

Summary of the 6 December 2019 meeting of the WCPO Tuna MSC Alignment Group, Port Moresby

Achieving MSC Milestones and Deadlines for Harvest Strategy Elements under the WCPFC Harvest Strategy Workplan

1. Agenda

- Alignment Group overview
- Update on harmonized milestones and schedule for harvest strategy elements of WCPO tuna stocks
- Actions if MSC's HS Performance Indicators as per WCPFC HS Workplan CMM are not met
- WCPFC16 HS agenda item
- Opportunities for coordinated activities during 2020

2. Alignment Group Overview

Established in 2014, suspended in 2017, and re-established by MSC earlier this year, the Alignment Group provides a mechanism for client groups of fisheries certified and under assessment against the MSC fisheries standard and of participants of Fishery Improvement Projects or FIPs, to coordinate their activities to pursue the adoption and implementation of robust harvest strategies for principal market tuna species. Through a unified voice, stakeholders improve their likelihood of achieving this shared objective.

The Alignment group's scope covers albacore, bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack tuna stocks that occur in the WCPFC Convention Area. The scope includes all gear types used by fisheries that operate in the WCPFC convention area, and that are in the MSC program and in FIPs with a unit of assessment that includes one or more of these tuna stocks. This includes 17 MSC certified fisheries, 7 undergoing full assessment and 14 FIPs.

3. MSC CAB Variation Request

In Nov. 2018 all MSC-accredited CABs filed a variation request with MSC to harmonize the Principle 1 conditions and deadlines for MSC certified highly migratory species globally where multiple certified fisheries existed on the same stock. In the WCPFC Convention Area this included fisheries for albacore, skipjack and yellowfin.

MSC reestablished the Alignment Group, in part, due to MSC's approval of this Variation Request that aligned the milestones and schedule for the adoption of harvest strategy elements for principal market tuna stocks in the WCPFC convention area. With this change, all MSC certified tuna fisheries in this region are required to align harvest strategy milestones as set out in WCPFC's CMM 2014-06 as revised by WCPFC14 in 2017 with the milestones in their client action plans to achieve the conditions of certification. The following actions are to be taken in response to the MSC-approved variation request:

- All of the MSC certified fisheries that were certified against the previous version 1.3 Certification Requirements will be upgraded to version 2.0.
- The milestones and timelines for the HS and HCR conditions will be aligned across fisheries for the same stocks using the tuna RFMOs' HS workplans where such workplans have been adopted.
- Fisheries that are currently undergoing full assessment and fisheries that enter full assessment in the future weren't covered by the variation request, but MSC expects that the CABs will follow the same logic and have these new fisheries align their milestones and schedule; and

- Schedules for annual surveillance audits are to also to be aligned.

4. Timelines for WCPO Tuna Fisheries

Table 1 summarizes the MSC-approved variation request deadlines for 5 tuna stocks that occur in the WCPFC convention area. The MSC deadlines are in green and are based on the deadlines stated in the WCPFC14's December 2017 version of the commission's harvest strategy workplan. The CAB variation request didn't specify a HCR deadline for SKJ but it is the same deadline as for having a HS in place. So, Dec. 2021 is the first MSC deadline for WCPFC adoption of HCRs for SPALB, SKJ, YFT and BET. Under the MSC fisheries standard, a HS is in place when all HS elements are in place.

Table 1. Summary of MSC-approved variation request deadlines for certain Pacific tuna stocks.

