

Report of the First Intersessional Meeting of Panel 1 on Western Skipjack MSE
(Online, 20-21 February 2024)

1. Opening of the meeting and meeting arrangements

Mr Emmanuel Kwame Dovlo, Chair of Panel 1, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.

The Secretariat explained the arrangements for the virtual meeting, including noting the timing of the lunch and coffee breaks.

2. Appointment of the Rapporteur

Brazil was appointed as Rapporteur.

3. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes and is attached as **Appendix 1**.

The list of participants is included as **Appendix 2**.

4. Review of the progress of the SKJ-W MSE

Dr Craig Brown (SCRS Chair) led item 4 of the agenda. He also informed that there have not been any new analyses since what was presented at the Commission meeting in November 2023, however, there has been considerable discussion on the way forward. Moreover, he informed that a new contract will be in place for this year.

Dr Craig then gave the floor to Dr Rodrigo Sant'Ana (western Atlantic skipjack rapporteur within the SCRS) to proceed with the presentation of the western skipjack MSE process and to provide information and support for Panel 1 decision-making on management procedure (MP) specifications. Dr Sant'Ana described the current progress on development of the SKJ-W MSE, recalling its timeline, stock structure, recent assessment results, and its derivation for structuring operation models and source of uncertainty currently proposed for the robustness test. The possible management objectives and their performance metrics, a workplan proposal for 2024, as well as an overview of the potential Climate Change effect scenarios that are being considered for the SKJ-W MSE, were also presented. Finally, the data requirements for the improvement of the SKJ-W MSE and update of the workplan to be carried out through this year, were also presented. He emphasized the importance of the discussions that could lead to the possible adoption of management measures at the end of this year.

Initial performance results for nine representative candidate management procedures (CMPs) were also reviewed, including scenarios of constant catch which were included for illustrative purposes. The different CMPs were all able to maintain the stock in the green region of the Kobe plot (i.e. not overfished with no overfishing occurring), except for the constant catch scenario with catches of 40,000 t. All other CMPs presented very good behaviour, in general, with many showing high probability of being in the green for almost all of the projection period. As to the comparison of trade-off plots between stability and safety, all CMPs tested represented a good stability process with a relative percentage of variation type between management periods lower than 20%.

The results using an interactive communication tool, called SLICK, were also presented. Slick tools were developed by Blue Matter Science and designed and commissioned by The Ocean Foundation's International Fisheries Conservation Project and www.harveststrategies.org, with support from PEW Charitable Trusts, and the Common Oceans Tuna Fisheries Project, which is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

After the presentation of the Slick tool, Dr Brown encouraged CPCs to begin working with this tool, to become familiarized with its functioning and its explanative figures and tables. Although it is intended to be used by managers, he offered training support if CPCs prefer to work with their scientists in exploring this tool.

In relation to the Management Objectives for the SKJ-W MSE, after discussions the document “Decision Points on Operational Management Objectives” was elaborated, which contains the following:

Safety – Background: Maximum acceptable probability of the stock falling below B_{LIM} ($0.4 * SSB_{MSY}$) at any point during the 30-year projection period. The probability is currently set at 10%, but during the [First Intersessional Meeting of Panel 1](#) (27-31 March 2023), the Commissioners had indicated that it could be considered to reduce that value to 5%;

Panel 1 decision point: Maintain the current probability of falling below B_{LIM} at 10%.

- *Stability – Background:* Maximum acceptable percent change in TAC between management periods, as well as whether or not this maximum acceptable change should be the same for increases as for decreases in TAC, and (for model-based CMPs) whether such a restriction should be imposed regardless of whether or not stock biomass is below or above B_{MSY} . At the [Second Intersessional Meeting of Panel 1 on Western Skipjack MSE](#) (5 May 2023), Panel 1 expressed its interest in testing the CMPs with and without a 20% restriction on TAC changes from one management cycle to the next. They also expressed openness to asymmetric TAC change restrictions where there would be no limit on TAC decreases if $B_{CURRENT} < B_{MSY}$.

5. Workplan for SKJ-W MSE, including Climate Change robustness tests

Dr Sant’Ana presented the workplan for SKJ-W MSE in 2024, including potential Climate Change robustness tests.

This workplan summarized all the steps for the evolution of the SKJ-W MSE proposed for 2024, with the objective being the possible adoption of a management measure for the stock at the end of this year. Among the actions presented, were incorporation of the Commission's feedback into the MSE development process, improvement of the MSE structure aiming to incorporate the new data that will be provided by CPCs with fisheries on the stock, incorporation of scenarios that seek to represent some possible effects of Climate Change on the stock, continued improvement of CMPs, as well as a communication plan for the results of the SKJ-W MSE.

Moreover, the SCRS Chair informed that there is a plan to initiate a series of online meetings with the Tropical Tunas Technical Sub-group on MSE, which is an open group for interested scientists. He also said that it is expected to bring in expertise with experience from the other SCRS MSE efforts, so that the process is consistent across the different Species Groups.

As an example of what may be included in the future discussions, the SCRS Chair pointed out that the exploitation rate for some CMPs as currently structured is not currently at levels that would allow increased catch while still meeting management objectives; these maintain very high probabilities of remaining in the green, substantially higher than required to meet identified management objectives. Thus, Dr Brown explained that scenarios where CMPs can maximize yields based on the increase of the exploitation rates will be explored more in further development of the SKJ-W MSE.

