



Update on the Common Oceans Tuna Project II for the 24th Meeting of ICCAT, 11-18 November 2024

Common Oceans Tuna Project II (2022-2027) 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. The Project objective is to achieve responsible, efficient, and sustainable tuna production and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ in the face of a changing environment. This is a GEF-funded project, implemented by FAO with activities carried out by the partners of the project - including intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector.

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

1. Improve tuna fisheries management

- Support that all major tuna stocks are fished at sustainable levels advancing the use of harvest strategies.
- Promote implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries management in tuna regional fisheries management organizations.
- Promote sustainable fishing practices with incentives such as better market conditions for sustainably sourced tuna products.

2. Improve compliance with conservation and management measures and tackle 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.

3. Reduce impacts of tuna fisheries on the environment

- Improve assessment of bycatch through better monitoring of catches of sharks, rays, cetaceans and seabirds, and promote best practices in bycatch mitigation techniques and alternative gear.
- Lower environmental impacts of fishing operations by advocating the adoption of ocean-friendly fishing devices.





ICCAT relevant activities of the Common Oceans Tuna Project II

IMPROVE TUNA FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Joint Tuna RFMO Working Groups

Through the coordination of **ICCAT secretariat**, the Project will organize three joint tuna RFMO Working Groups on topics of technical global relevance for managers and scientists. A steering group was formed comprising officials from the t-RFMOs, the Tuna Project Management Unit, as well as other relevant stakeholders. The proposed themes for the three joint tuna RFMO working groups include bycatch, management strategy evaluation (MSE), and stock assessment.

The first working group meeting, tentatively scheduled for 27-29 January 2025 at FAO headquarters in Rome, will focus on bycatch.

Support scientific and technical capacity to further develop harvest strategies for tuna

Another Project partner, **The Ocean Foundation (TOF)**, supports capacity building in **Harvest Strategies/Management Strategy Evaluation** in tuna RFMOs through technical support, developing e-learning courses and interactive tools, hosting quarterly webinars with simultaneous interpretation, and producing supporting outreach materials.

More information can be found here [Harvest Strategies | 21st century fisheries management](#).

Support implementation of EAFM, including consideration of consequences of climate change, in tuna RFMOs

The Project, with direct involvement of the **International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)**, in collaboration with the Project Management Unit, will support the **operationalization of Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM)** in t-RFMOs.

The emphasis is on how to formalize the implementation of the EAFM in t-RFMOs and establish a way forward by proposing a plan of action building on the outputs from workshops held in 2016 and 2019. Three workshops are planned to bring together stakeholders from the t-RFMOs, including delegates from CPCs, to discuss approaches and help develop EAFM action plans / roadmaps. The outputs from these workshops will be disseminated broadly and the goal is to advance the adoption of EAFM roadmaps in t-RFMOs with the support from stakeholders and the environmental community.

The first workshop of the second phase of the Project is tentatively scheduled for 21-23 January 2025 at FAO headquarters in Rome.

The **ICCAT secretariat** started work on simulation studies using **EcoTest (testing ecosystem-based indicators and management policies)** to study how harvest rates will work under different assumptions of ecosystem and climate change conditions, taking into account the correlation of fishing mortality between target and secondary species in the catches.

The open-source EcoTest software package will be freely available.



Three partner organizations: **Conservation International**, the **Pacific Community (SPC)**, and **Mercator Oceans International** have started work to **model the effects of likely climate change scenarios on tuna distribution in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.**

This work builds on previous modelling work carried out in the Pacific Ocean to study the effects of climate change on tuna fisheries which showed dramatic shifts eastward in the distribution of tuna stocks in the Pacific, hence predicting changes in the availability of the resources for Pacific Island countries. Under Common Oceans Tuna II, Conservation International, the Pacific Community, and Mercator Oceans International will extend and replicate this work to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, as well as in the Pacific, including various climate change scenarios (based on International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) forecasts). The model SEAPODYM will be used to simulate spatio-temporal dynamics of tuna populations under the influence of both fishing and environmental pressures, including their prey (zooplankton and micronekton).

The goal of this work is to project the future of the tuna population using (corrected) forcing fields from IPCC scenarios and provide this information on climate change impacts to decision-makers for appropriate action.

IMPROVE COMPLIANCE WITH CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES AND TACKLE IUU FISHING

Develop human capacity for fisheries control and enforcement

With support from the project, ICCAT will provide compliance-related capacity building to improve adherence to its conservation and management measures, including but not limited to Port Inspection (i.e. implementation of the PSMA and ICCAT PSM CMM). Since 2023 Port Inspection Training Courses were held in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Namibia. Additionally, combined Statistics and Compliance missions were organized in São Tomé and Príncipe.

The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) will develop, in close collaboration with ICCAT, a **Certificate Fisheries Enforcement and Compliance program for MCS officers operating in the ICCAT area.** This initiative will include the identification of an educational institution for accreditation and potential development partners to ensure delivery of the course to ICCAT CPC personnel.

Through the **International IMCS Network**, the Project continues to support the **Tuna Compliance Network (TCN)**, 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.

The third Tuna Compliance Network meeting is tentatively scheduled for June 2025 in the Asia-Pacific region.

Support establishing electronic monitoring (EM) systems in tuna RFMOs

To support the further **development of regional standards for establishing electronic systems to improve fisheries monitoring**, the Project partner **International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)** will convene and conduct two workshops involving relevant stakeholders from all t-RFMOs to identify opportunities for EM standard technical harmonization (1st WS) and implementation aspects (2nd WS).

The first workshop is tentatively scheduled for 10-12 December 2024 in San Sebastian, Spain.



To further support, the **World Wildlife Fund (WWF-US)** is developing and will promote a **training guide/toolkit to address technical and financial barriers for the implementation of electronic monitoring** in tuna fisheries.

ICCAT's Integrated Online Management System (IOMS) will be enhanced through the development of extensions for automatic data interoperability for the dissemination of information by t-RFMOs to the public.

REDUCE IMPACTS OF TUNA FISHERIES ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Enhance sustainable management of sharks and rays

To expand monitoring of elasmobranch landings in Atlantic South America (e.g. Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil) project partner **INFOPECSA** will develop and trial a port sampling program. This activity is planned but has not yet begun.

Develop monitoring and management systems to quantify and mitigate bycatch, develop innovative technologies for reducing bycatch, and disseminate best practice mitigation techniques to fishers

Under an activity coordinated by **CCSBT secretariat**, the Project is providing enhanced 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.

Another partner of the Project, the **International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)**, continues efforts in bycatch mitigation, including a) develop and promote **biodegradable/non-entangling FADs**; b) hold **skippers' workshops** to adopt best practices in bycatch mitigation; c) develop **acoustic technology** to support selective fishing and bycatch avoidance, and d) produce and disseminate a **policy paper for holistic bycatch management** that considers the impact of different fishing gears.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming is “a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated”.

The Tuna project and its partners are actively working to **improve gender equality** and support a balanced participation and equitable benefits across genders within the fisheries sector. This work is being led by the FAO Fisheries Gender Team and will follow a structured three-phase approach, including a baseline study to analyze gender roles and gender-based constraints, followed by development of a toolkit to support capacity development efforts, coupled with awareness-raising efforts.



Successes from Common Oceans Tuna Project phase I

From 2014 until 2021, in collaboration with the five tuna RFMOs and many partners - including intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector - the Common Oceans Tuna Project I promoted effective and sustainable tuna fisheries and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ. Its achievements paved the 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, in particular developing States, 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 and deploying 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– several 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 meters 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.

COMMON OCEANS | Tuna Project

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), INFOPECA, 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).



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