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Common Oceans Tuna Project 2022-2027 - Update

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PROGRAM


Tuna project

Project Brief 2022-2027

1. Background

The Project “Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction” is a continuation of an earlier project (2014-2019) with the same name (“ABNJ Tuna Project”). The Project objective is to achieve responsible, efficient, and sustainable tuna production and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ in face of a changing environment. This is a GEF-funded project, implemented by FAO and executed by the IOTC through a Project Management Unit.

The Common Oceans Tuna Project aims to promote more responsible and sustainable tuna fishing. It works to ensure that all major tuna stocks are fished at sustainable levels, that compliance with management measures is improved and to preserve biodiversity by reducing negative impacts caused by tuna fisheries on marine ecosystems.

In the coming years, the Common Oceans Tuna Project will step up efforts to support further reductions in catches from stocks that are subject to overfishing, including tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) fishing, while enhancing the contribution to biodiversity conservation.

The project consists in three components aiming at addressing key issues in tuna fisheries:

Improve tuna fisheries management

Ensure that all major tuna stocks are fished at sustainable levels advancing the use of harvest strategies.



Promote the ecosystem approach to fisheries management in tuna regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs).

Promote sustainable fishing practices with incentives such as better market conditions for sustainably sourced fishery products.

Tackle illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing

Make enforcement of fisheries regulations more efficient with training in monitoring, control and surveillance.

Improve compliance with fishing regulations by promoting innovative tools like electronic monitoring and traceability systems.

Reduce impacts of tuna fisheries on the environment

Decrease bycatch by improved monitoring of catches of sharks, rays, cetaceans and seabirds and promoting best practices in bycatch mitigation techniques and alternative gear.

Lower environmental impacts by advocating the adoption of ocean-friendly fishing devices.

2. Successes from phase I

From 2014-2019, in collaboration with the five tuna RFMOs and a large number of partners - including intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector - the Common Oceans Tuna Project has promoted effective and sustainable tuna fisheries and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ.

It has paved way for future cooperation and knowledge sharing to ensure a positive and lasting impact on the world's tuna fisheries.

Better decision making in fisheries management

With contribution of the project, **harvest strategies – also known as management procedures** - were adopted in six tuna stocks, compared to just one when the project started.

As a result of improved management in general, the number of major commercial tuna stocks (23) experiencing **overfishing decreased** from 13 in 2013 to 5 in 2019.

Conservation and management measures implemented

Reinforcing the ability of RFMO members to fully apply adopted regulations was one of the major outcomes of the project. This was achieved by:

- **Certification-based training** to create career paths for professionals on monitoring, control and surveillance, which is geared up to strengthen national administrations and build mechanisms for global exchanges between enforcement officials.
- Capacity to improve compliance with regulations was strengthened at the national level through **compliance support missions**, that provided customized and integrated advice to the countries facing the biggest compliance challenges.

- Knowledge sharing and cooperation on compliance across tuna RFMO officials was enhanced by the creation of a **Tuna Compliance Network (TCN)**, encompassing all five tuna RFMOs to exchange information to support and strengthen the implementation of conservation and management measures.
- **New tools to combat IUU fishing**, promoting technologies such as Electronic Monitoring (EM) and developing new processes to support improved compliance by RFMO members and the Consolidated List of Authorized Vessels (CLAV) – a real-time global database of vessels authorized to fish tuna to assist authorities to research, identify and verify fishing boats operating in their waters.
- **A legal template** to aid developing countries to incorporate the provisions of the **FAO Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA)** into their national legislation was produced. Design options of **catch documentation schemes** were also produced on the mechanisms to ensure that the origin of tuna fishery products in the markets can be traced at any point in the supply chain.

Reducing negative impacts of tuna fishing

Every year, thousands of marine species such as sharks, sea turtles, seabirds and other marine mammals are incidentally caught and discarded as unwanted bycatch. To reduce the negative impacts of tuna fishing on these animals – some of which are threatened with extinction – a number of initiatives were undertaken during the project lifecycle.

In the **Northern Arabian Sea where tuna gillnetting is widespread**, data was collected by fishermen and yielded estimates of both targeted and untargeted catches. Working directly with the crew also provided an opportunity to enforce guidelines and hands-on training in the handling of untargeted species. It also offered an opportunity to test out simple, low-cost methods for less harmful gillnet fishing techniques – such as placing the nets two metres deeper.

The project supported thirteen workshops and trainings at sea and at ports with over 270 participants to **lower seabird mortality from tuna fishing operations** and the first global seabird bycatch assessment was carried out.

Promoting ocean-friendly materials

Fish aggregation devices (FADs) are often used to maximize catch. Unfortunately, this method also increases the chance of catching non-target species and undersized tuna, as they aggregate around or get entangled in the structures. The project has also promoted the uptake of more ocean-friendly FADs by organizing in partnership with the private sector **over 90 skippers' workshops**, gathering 2,500 participants in over 22 countries. The workshops were held to both inform and consult captains, fishing masters and crews about **ways to reduce bycatch while also exploring the use of biodegradable materials in the construction of FADs**.

Concurrently, **guidelines developed on non-entangling FADs** have been successfully adopted by all tuna RFMOs.

3. Activities involving WCPFC during phase I

During the first phase, the project supported several activities which involved WCPFC Secretariat or CPCs.

3.1 Activities carried out by WCPFC Secretariat

Improved bycatch data for sharks across the Pacific region

This work focused on developing a **practical and consistent approach to monitoring the status of sharks** caught by tuna fisheries in the Pacific Ocean. It included a baseline shark data inventory, by both IATTC and WCPFC. With the cooperation of the SPC, WCPFC also helped to advance a Bycatch Data Exchange Protocol (BDEP), based on a CCSBT model.

