

Common Oceans Tuna Project (2022-2027)

(submitted by FAO Common Oceans/ABNJ Tuna Project)

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 objective of the project 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 Project will step up efforts to support further reductions in catches from stocks that are subject to overfishing, including tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated (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 private sector - the Common Oceans ABNJ Tuna Project has promoted effective and sustainable tuna fisheries and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ. It has paved the way for future cooperation and knowledge sharing to ensure a positive and lasting impact on the world's tuna fisheries. The main achievements across the different project components were:

Better decision making in fisheries management

With contribution of the project, 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 (CMMs) implemented

Reinforcing the ability of RFMO members to fully apply adopted CMMs 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 CMMs was strengthened at the national level through *compliance support missions*, that provided customized and integrated advice to the countries facing 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 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.

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.

The project also succeeded in carrying out *new assessments of the status of four Pacific-wide shark populations*, involving new partners and data-sharing arrangements, resulting in proposals for management actions on both sides of the Pacific Ocean.

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 ICCAT during phase I

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

3.1 Activities carried out by ICCAT Secretariat

Support to the development of the Fisheries Online Reporting System (FORS)

The Project supported the development of a prototype *Fisheries Online Reporting System (FORS)* for ICCAT CPCs which should improve timely reporting, quality of the data and facilitate ICCAT Compliance assessment.

Joint tuna RFMO workshops on issues relevant to more than one ocean including:

Joint t-RFMO Bycatch Working Group meeting organized by ICCAT, which took place in Porto, Portugal, 16 to 18 December 2019. A three-day Joint Meeting of the tuna RFMOs on the implementation of the EBFM took place in in FAO HQ in Rome from 12-16 December 2016. On the initiative of ICCAT, this joint meeting brought together scientists from the five tuna RFMOs and national experts to establish a sustained dialogue across t-RFMOs on common challenges and identify potential steps and areas to enhance the implementation of EBFM.

Joint t-RFMO FAD Working Group meeting, which took place in Madrid from 19-21 April 2017. This meeting, bringing together members and stakeholders of ICCAT, IOTC and IATTC, aimed to promote discussions on relevant tropical tuna FAD fishing and management issues from an Ocean-wide perspective.

Support to meetings of the ICCAT Port Inspection Expert Group for Capacity-building and Assistance

- Meeting of the Port Inspection Expert Group for Capacity-building and Assistance, 9-10 October 2017, Madrid, Spain.

- Meeting of the Port Inspection Expert group for Capacity and Assistance, 18-19 September 2018 in Madrid, Spain.

3.2 Activities which benefitted ICCAT CPCs

Tuna management workshop led by WWF for ICCAT member countries, 30-31 August 2016, Accra, Ghana 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 purse seine vessels in Ghana 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, organization of thirteen workshops and trainings at sea and at ports with over 270 participants to lower seabird mortality from tuna fishing operations including in ICCAT CPCs (Namibia, China (P.R), South Africa, Brazil, Korea (Rep.)).

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

4. Activities involving ICCAT during the current phase

4.1 Activities carried out by the ICCAT Secretariat

During the current phase (2022-27) of the Common Oceans Tuna Project, several activities will be carried out by the ICCAT Secretariat.

Compliance-related capacity building - aiming at improving compliance with ICCAT conservation and managements measures, including but not limited to Port Inspection (i.e. implementation of the PSMA and ICCAT PSM CMM).

Enhancement of Online Reporting Systems - this activity will enhance the ICCAT Integrated Online Management System (IOMS) through the development of extensions for automatic data interoperability for the dissemination of information by t-RFMOs to the public.

Technical harmonization across t-RFMOs - organization of three joint t-RFMO working groups on themes of common interest among t-RFMOs (e.g. FADs, MSE, EAFM, Climate Change, etc.).

Testing ecosystem-based indicators and management policies - carry out simulation studies using EcoTest (testing ecosystem-based indicators and management policies) that establish a range of credible ecosystem hypotheses including fleet and bycatch behaviour to determine in which instances indicators and management policies might be considered reliable.

4.2 Activities that will benefit ICCAT CPCs

Additionally, there are several activities with a global focus including the Atlantic Ocean region during the current phase.

1. Conservation International, in collaboration with the Pacific Community (PC), and Mercator Oceans International will *model the effects of climate change on tuna distribution* in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.
2. 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.
3. 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.

4. 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.
5. 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.
6. The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) will develop a Certificate IV *Fisheries Enforcement and Compliance qualification program for MCS officers* with a focus on the Atlantic Ocean and/or Indian Ocean. This will include the identification of educational institutions for accreditation and potential development partners for delivery.
7. Activities led by Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) targeting IOTC CPCs who are also CCSBT members (Australia, European Union, Indonesia, Japan, Korea (Rep.), South Africa) 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*.