



Western  
Pacific  
Regional  
Fishery  
Management  
Council



**MIMRA**  
Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Workshop on Western and Central Pacific Tropical Tuna Longline Fishery Management

*September 28, 2023*

*WCPFC Annex Conference Room  
Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia*

### Report

#### A. Introduction/Welcome

1. The workshop was opened with prayer at the invitation of the co-hosts Glen Joseph, Director of the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority (MIMRA) and Kitty Simonds Executive Director of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WPRFMC, Council). The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) provided a venue for the workshop. Simonds made opening remarks, thanking the WCPFC and describing the outcomes of the previous two workshops the WPRFMC hosted with MIMRA in Honolulu. These previous two workshops were the opportunity for open dialogue with the goal to support a new tropical tuna measure. Hawaii and U.S. Pacific Islanders share the same cultural ties to tuna fisheries and needs for equitable and sustainable longline fisheries. The Hawaii longline fishery has been an example of monitoring and compliance. Simonds noted that since current catch limits for bigeye tuna were developed, the stock status has changed to no overfishing. More recent information supports the advice that the stock is healthy and there is an opportunity for increase in catch. Simonds stated that the Hawaii longline fishery is asking for a 3,000 metric ton (mt) increase in the U.S. catch limit in Table 3 of the tropical tuna measure, CMM 2021-01. Her remarks are appended at **Attachment A**.

2. In his opening remarks, Glen Joseph considered that while the current tropical tuna measure is largely effective, there is room for improvement, including working with members to adjust longline bigeye catch limits (Table 3 of CMM 2021-01). The biomass stock is consistent of management objectives in CMM 2021-01, indicating success of CMM 2021-01. There remains an important need to work together to find common ground on ensuring mutual needs are met where longline fisheries are concerned. Joseph acknowledged other fishery sectors need to be considered.

3. The workshop facilitator in welcoming participants (a list of participants is appended at **Attachment B**) explained the workshop was the 3<sup>rd</sup> in a series of informal longline workshops hosted by the WPRFMC and MIMRA designed to foster the exchange of information relevant to the longline

provisions in the tropical tuna measure (CMM 2021-01). The workshop adopted the agenda **(Attachment C)**

#### **B. Overview of the Key Considerations from Second Longline Management Workshop**

4. Mark Fitchett of the Council presented the key considerations emerging from the last informal workshop hosted by the Council and MIMRA. The workshop recognized that the bigeye tuna stock status should allow for consideration for increases in bigeye tuna catch limits reflected in Table 3 of CMM 2021-01, at WCPFC20 in December 2023 and that an increase in longline fishing opportunities should be balanced with a commensurate purse seine fishing effort increase. The stock was assessed in August 2023 and remains to be healthy.

5. The workshop also considered that hard limits are needed for longline fisheries, but recognized that would take some time. In the interim, some provisions regarding longline fisheries could be modified.

6. Provisions with respect to monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) would need to be included in developing any future management measure. These may be related to entry/exit and catch notification schemes, observer coverage on the high seas, transshipment and monitoring, etc.

7. The previous workshop also recognized that EEZ management could be considered in balancing limits for longline fishing between the high seas and in-zone.

#### **C. Overview of Outcomes from the WCPFC Tropical Tuna Measure Workshop**

8. The WCPFC Chair, Josie Tamate was invited to address the workshop on the Commission's Tropical Tuna Measure workshop. She took the opportunity to explain what she expected from the Commission's 4th workshop on the measure and noted that the previous workshop developed a prioritization of scientific service provider (SSP) requests. Also available to participants at the formal WCPFC workshop was a list of allocation criteria that may inform members.

#### **D. Review of longline components of CMM 2021-01, including Table 3**

9. A summary of the Paragraphs 5, 9, and 37 - 41 of the tropical tuna measure was presented by the facilitator noting that paragraphs 5 and 9 are pertinent to the rights and obligations afforded to SIDS and Participating Territories, including the U.S. territorial agreements under CMM 2021-01. Paragraph 41 of the measure relates to the transition to an equitable allocation framework using criteria in the Convention with the expectation that hard limits would be set in 2023.

#### **E. Scientific Committee Advice**

10. Graham Pilling of SPC provided an overview of the recent stock assessment for bigeye tuna and yellowfin tunas released August 2023. The bigeye assessment shows that current spawning biomass depletion levels are well above the limit reference points (LRPs, 20% unfished biomass) and the levels of biomass are above the 2012-2015 bigeye biomass management objective in the measure

(approximately 34% unfished biomass). The skipjack management procedure (MP) was also discussed in terms of its effect on bigeye and yellowfin biomass including the maximum levels of purse seine fishing set at the 2012 level. Pilling presented on the ‘nuclear grid’, a comprehensive mosaic of longline catch and purse seine effort scenarios with resulting biomass levels and overfishing risks (relative to the LRP) over a projected time horizon. The projections were 30 years from 2021 to 2051 for each of the scenarios.

