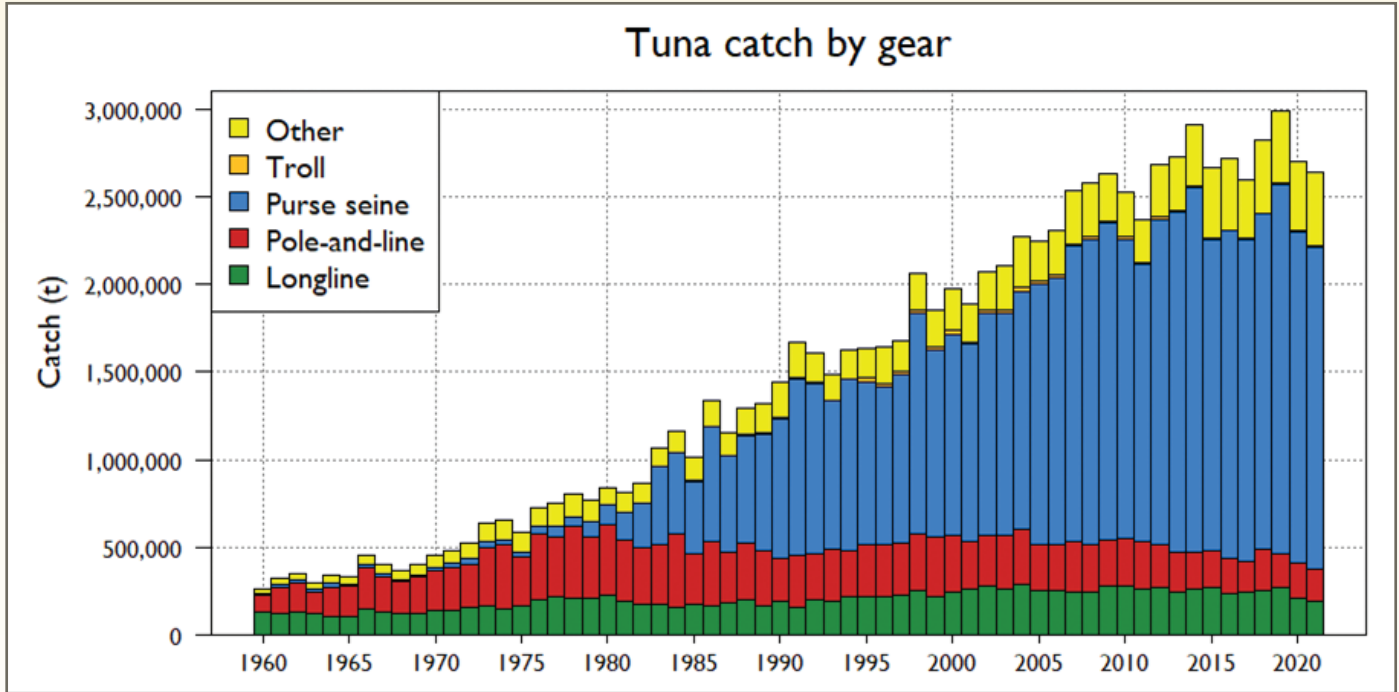


Positive Outcomes from International Fisheries Commission Meeting Lead to Optimism in 2023



Credit: Hare et al. 2022. *The western and central Pacific tuna fishery: 2021 overview and status of stocks*. Tuna Fisheries Assessment Report no. 22. Noumea, New Caledonia: Pacific Community. 63 p.



The 19th Regular Session of Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC19) met in Da Nang, Vietnam from Nov. 27 to Dec. 3, 2022. This was the first time in three years the WCPFC met in-person following the virtual format used during the COVID-19 pandemic. A major positive meeting outcome was the adoption of a WCPFC management procedure and harvest strategy work plan, which will safeguard Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certifications for the Hawai'i and American Samoa longline fisheries. Third party certifications are often required for fish products to enter certain large retailers and markets, such as Walmart. The MSC had required the WCPFC to make progress on developing harvest strategies for tropical tunas in order to retain certifications for fisheries under WCPFC management. The American Samoa longline fishery relies on its MSC certification to supply the StarKist Samoa cannery and the Hawai'i longline fishery that targets swordfish, bigeye and yellowfin tuna



The U.S. delegation to the WCPFC.

just recently earned its certification in 2022. The WCPFC manages nearly 60% of the world's tuna supply and is the only international entity that has all of its managed tropical tunas not overfished or experiencing overfishing. WCPFC members with a wide range of management objectives were successful in negotiating harvest strategy work plans and a management procedure for

skipjack tuna (the largest stock).