Stock	Mgmt. objective	Deadline for Harvest Strategy Element			HCR adopted ¹	HS in place ¹
		Acceptable Level of Risk	LRP adopted	TRP adopted ⁵		
NPO ALB ⁶	Interim first adopted in 2011, amended in 2017 ² - maintain biomass near current level to maintain recent exploitation levels and low risk of breaching LRP	Not specified (general 0-20% risk of breaching LRP adopted in 2016) ³	Completed - first adopted in 2008 (WCPFC NC) - interim LRP is 20%SSB _{current} , F=0 ²	No deadline adopted by NC	2023 (CAB VR deadline) (NC has adopted a LRP rule ⁴)	2023 ⁷ No CAB VR deadline WCPFC14 adopted an interim HS
SPO ALB	WCPFC15 objective of interim TRP is, within 20 years, to achieve 8% increase in CPUE by southern PLL fishery relative to 2013 CPUE.	Not specified (general 0-20% risk of breaching LRP adopted in 2016) ³	Completed - adopted in 2012 at SC8 (20%SB _{recent} , F=0)	Completed - interim adopted by WCPFC15 in 2018 - 56% of spawning stock biomass in the absence of fishing (0.56 SBF=0) - to be achieved within 20 years	2021 (CAB VR & WCPFC14 2017 HS workplan deadline)	2021 ⁷ No CAB VR or WCPFC HS deadline specified
WCPO SKJ	Interim defined in CMM 2018-01 (spawning biomass is to be maintained on average at a level consistent with the interim TRP of 50% of the spawning biomass in the absence of fishing)	Not specified (general 0-20% risk of breaching LRP adopted in 2016) ³	Completed - adopted in 2012 at SC8 (20%SB _{recent} , F=0)	Completed - interim adopted by WCPFC12 in 2015 (CMM 2015-06) (50% of estimated recent average spawning biomass in the absence of fishing - SB _{F=0, t1-t2})	2020 (WCPFC14 2017 HS workplan deadline)	2021 (CAB VR & WCPFC14 2017 HS workplan deadline)
WCPO YFT	Interim defined in CMM 2018-01 (the spawning biomass depletion ratio (SB/SBF=0) is to be maintained at or above the average SB/SBF=0 for 2012-2015)	Not specified (general 0-20% risk of breaching LRP adopted in 2016) ³	Completed - adopted in 2012 at SC8 (20%SB _{recent} , F=0)	2019 (WCPFC14 2017 HS workplan deadline)	2021 (CAB VR & WCPFC14 2017 HS workplan deadline)	2021 ⁷ No CAB VR or WCPFC HS deadline specified
WCPO BET	Interim defined in CMM 2018-01 (the spawning biomass depletion ratio (SB/SBF=0) is to be maintained at or above the average SB/SBF=0 for 2012-2015)	Not specified (general 0-20% risk of breaching LRP adopted in 2016) ³	Completed - adopted in 2012 at SC8 (20%SB _{recent} , F=0)	2019 (WCPFC14 2017 HS workplan deadline)	2021 (WCPFC14 2017 HS workplan deadline)	2021 ⁷ No CAB VR or WCPFC HS deadline specified

¹ CAB VR deadlines are in green font

² WCPFC14 (Dec 2017) Attachment I (HS 2017-01) states the revised interim management objective and LRP

³ WCPFC13 did not specify stock-specific acceptable levels of risk, but agreed that in general must be less than a 20% risk of breaching LRP

⁴ NC's NP ALB LRP rule: In the event that, based on information from ISC, the spawning stock size decreases below the LRP at any time, NC will, at its next regular session or intersessionally if warranted, adopt a reasonable timeline, but no longer than 10 years, for rebuilding the spawning stock to at least the LRP and recommend a CMM that can be expected to achieve such rebuilding within that timeline.

⁵ MSC fisheries standard v 2.0 does not include a PI on TRPs - and the CAB VR request does not include deadline for adoption of TRPs

⁶ The WCPFC HS workplan does not include NPO ALB and thus no WCPFC HS deadlines are listed for this stock

⁷ Under the MSC fisheries standard, a HS is in place when all HS elements (HCR based on a LRP & TRP, etc) are in place

The current MSC fisheries standard (v 2.0) doesn't include a Performance Indicator on Target Reference Points (TRPs) - and the CAB variation request doesn't include a deadline for adoption of TRPs. The WCPFC HS workplan doesn't include NPALB and thus no WCPFC HS deadlines are listed for this stock.