It was asked if there would be another meeting of Panel 1 to discuss the MSE workplan before the November meeting. The SCRS Chair explained that, if results obtained through further refinement of the CMPs are substantially different from what was presented this time, Panel 1 may wish to have some further interaction in advance of the November meeting.

Still following item 5 of the agenda, Dr Sant'Ana discussed the inclusion of Climate Change as a robustness test for the SKJ-W MSE. First, he presented evidence of the change in the Earth's climate in terms of greenhouse gas emissions contributing to the increase of the Earth's temperatures and the respective effect on the ocean and hence, the effects of these changes on fishing activity and on the structure of the different marine ecosystems from the pelagic compartment community to the deep-sea environments.

Dr Sant'Ana highlighted some potential effects on the stock, such as the movement of the species with a more abrupt increase in temperatures at low latitudes, postulating a tendency for the organisms capable of moving to have a high migratory behaviour. Moreover, he expounded a hypothesis that there could be a relative increase in energy consumption resulting in individual biomass losses and, to capture the same amount of biomass currently caught, it would be necessary to remove an even greater number of individuals.

They may also be capable of moving from subtropical areas towards the poles. Species that once occurred in tropical areas may appear in subtropical regions in response to Climate Change, with the result that the availability of the stock to different fisheries may change. This is another important issue that could be associated with Climate Change.

He also mentioned that changes in recruitment, based on some Climate Change scenario, could affect the size and productivity of the stock, and therefore the behaviour of some CMPs tested. Moreover, not only the effects on recruitment may be looked at, but also in the mid-term, the possible effects on changing this partial distribution of the resource may be explored, based, for example, on effects on catchability.

Dr Sant'Ana emphasized that, among these various potential impacts of Climate Change, the one that could most likely be addressed in the short term for the western skipjack would be scenarios regarding variations in productivity, for example by assuming lower recruitment levels in the future. A robustness test based on reduced future recruitment as a proxy for Climate Change will be conducted within the workplan that was presented earlier in the meeting.

Dr Brown commented that it will be important to look at the relative performance of CMPs in robustness testing, rather than absolute performance, since the robustness tests are intended to challenge CMPs to see which are more capable of performing under a wide range of conditions, and the scenarios in the robustness tests are intended to represent more extreme conditions, for which there is little data to parameterize currently. There will be additional discussions of the impact of Climate Change within the SCRS and also at the Meeting of the Joint Experts Group on Climate Change to be held later this year.

6. Overview of the data needs and process to generate TAC levels beginning in 2025 for candidate MPs

For this item of the agenda, Dr Sant'Ana gave a short presentation.

He informed that regarding the requirement for updated data for this year, the proposal is to consider that all CMPs will use two years lag. Therefore, all indices used in the stock assessment in 2022 should be updated to include fishery data from 2022. The idea is for this to be presented during the Yellowfin Tuna Stock Assessment Meeting that will take place in July of this year.

Concerning the data series to be updated, Dr Sant'Ana indicated that both the baitboat fleet and handline from Brazil and the purse seine fleet from Venezuela must also be updated to 2022. For the USA, if possible, the longline should also be updated to 2022. These indices were used in the stock assessment, and they are the same indices that were included in the conditioning of the operating models within the SKJ-W MSE.

He then presented a preliminary proposal on the process to generate the Total Allowable Catch (TAC). First, for both empirical index-based and model-based candidate MPs, the TAC for next year (2025), for example, will depend on the information available through 2022. The SCRS Chair highlighted that a commitment would be required from the CPCs producing the indices to continue to support those indices in the future as they would be an important component of those management procedures.

7. Feedback and recommendations from the Commission

During the meeting, important points were defined by the ICCAT Commissioners. These points include:

- a) The definition of the operational management objective of *Status* to use as the reference for the probability of falling below B_{lim} equal to 10%;
- b) Regarding the objective of management stability, it was considered pertinent to set a maximum allowable percentage variation in the TAC at 20%, an exception to this limit being permissible if the biomass of the stock falls below the biomass of maximum sustainable yield (B_{MSY}). However, consensus was not reached on this matter. Brazil also commented on the need to evaluate a second limit, above 20%, which can ensure the predictability of any changes in the annual catch limits for the species, aiming to strengthen the socioeconomic importance of the fishery.
- c) For the candidate management procedures the decision was that the illustrative CMPs based on constant catches should no longer be included. Additionally, although Brazil has expressed its preference for model-based CMPs, the Panel decided to keep open the opportunity for the SCRS to explore different CMPs during the development of the SKJ-W MSE throughout 2024.

8. Other matters

No other matters were discussed.

9. Adoption of the report and closure

The Panel agreed to an expeditious process for adopting the report by correspondence.

The Chair thanked the Secretariat, SCRS, interpreters, Rapporteur, and participants for their hard work and contributions to the meeting and adjourned the meeting.

Agenda

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Appointment of Rapporteur
3. Adoption of the Agenda and meeting arrangements
4. Review of the progress of the SKJ-W MSE
5. Workplan for SKJ-W MSE in 2024, including Climate Change robustness tests
6. Overview of the data needs and process to generate TAC levels beginning in 2025 for candidate MPs
 - 6.1 Required update of SKJ-W abundance indices
7. Discussion
 - 7.1 Questions
 - 7.2 Requests for analyses, to be carried out in 2024
 - 7.3 Reducing the pool of CMPs
8. Other matters
9. Adoption of the report and adjournment

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