11. The SPC ‘nuclear grid’ shows future depletion and risks associated with realized longline and purse seine levels relative to 2019-2021 fishing levels. SPC explained that the range of future levels for purse seine and longline fisheries are 0.5 to 2.0, relative to the 2019-2021 baseline levels. The grid also shows longline scalars which are related to catch versus purse seine scalars relative to unassociated and FAD-associated sets.

12. A number of stock projections are possible using the nuclear grid as presented. These include scenarios related to the recent recruitment productivity assumption, and a long-term recruitment scenario (slightly less optimistic) which are projected out 30 years to equilibrium. It was noted that the WCPFC Scientific Committee has historically provided preference for the recent recruitment scenario compared to the long-term recruitment scenario. The baseline periods were also discussed, including how recent longline catches and purse seine fishing effort are lower than historical levels.

13. SPC indicated that the yellowfin stock projections are less optimistic, falling below target levels but that this is mostly attributable to catches in ‘other fisheries’ namely Region 2 in the yellowfin tuna stock assessment (Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam). However, the projections assume a constant catch scenario for this region, even if biomass declines, which is not a plausible scenario. SPC will take another look at the yellowfin assumptions and provide new projections prior to WCPFC20.

14. Further, projections for fishery scenarios for both ‘optimistic’ 2019-2021 baseline levels and ‘fully utilized’; whereas the longline catch is fully utilized, it is assumed that Table 3 is fully realized, and that purse seine limits are met. Additionally, the scenario assumes some WCPFC members have up to 2,000 mt of catch, even if they do not have recent catch histories. Fully utilized scenarios for both sectors together when projected forward do not reach the 2012-2015 biomass levels. Projection scenarios to reach 2012-2015 levels were also provided, as combinations of longline catches and adjustments to the purse seine FAD closure.

15. SPC responded to a number of questions and requests for clarification to their presentation. The discussion is summarized as follows:

- With regards to catches of yellowfin in Region 2, SPC confirmed that the modelling assumes that catches projected forward continue even if biomass declines which may not be realistic..

- The impact of the purse seine fishery is assessed to be greater than other gears. Much of the impact of purse seine fisheries is impacting juvenile bigeye tuna.
- A 10,000 mt increase in longline catch equates to rolling back the FAD closure by 1.25 months.
- The catch of yellowfin in Region 2 is taken by miscellaneous gears landed at many sites and could be considered ‘uncontrolled’ by the existing measure.
- The catches of bigeye tuna are assumed to have an impact on yellowfin but the degree to which this amounts to is unknown. Participants questioned whether directed longline catch of bigeye tuna has a proportional impact on yellowfin tuna.
- SPC noted that better information from Region 2 is critical but challenging to address the recruitment and uncertainty in the assessment of yellowfin tuna. For the trade-offs between longline and the purse seine fisheries baselines used are very important when selecting baseline scenarios to manage from. Applying the fully utilized scenarios would mean that substantial increases in catch limits would not be possible.
- Catches of longline-caught bigeye tuna have decreased since the mid-2000s. Pre-COVID-19 (2016-2018) longline catch levels were just above 61,000 mt. Catches since COVID-19 (2019-2021) were about 58,250 mt. Participants questioned whether recent catch histories are more plausible baselines than a fully-utilized scenario.
- Fully utilized longline catch would be in excess of 93,000 mt. Recent longline bigeye catches have been below 70,000 mt over the last decade. Participants questioned whether a fully utilized scenario is likely or realistic, considering the assumptions of full utilization of longline catch has not been historically met by many members, including those in Table 3.
- A participant noted that there is an interest to balance the needs and impacts between longline and purse seine fisheries, noting that the fishery impact of the purse seine sector may be three times that of the longline sector, according to the stock assessment.

16. The decreasing trend in active vessels versus fishing capacity of each of the Commission’s members, and whether each is fully utilizing their catch limits (or not) was raised. These issues were considered to have implications for members that do not currently have interim catch limits in Table 3 of the measure. It was suggested that there could be some progress on understanding what the potential catches or capacity could be.

#### **F. Potential Proposed Revisions to Longline Components of CMM 2021-01**

17. The workshop discussion on potential revisions to the longline components of the measure noted that not all members with catch limits have fully utilized catch and that some that do have limits may be seeking an increase. This would require balanced changes in purse seine scalars but which needs to allow a ‘buffer’ to maintain conservation objectives.

