

**Report from the CCSBT observer to meetings of
the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries
Commission (WCPFC) held since CCSBT18**

CCSBT Observer (New Zealand)

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1. At CCSBT 18 it was agreed that New Zealand would again act as observer to meetings of the WCPFC in 2012. The following meetings of WCPFC have taken place since CCSBT18.
 - Annual Commission meeting 26-30 March in Guam, USA (WCPFC8)
 - A meeting of the Scientific Committee 7-15 August in Busan, Korea
 - A meeting of the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) overlaps with CCSBT19 (27 September-2 October)

Annual Commission meeting

2. The planned December 2011 meeting of WCPFC was postponed to March 2012. With a very full agenda, WCPFC struggled to address the core business of this meeting which was to decide on a new conservation and management measure (CMM) for bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack. Current scientific advice is that the CMM agreed in 2008 (CMM2008-01) has not been successful in reducing overfishing of bigeye tuna. The WCPFC has also agreed that measures should be applied throughout its convention area for skipjack.
3. While considerable progress was made, WCPFC was not able to finalise development of a new CMM and instead agreed to extend major components of the existing measure for a further year (CMM2011-01). Work is continuing on a new measure for consideration when the Commission meets again in December 2012.
4. WCPFC did agree to a prohibition on the retention of oceanic whitetip shark (to apply from 1 January 2013) and discussed a range of administrative and infrastructural issues. A key issue raised by Pacific Island states was the need to apply further management controls on the south Pacific albacore stock to maintain the economic viability of their longline fisheries which rely on albacore as a key target species.
5. Another issue that attracted considerable debate at WCPFC8 was in relation to requests by Pacific Island countries for access to WCPFC VMS data for vessels entering and/or adjacent to their EEZs. There was no resolution to this issue and it will be considered again at the TCC and at WCPFC9. There was further progress on the development of a compliance monitoring report which presents a summary of the implementation status of WCPFC CMMs.

Scientific Committee (SC)

6. Key WCPFC tuna stocks are taken as a bycatch of SBT longline fisheries. The status of these stocks is therefore a matter of relevance to CCSBT.
7. A general overview of the fisheries and the economics were presented. The provisional total Western and Central Pacific convention area (WCP-CA) tuna catch for 2011 was estimated at 2,244,776 t, the lowest since 2005 and 300,000 t lower than the record in 2009 (2,544,679 t). This catch represented 79% of the total Pacific Ocean catch of 2,833,020 t, and 55% of the global tuna catch (the provisional estimate for 2011 is 4,077,814 t, which is the lowest for 10 years).

Species	WCP-CA 2011 catch	% of total Pacific Ocean catch	Notes
Skipjack	1,540,189t	69%	Fifth highest recorded and 215,000 less than in 2009
Yellowfin	430,506t	19%	Lowest since 1996 and more than 170,000t lower than in 2005 due to poor catches in purse seine fishery
Bigeye	151,533t	7%	Close to average of last decade
Albacore (North and South)	122,548t	5%	Relatively stable and close to average of past decade. Includes catches of North and South Pacific albacore. The South Pacific albacore component was 75,258t.

8. No new stock assessments for skipjack, yellowfin or bigeye were undertaken in 2012. The assessed status of these stocks remains the same as reported to CCSBT18 as follows:
- **Skipjack:** the largest fishery by volume is assessed as not overfished and no overfishing occurring at current levels of fishing effort.
 - **Bigeye tuna:** The SC considered the results of a review of the 2011 stock assessment of bigeye which concluded that the assessment was robust but made some recommendations for improvements in future assessments. Bigeye tuna is currently assessed as not overfished but overfishing is occurring.
 - **Yellowfin tuna:** Yellowfin tuna is assessed as not overfished and overfishing is not occurring according to base case estimates, however the SC recommends that there be no increase in fishing effort in the equatorial region of the fishery.
 - **Albacore tuna:** A new assessment of the southwest Pacific albacore stock was reported to the 2012 SC. The results were generally similar to the 2011 assessment that the stock is not overfished and no overfishing was occurring. The SC did note that if catch rates were to remain at economic levels a reduction in current catch would be required.

9. An issue for CCSBT to note is that fleets that target south Pacific albacore in the southern high seas of the WCP-CA may well take southern bluefin tuna as a bycatch.
10. Assessments were also reported for silky and oceanic whitetip sharks and south Pacific striped marlin. The assessment of oceanic whitetip shark confirmed the need for the action taken by WCPFC 8 to prohibit the retention of this species from 1 January 2013. ISC is to assess the Pacific bluefin tuna stock (the distribution overlaps southern bluefin tuna in some areas of the fishery) in 2013. Full reporting of the 2012 assessments is to be found at www.wcpfc.int when the science committee report is finalised.

Seabirds

11. The SC considered a report from ACAP on best practise seabird mitigation techniques. In relation to the southern hemisphere (an area of overlap with the southern bluefin tuna fishery) The SC has recommended that fisheries south of 30° S are required to use at least two of these three measures: weighted branch lines, night setting and bird scaring lines. This advice will be considered by both the TCC and the Commission in December of this year.