During this WCPFC16 annual session TRPs are due to be adopted for YFT and BET under the WCPFC14 HS workplan – and while this deadline is not part of the variation request, missing the deadline would make it that much more difficult to meet the MSC variation request 2021 HCR deadlines for these 2 stocks. Skipjack is on schedule to have a HS in place in 2020 a year ahead of the MSC VR deadline, and SP ALB, BET and YFT are on schedule to meet the VR HS deadlines.

The variation request and the WCPFC HS schedule are both for single stock Harvest strategies. However, SC15 considered alternatives for harvest strategies to account for mixed fisheries interactions and endorsed the use of a hierarchical approach based on a collection of single species models. So, the WCPFC plan is to initially develop single-stock harvest strategies and then at some later date incorporate these into a mixed fishery, multi-species framework.

5. Process if Harvest Strategy Deadlines Are Not Met

If an MSC HS condition deadline is not met, for relevant MSC certified tuna fisheries, the current process envisioned by MSC is that the CABs would undertake an expedited surveillance audit as soon as possible, given the condition would not be met and the fisheries suspended. MSC would expect the CABs to do their expedited audits at about the same time for all the affected MSC fisheries. This would avoid a situation where a fishery that had planned an audit in February was suspended, while a fishery with a planned audit in September remained certified.

6. Alignment Group Coordinated Activities

- Meetings with WCPFC delegations
- MSC Fast Facts for tuna suppliers
- NGO Tuna Forum joint letter
- SFP Fresh and Frozen Tuna Supply Chain Roundtable
- ISSF position statement to WCPFC, joint letter to WCPFC
- Make the case to eNGOs that advise major tuna buyers and contribute to MSC governance, including NGO members of the MSC Stakeholder Advisory Committee, of the need to amend the CAB variation request
- Request that MSC-accredited CABs submit a new variation request that recognizes that the WCPFC Harvest Strategy Workplan deadlines are not intended to be static and therefore, while stocks remain in a healthy state, adjusts harmonized deadlines for P1 milestones of WCPO tuna MSC certified fisheries as the harvest strategy CMM is amended.

For the latter two points, the group discussed and agreed to prepare and send a joint letter from the Alignment Group participants to environmental NGOs and to prepare a template letter to be sent by clients to their MSC-accredited CABs. A rough outline for these letters follows:

- The WCPO Tuna MSC Alignment Group participants support MSC's approved joint CAB variation request that harmonized Principle 1 conditions and deadlines for MSC certified fisheries for the principal market tuna stocks in the WCPFC convention area.
- The WCPFC Harvest Strategy Workplan was intended by WCPFC to be a living document, with the expectation that the deadlines be adjusted as they developed harvest strategy elements. *[A summary of relevant WCPFC language on this planned flexibility and convincing rationale for the need to amend deadlines during the process to develop HS elements will be included in the template letter]* It was therefore

inappropriate for the Variation Request to adopt static deadlines pinned to WCPFC's CMM 2014-06 as revised by WCPFC14 in 2017. Instead, the milestone deadlines should be linked to those of WCPFC's current Harvest Strategy Workplan.

- Suspending MSC certified WCPFC tuna fisheries, which combined supply X metric tonnes of ecologically sustainable tuna products annually, would result in a substantial loss in environmental sustainability.
- WCPO principal market tuna stocks are healthy (none are overfished nor are experiencing overfishing) – reducing the urgency for MSC-defined harvest strategies to be put in place
- The Alignment Group participants remain committed to use our unified voice to pursue having WCPFC put robust harvest strategies in place.

7. Participants

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The **Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) Tuna Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Alignment Group** provides a mechanism for client groups of WCPO fisheries certified and under assessment against the MSC fisheries standard and of participants of WCPO tuna Fishery Improvement Projects to coordinate their activities to pursue the adoption and implementation of robust harvest strategies for principal market tuna species. Through a unified voice, stakeholders improve their likelihood of achieving this shared objective.

https://sites.google.com/site/seafoodcompaniestunamanagement/home/WCPO_Tuna_Alignment_Group