**i. Table 3 Bigeye Longline Catch Limits**

18. The Council displayed a revision of Table 3 that was first proposed at the Commission in 2021 showing a total increase of 12,000 metric tons, among the U.S., Korea, Chinese Taipei, and China. They explained that the Hawaii Longline Association were seeking an increase in the longline bigeye catch limit in Table 3 of an additional 3,000 metric tons pointing out that they had taken a reduction in catch limits in past, high levels of observer coverage, fresh fish fishery delivering to domestic market. A participant pointed out the proposed revision being discussed was a historical one made by the US. Using ‘nuclear grid’ provided by the SPC, when assuming a baseline catch of 2019-2021 levels, it would be under a 1.25 scalar under the 12,000 mt increase in longline catch. Along with an equitable 1.25 purse seine scalar, these longline and purse seine fishing levels would not have an overfishing risk, nor would biomass levels fall below 2012-2015 levels. A scalar of 1.25 for the purse seine scalar would coincide with a reduction of the FAD closure period by approximately one month.

**ii. Compatibility with zone-based management**

19. A topic that is expected to have some bearing on the revision of the tropical tuna measure is the compatibility of the scope of the measure with zone-based management. It was stated that where the longline fishery was concerned, the Parties to the Nauru Agreement plus Tokelau, have established zone-based management for longline in the form of the Vessel Day Scheme which is operational.

**iii. MCS**

20. An important consideration that needs to be addressed in revising longline components of the CMM 2021-01, is the long-standing low levels of monitoring of the longline fleets operating on the high seas in the Convention Area. It is widely acknowledged that the coverage of the longline fishery needs to improve monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS). Particularly as there is a need to better monitor incidental catch and catches of by-catch and protected species.

21. It was pointed out that responsible and sustainable fisheries are market priorities and in this context it was noted that the Hawaii longline fisheries is an ice-chilled fishery that does not transship in addition to its high levels of observer coverage.

22. It was also noted that there are data gaps in longline fleets that need to be addressed through enhanced MCS including catch documentation schemes and entry and exit reporting. Conditions in the operation of the longline fishery will also need to be addressed to meet the new Marine Stewardship Certification standards.

#### **iv. Impacts on bigeye tuna stock and other fisheries**

23. The Council presented some issues related to the impacts on bigeye tuna stocks and other fisheries beginning with a comparison between the catches of bigeye tuna by Commission members with, and without catch limits under the measure. Noting that catches have declined over the last decade and that the catch levels in the three years prior to COVID-19 (as the terminal years of the 2020 stock assessment, 2016-2018), averaged just around 3,000 metric tons per year more than the 'recent' baseline period of 2019-2021.

24. Using the SPC nuclear grid based on recent recruitment and with a baseline period of 2019 – 2021, the Council showed that using a purse seine and longline scalar of 1.45 the depletion levels for bigeye would accrue just above 2012 – 2015 biomass levels. This is consistent to an interim TRP for bigeye tuna. To reach the same baseline of 2012 – 2015 on a long-term recruitment scenario, the purse seine/longline scalar would be 1.30. The Science Committee has maintained since its 8<sup>th</sup> meeting, that recent recruitment is a more plausible scenario.

25. The translation of the longline and purse seine scalars relative 2019 – 2021 shows that if the scalar is 1, the longline catch is 58,248 metric tons and purse seine effort for both associated and unassociated would be 14,746 and 28,700 sets respectively. With equal scalars the recent recruitment scenario would allow for a longline catch of 84,500 metric tons of bigeye at 1.45 and, in the long term, 75,700 metric tons for long term recruitment scenario at 1.3.

26. The Council concluded that if the suggested proposed revision to Table 3 is realized relative to 2019 -2021 catches would be 70,248 metric tons and approximately 73,000 tons relative to 2016 – 2018 longline catches and a longline scalar of 1.20 – 1.25.

27. To meet the 2012 – 2015 objectives of the tropical tuna measures at both recent recruitment levels and for long term recruitment, with an approximate longline bigeye catch of 71,000 metric tons provides for increases longline catch limits and reduces FAD closures to a full removal.

#### **G. Agreed workshop outcomes, possible joint proposal, and/or next steps**

28. Glen Joseph for MIMRA concluded that in his view Table 3 of interim longline catch limits for the tropical tuna measure would require revision within the scope of the recent scientific advice. He recognized that this would not be an easy task and that conversations need to continue amongst concerned members in the lead up to the Commission meeting in December. In addition, he also acknowledged that the compatibility with zone-based management. In particular, the PNA +Tokelau Longline Vessel Management Scheme would warrant consideration.

29. Glen Joseph indicated that it was his intent to provide a summary of this workshop to the WCPFC Secretariat for circulation, and that he would make an intervention, speaking to the summary of this workshop at the 4<sup>th</sup> Tropical Tuna Workshop commencing September 29 and 30, 2023.

