable way forward and encouraged all members to review and engage with the proposal and urged to look into any opportunities to discuss the components of MPs and have more face-to-face discussions. They recognized the level of technical work being done and encouraged managers to provide critical input so that there is an agreement for TRP at the Commission meeting this year, which may progress development of a harvest strategy for this stock.

20. Pamela Maru (Cook Islands) encouraged all CCMs to reach out to SPG if they have comments or concerns about the SPG proposal and continue on further developments regarding the proposal leading up to SC19 and the Commission meeting at the end of the year. It was further noted that contact details are in the proposal for further correspondence on the proposal’s subject matter.

21. Heather Ward (NZ) thanked the SPG on this initiative and from their perspective they noted its importance on the management objective of south pacific albacore, which is reasonable and achievable, and noted that the 2021 stock assessment estimated that the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring so there is no need to make dramatic reductions to the catch levels in order to improve the sustainability of the stock. NZ further added that maintaining economically viable levels of fishing was an important consideration. They indicated that their preferred approach is to maintain a steady and consistent catch, ensuring sustainable fishing levels and predictable economic conditions, and therefore considered that the SPG proposed iTRP based on 2017- 2019 reference period is something that is workable. They welcomed the initiative and also appreciated the comments from Australia with regards to addressing the issues relating to the “big dip”. They noted the difficulty in understanding the implications of any major problems encountered until there is a complete understanding of the recent stock assessment.

22. The Chair acknowledged all comments made by IWG participants.

AGENDA ITEM 4. OTHER MATTERS

23. The Chair reminded the forum of the Harvest Strategy work plan as alluded by Australia in the previous agenda to make decision on the iTRP at the Commission this year to which the Chair proposed working with the committee to develop recommendations post SC for the Commission’s consideration.

24. The Chair proposed next meeting to be held virtually either in June or July and opened the floor for views from other CCMs.

25. PNA proposed meeting to be held post SC for the SSP to be given more time to look into the “big dip” and inform the members during the SC for members to discuss further in the next IWG meeting.

26. The USA agreed with PNA to have the next meeting post-SC and requested to know the exact agenda items for the next meeting and how it will differ from the current meeting.

27. The Chair responded that the main focus of the next meeting will be to discuss the iTRP, MP and allocation principles to advance the SPA RM work plan.

AGENDA ITEM 5. CLOSE OF MEETING

28. The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions on the discussion topics brought to this IWG meeting. The summary report will be compiled into a Chair’s Summary Report that will be circulated in two weeks’ time.

29. The meeting officially closed at 10:53 am Pohnpei Time.

Annex A

SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE ROADMAP INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP (SPA-RM-IWG04)

ELECTRONIC MEETING
10am to 2pm Pohnpei Time, 5th May 2023

List of Participants

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Annex B

SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE ROADMAP INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP (SPA-RM-IWG04)

ELECTRONIC MEETING
10am to 2pm Pohnpei Time, 5th May 2023

Agenda

TIME	ADOPTED AGENDA
09:00-09:15	AGENDA ITEM 1. Opening of the Meeting
	1. Welcome Remarks and Recap
	2. Objectives of the Meeting
09:15-10:30	AGENDA ITEM 2. SPA Management Objectives and TRP 3. Scientific Services Provider to present updated analyses of catch projections to inform discussions of objectives and a potential iTRP. 4. IWG to discuss Objective options provided by the SSP. Discuss any proposals put forth by any CCM(s)
10:30-11:30	AGENDA ITEM 3 Harvest Strategy for SPA (Management Procedure)
	5. Scientific Services Provider to present the latest development of the SPA management procedure. 6. IWG to discuss progressing components of the Management Procedure <i>Expected Outcome – Identified issues needing decisions from the Commission for the IWG to develop recommendations for consideration of the SC19 and to the Commission.</i>
11:30–12:15	AGENDA ITEM 4. Other Matters
12:15 -13:00	AGENDA ITEM 5. Close of Meeting

Annex C

SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE ROADMAP INTERSESSIONAL WORKING GROUP (SPA-RM-IWG04)

ELECTRONIC MEETING
10am to 2pm Pohnpei Time, 5th May 2023

WCPFC SPA-RM-IWG Work Plan

	Support the development and adoption of the Management Procedure	Establishing a framework for the allocation of the SPA TAC	Development of a new CMM
Objectives	<p>The IWG will progress the discussions on a management objective and the revision of the iTRP to recommend to WCPFC20.</p> <p>Progress the discussions and make recommendations on a management procedure for the SPA for the Commission to consider</p>	<p>The IWG to identify and develop recommendations on key components and a process for establishing an allocation framework for the Commission to consider.</p>	<p>To develop a new measure that incorporates the allocation framework, as well as any other issues identified by the IWG, that will function as an implementing mechanism for the management procedure.</p>
2023	<p>To consider the South Pacific albacore objectives and a revised TRP and recommendations for the WCPFC20.</p> <p>On the ongoing Management Procedure development and testing for the IWG to progress the discussions on the SPA MP development and provide guidance in the margins of the SC19 and TCC19.</p>	<p>To consider key issues [principles and developments] required to be considered in the development [work] of the allocation [framework for the Commission to consider], in particular Article 10.3 of the Convention.</p> <p>Report to the Commission on the progress of the work by the IWG.</p>	<p>Take note of discussions/progress from the MP and the SPA Allocation framework developments, as well as other relevant considerations (including guidance from SC and TCC) to identify management measure implications to be addressed.</p>

2024	<p>Ongoing SPA Management Procedure development and testing and “dry run” of MP application.</p> <p>A Science management dialogue dedicated to SPA (focused on selecting candidate MPs for potential adoption).</p> <p>Recommend to the Commission to adopt a SPA management procedure.</p> <p>Development of a CMM for a Management Procedure for SPA for adoption by WCPFC21</p>	<p>Depending on outcomes from 2023</p> <p>to consider recommending the start of the allocation process discussion. Potential physical workshop for allocation.</p>	<p>Take note of discussions/progress from the MP and the SPA Allocation framework developments, as well as other relevant considerations (including guidance from SC and TCC) to identify key elements for a revised CMM for SPA.</p> <p>Commence development of a revised CMM for SPA.</p>
2025	<p>The adopted management procedure is run for the first time in 2025 (the year after the stock assessment which is desirable).</p>	<p>Progress with guidance from the Commission.</p>	<p>Continue development of the implementation CMM</p> <p>Consideration of a draft CMM by SC21, TCC21</p> <p>Adoption of a revised CMM for the management of SPA by WCPFC22</p>
2026	<p>Implementation of the Management Procedure would commence in 2026 and run in a three-year cycle (2026-2028).</p>		