New RFMO shark species assessments

Under WCPFC's lead, **four new assessments of the status of four Pacific-wide shark populations** were carried out, involving new partners and data-sharing arrangements, resulting in proposals for management actions on both sides of the Pacific Ocean.

Bycatch mitigation workshops

In the Western Pacific, two workshops gathering over 30 participants from 16 countries, representing 34 fishing fleets, estimated the **mortality of four threatened sea turtle species**, and explored ways to reduce turtles from being harmed or killed by fishing activities. This led to revised management measures to reduce the threat to marine turtles and is expected to curtail sea turtle interactions in tuna fishing by an average of 12 percent in longline fisheries in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

Bycatch Mitigation Information System (BMIS)

In collaboration with SPC, the [Bycatch Mitigation Information System \(BMIS\)](#) was relaunched and data coverage expanded to cover global level.

Development of management procedures

The project supported two meetings:

- Fourth Management Objectives Workshop held in Bali, Indonesia on 10 December 2015.
- Intersessional Meeting to Progress the Draft Bridging Measure for Tropical Tunas held in Honolulu, Hawaii 22 – 24 August 2017.

3.2 Activities which benefitted WCPFC CPCs

Tuna management workshop led by WWF for WCPFC member countries, 1-2 August 2017, Bali, Indonesia and 20-21 February 2018, Nadi, Fiji, with the aim to increase the familiarity of officials from developing states with the principles of harvest strategies, methods for MSE, focusing on the knowledge necessary for officials to participate effectively in the process.

Pilot trial of electronic monitoring systems (EMS) for tuna longline vessels in Fiji to test the best way to incorporate electronic monitoring technology to the MCS toolbox available.

Work to mitigate the impact of tuna fisheries on seabirds organized thirteen workshops and trainings at sea and at ports with over 270 participants to lower seabird mortality from tuna fishing operations

including in WCPFC CPCs (China, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Malaysia) and engaged with the distant water Chinese fleet operating out of Suva, Fiji through a port-based outreach program.

Certification-based training under the lead of FFA in collaboration with the University of the South Pacific to create career paths for professionals on monitoring, control and surveillance, which is geared up to strengthen national administrations and build mechanisms for global exchanges between enforcement officials.

Support to the **development of an integrated MCS system** by FFA.

Skippers' Workshops for purse seine skippers involving fleets from WCPFC CPCs.

4. Activities involving WCPFC during phase II

During the current phase (2022-27) of the Common Oceans Tuna Project, WCPFC will benefit from activities with a global focus including the Western Central Pacific Ocean region.

1. The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) will further develop an Advance Diploma in Fisheries Management qualification program: this concerns a vocational education training program in fisheries management targeted at building the capacity of fisheries officers and other related government agencies (e.g., Immigration, Customs, Ports, etc.) in skills that are relevant to fisheries and ocean resource management. In addition, FFA will develop and deliver training in leadership and data analysis.
2. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) aims to promote sustainable fisheries in the Western Central Pacific Ocean through engaging tuna fisheries in the MSC program. This will follow the Pathways to Sustainability Program which uses a suite of specific tools to support small-scale fisheries and fisheries in developing economies in improving their practices, particularly from fisheries in the pre-certification space. This will be carried out in collaboration with regional organizations, FFA in particular.
3. Conservation International, in collaboration with the Pacific Community (SPC), and Mercator Oceans International will model the effects of climate change on tuna distribution in the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans.
4. Activities led by Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) targeting WCPFC CPCs who are also CCSBT members (Australia, European Union, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea) to enhance education, outreach, and capacity building for the monitoring and implementation of seabird bycatch mitigation measures, as well as an update of the 2016 global seabird risk assessment.
5. Three joint tuna RFMO working groups will be organized on themes of common interest among tuna RFMOs (e.g. FADs, MSE, EAFM, Climate Change, etc.).
6. Continued support to the Tuna Compliance Network through the International MCS Network, which brings together compliance officers from the five tuna RFMOs, to review monitoring processes for compliance in tuna and non-tuna RFMOs to identify drivers of compliance rates and measures to improve compliance.
7. The Ocean Foundation will support capacity building in Harvest Strategies/Management Strategy Evaluation in tuna RFMOs through technical support, developing e-learning courses and interactive tools, hosting quarterly webinars, and producing supporting outreach materials.

8. The International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) will continue efforts in bycatch mitigation such as: a) develop and promote biodegradable/ non-entangling FADs; b) hold skippers' workshops to adopt best practices; c) develop acoustic technology; and d) produce and disseminate a policy paper for holistic bycatch management that considers the impact of different fishing gears.
9. World Wildlife Fund (US) will develop and promote a training guide/toolkit to address technical and financial barriers in developing countries for the implementation of electronic monitoring in tuna fisheries.
10. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) will work in the Indian and Western Pacific Ocean basins to (i) assess cetacean bycatch and data gaps, (ii) build regional capacity and awareness on cetacean bycatch and available solutions, and (iii) collaboratively develop recommendations to address cetacean bycatch.

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The Common Oceans Tuna project brings together a global partnership aiming to advance responsible tuna fisheries management and the conservation of biodiversity in the ocean areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). Funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), it works in collaboration with the five regional tuna fisheries management organizations, intergovernmental organizations, national governments, civil society, and the private sector.

For more information: <https://www.fao.org/in-action/commonoceans/en/>

IN COLLABORATION WITH: Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), BirdLife International (BLI), Conservation International (CI), INFOPESCA, International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF/ISSA), International MCS Network (IMCSN), International Pole and Line Foundation (IPNLF), International Whaling Commission (IWC), Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), Mercator Ocean International (MOi), US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), PEW Charitable Trusts, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Ocean Foundation (TOF), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