30. No further informal workshops are planned. Both Joseph and Simonds indicated that discussions and outreach would need to continue in earnest up until the meeting in Rarotonga when the revised measure would be negotiated.

31. The workshop concluded by thanking Pilling and SPC for making themselves available to respond to questions and queries relating to the recently completed analyses requested by Commission members for the revision of the tropical tuna measure.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

A - Opening Remarks by Kitty Simonds, WCPFMC

B - List of Participants

C. - Agenda





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### **3<sup>rd</sup> WCPO Longline Management Workshop**

September 28, 2023

12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

*WCPFC Annex Conference Room*

*Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia*

#### **Opening Remarks**

Souwas mwahu, yokwe, and aloha!

Thank you all for joining us today for our third workshop, hosted by Glen Joseph of the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority, and myself and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council. As well know, there is a need to renewing the Commission's tropical tuna measure this year and intersessional informal discussions and exchanges have been encouraged by the WCPFC Chair. The first two workshops we hosted were well received, and they focused on important issues with regards to the WCPO longline fisheries. The workshops have been particularly useful by providing an opportunity for open discussion and ultimately, will support agreement on a new tropical tuna measure in December.

I'm addressing you this morning principally as a Hawaiian, as a Pacific Islander and as someone that has been involved in the management of tuna resources in region for over 40 years! As Pacific Islanders, tuna is the lifeblood of our local economies. In Hawaii, our longline fishery is the largest food producer for our islands, with 80% of fish staying in Hawaii for the local market and the remainder going to the United States. Bigeye tuna is main target species for the Hawaii longline fleet, which is comprised of nearly 150 vessels all landing ice-chilled, premium product into a single port. The fleet has had over 20 percent observer coverage since the early 1990s and is the most highly monitored, comprehensively managed tuna longline fishery. The Hawaii fleet catches all of the WCPO US longline bigeye limit – typically reaching it by August every year. The current US longline bigeye limit of 3,554 mt, is derived from the single baseline year of 2004, is currently lower than the US limit was when bigeye was believed to subject to overfishing. It was clear from day one that the US longline limit has never matched the Hawaii longline fleet's capacity or local domestic market and we've been asking this Commission for a more appropriate limit for nearly a decade.

I would note that at the Commission meeting in Vietnam, and at the tropical tuna workshop this past June, there is acknowledgement of a need to adjust catch limits for longline bigeye tuna in the current tropical tuna measure. This is a view I strongly support. The Council and the Hawaiian Longline Association have been open and frank about seeking a 3,000 metric tonne increase in the longline catch limit which we estimate would equate to 2% of the total bigeye catch. The increase would contribute immensely to the long-term viability of the Hawaii longline fishery and would strengthen channels for Pacific Island longline fisheries into the US markets. Supporting the Hawaii longline fishery would go a long way to demonstrating that the Commission and its' members are committed to acknowledging fisheries that are well-managed, highly monitored, and have a low ecosystem impact including those on protected species. I do not need to remind anyone here about the Hawaii longline fishery's high observer coverage, lack of transshipment history, and leadership in developing mitigation measures to reduce bycatch of birds, turtles, and seabirds.

I acknowledge the rights and focus in the Commission for our brethren Pacific Islanders and their status of small island developing States and Territories, but I would emphasize that we do share cultural and aspirational direction for an equitable and healthy longline fishery and long-term sustainability of all of the region's tuna fisheries. We now have that opportunity in the upcoming revision of the tropical tuna measure.

So, let us have a very honest and informal dialogue today and find a pathway that reconfirms that Table 3 of the TTM needs to be adjusted in a manner that is equitable and accommodating to the status of stocks involved and also the operations of fisheries that bring such significant benefits to our local communities.

Mahalo nui loa.... And Imua!

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**3<sup>rd</sup> Workshop on Western and Central Pacific Tropical Tuna Longline Fishery  
Management**

*September 28, 2023*

*12:00 p.m*

*WCPFC Annex Conference Room  
Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia*

**AGENDA**

- A. Introduction/Welcome
- B. Overview of the key considerations from Second Longline Management Workshop
- C. Overview of outcomes from the Tropical Tuna Measure Workshop
- D. Scientific Committee Advice
- E. Review of Paragraphs 37-41 of CMM 2021-01
- F. Review of Table 3 of CMM 2021-01
- G. Potential Proposed Revisions to Table 3 in CMM 2021-01
  - i. Compatibility with zone-based management
  - ii. MCS
  - iii. Impacts on bigeye tuna stock and other fisheries
- H. Agreed workshop outcomes, possible joint proposal, and/or next steps

Sought outcome: *Agreement on revisions to Table 3*