The WCPFC also adopted a new shark conservation management measure that follows a Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council recommendation. The measure prohibits use of wire leaders in longline fisheries that target tuna and billfish in waters from 20 degrees south latitude to 20 degrees north latitude, where most protected

shark interactions occur. The Council and Hawaii Longline Association led this effort and National Marine Fisheries Service staff successfully managed to get this measure through to help “level the playing field” for conservation burdens.

The United States, with coordination among several Pacific Island members, was able to incorporate climate change into management decisions, requiring the topic be a standing agenda item for all meetings of the WCPFC and its subsidiary bodies. Climate change is an important matter to Pacific Island nations. Successfully leading efforts to push the WCPFC to make decisions that strongly consider climate change issues certainly helps the United States achieve much-needed goodwill to negotiate the needs of Hawai‘i and the U.S. Pacific territories in tropical tuna management.

Most importantly, the WCPFC now has a clear path forward to negotiate a new tropical tuna measure at the December 2023 meeting, due at least in part to the Council’s efforts. WCPFC19 participants recommended a plan to hold two workshops in 2023 to negotiate components of a tropical tuna measure, noting that the largest fisheries are purse seine fisheries, followed by longline fisheries that include Council-managed fisheries.

Leading up to WCPFC19, Council staff organized a productive workshop on Western and Central Pacific Tropical Tuna Longline Fishery Management Nov. 1-3, 2022, co-convened with the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority. One workshop outcome was to increase the priority level of revising longline components of the tropical tuna measure. In this informal and open setting, the workshop addressed the wants and needs of the Council-managed fisheries and of the Pacific Island nations alike. Pacific Island nations favor zone-based management, meaning controlling catches on the high seas and allocating catch attribution to the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of Pacific Island nations. Workshop participants came to a mutual understanding that the Hawai‘i fishery is itself an island fishery, is required to fish primarily on the high seas, and doesn’t have the fleet range to fish within the EEZs of other nations. Attendees acknowledged the need for special distinctions for “fresh fish” fisheries and those that have small vessel capacities like the Hawai‘i fishery, and to incentivize monitoring and compliance. The Hawai‘i-based longline fishery has led the way in conservation and monitoring, with no real incentive to date within existing management measures.

The Western and Central Pacific Tropical Tuna Longline Fishery Management workshop was discussed at WCPFC19



Left: Rhea Moss-Christian. Photo: RNZ Pacific/Koroi Hawkins.

Right: Josie Tamate. Photo: PMN News.

The WCPFC made history in 2022 by being the first organization of its kind to be led by Pacific Islander women. Rhea Moss-Christian of the RMI, with whom the Council has worked for decades, will succeed former WCPFC Executive Director Feleti Teo of Nauru. Josie Tamate of Niue is the new chair of the WCPFC, replacing Riley Kim of Korea.

and included as a delegation paper by the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). This inaugural workshop was the first concerted step by the United States and Pacific Island nations and organizations with the intent to develop guidance on longline fishery management in the Western and Central Pacific and identify mutual interests. The RMI made a critical intervention on the floor of WCPFC19, recognizing that the current tropical tuna measure needs “tweaks” to be favorable for all members, including the United States. Members were asked to consult the Council’s workshop report to guide the follow-up workshops in 2023 to develop a new tropical tuna measure at the 20th Regular Session of the WCPFC.

To complement the two WCPFC workshops, the Council will coordinate a series of informal workshops in 2023 focusing on longline management. The Council remains optimistic that these steps will lead to further momentum and that next year progress will be made for our largest Council-managed fishery in renegotiating bigeye tuna longline catch limits for the Hawai‘i fishery. 🐟