

**Strategic Plan for the Commission for the
Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna**

2023 - 2028

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1. Introduction

A strategic plan for the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna

This strategic plan outlines a common vision for how Members of the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) would like to see the Commission operate in the future.

Components of that vision include the state of the southern bluefin tuna (SBT) stock; how the CCSBT operates to effectively manage the stock; and how Members are implementing their obligations and benefiting from the management of the stock.

This plan outlines not only a desired future state but also specific strategies and tasks associated with achieving the desired future state. This is the third Strategic Plan written for the CCSBT and builds on the 2009 and 2015 plans.

The 2021 CCSBT Performance Review

The 2015 Strategic Plan noted the CCSBT agreed to undertake periodic performance reviews of the CCSBT to assess opportunities for improvement.

A performance review was conducted in 2021 (the 2021 Review) and this provided suggestions for ongoing performance improvement. This strategic plan allows these actions to be incorporated into future work plans as well as confirming ongoing priority work for the Commission. In drafting this plan, suggested actions have been prioritised so that the overall work plan is achievable.

Key challenges

The 2021 CCSBT Performance Review concluded that the CCSBT's performance status had remained challenging in certain areas, specifically:

- Status of non-target species¹;
- Relationship to non-cooperating non-members; and
- Special requirements of developing States.

Taking into account the wide range of recommendations made by performance reviews of the CCSBT to date, key challenges for the CCSBT include:

- Providing for the rebuild of the stock to a level that can sustain maximum sustainable yields (stock re-building);
- Balancing the competing demands of those who harvest SBT against the biological demands of stock rebuilding (TAC setting and allocation);
- Ensuring all SBT mortalities are attributed against Total Available Catch limits, and Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) catches are prevented (compliance);

¹ Species that belong to the same ecosystems as, or are associated with or dependent upon, the major target stocks. (paragraph 18 of the report of the 2021 CCSBT Performance Review)

- Ensuring that all States with an interest in SBT fisheries are cooperating with the Commission;
- Ensuring CCSBT's systems and processes allow for the rights and responsibilities of all Members and encourage cooperation from non-members (governance);
- Considering the special requirements and capacity building needs of developing State Members and potential Cooperating Non-Members in terms of compliance with CCSBT obligations; and
- Addressing the impact of SBT fisheries on non-target species that belong to the same ecosystem, in particular seabirds.

2. Background

The Convention for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna

Origins

Southern bluefin tuna (SBT) were heavily fished in the past, with annual catches reaching 80,000 tonnes in the early 1960s. Heavy fishing resulted in a significant decline in the numbers of mature fish, and the annual catch began to fall rapidly.

In the mid-1980s it became apparent that a way of limiting catches was needed. To enable the SBT stocks to rebuild, the main nations fishing SBT at the time – Australia, Japan, and New Zealand – began to apply strict quotas to their fishing fleets from 1985.

On 20 May 1994, the voluntary management arrangement between Australia, Japan and New Zealand was formalised when the Convention for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna, which the three countries signed in May 1993, came into force.

The role of the CCSBT

The objective of the Convention is to ensure, through appropriate management, the conservation and optimum utilisation of southern bluefin tuna. Decisions of the Commission and the Extended Commission are taken by a unanimous vote of the Members, consistent with the Rules of Procedure and relevant Resolutions of the CCSBT.

The Convention created the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) and describes how it operates and functions. The functions of the CCSBT include—

- collecting data and information,
- deciding on a total allowable catch (TAC) for SBT and its allocation to Members,
- deciding on additional measures including monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) measures considered necessary to achieve effective implementation of the Convention,
- agreeing an annual budget, and
- encouraging accession by other states.

Initially, the Commission adopted a relatively devolved mode of operation, with most core functions (such as provision of science and monitoring, control, and surveillance services) being done directly by Members, sometimes in line with standards established by the Commission. This approach has shifted in recent times with much of the scientific work now procured, funded, and managed by the Secretariat on behalf of Members.

Membership of the Commission

Membership of the CCSBT Commission is only open to Nation States. To facilitate the participation of fishing entities, the CCSBT established by resolution the Extended Commission (EC) and the Extended Scientific Committee (ESC) in 2001 and revised the Resolution in 2013 to allow Regional Economic Integration Organisations (REIOs) to join the EC.

Membership of the EC and the ESC includes all parties to the Convention, fishing entities, and REIOs.

The EC and the ESC perform the same functions as the CCSBT and the SC respectively. Each Member has equal voting rights. Decisions of the EC that are reported to the CCSBT become decisions of the CCSBT unless the CCSBT agrees otherwise (but this has not happened since the EC resolution was agreed). Any decision of the Commission that affects the operation of the EC or the rights, obligations, or status of any individual Member within the EC should not be taken without prior due deliberation of that issue by the EC.

Currently the EC consists of eight Members. There are currently no CCSBT Cooperating Non-Members:

Members

- Australia joined in 1994
- Japan joined in 1994
- New Zealand joined in 1994
- Republic of Korea joined in 2001
- Fishing entity of Taiwan joined in 2002 (Member of the EC only)
- Indonesia joined in 2008
- European Union joined in 2015 (Member of the EC only)
- South Africa joined in 2016

The CCSBT meets annually and has five subsidiary bodies which provide advice on their areas of expertise, either annually or as required—

- the Scientific Committee (SC)/Extended Scientific Committee (ESC) (along with other technical working groups that may be required to complete its work, such as the Operating Model and Management Procedure (OMMP) Technical Meeting),
- Finance and Administration Committee (FAC).
- Compliance Committee (CC) and technical working groups,
- Ecologically Related Species Working Group (ERSWG), and
- the Strategy and Fisheries Management Working Group (SFMWG),

A panel of independent scientists attend ESC meetings and provides advice directly to the CCSBT as required on scientific issues relating to the stock.

The southern bluefin tuna fishery

Characterisation of the fishery

The primary market for SBT is the Japanese Sashimi market, where premium prices can be obtained.

The main methods used for catching SBT are longline fishing and purse seining. Longlining involves using long lengths of fishing line with many hooks. SBT are usually frozen at very low temperatures (-60C) and either unloaded at intermediate ports and shipped to markets in Japan or unloaded directly at markets in Japan.

Purse seining involves using purse seine nets to enclose schools of SBT. This method is currently only used in the Australian SBT fishery. The enclosed schools of fish are towed to waters near the Australian mainland to floating cages anchored to the ocean floor. The tuna are fattened for several months and sold direct to export markets as frozen or chilled fish.

Status of the stock

As noted above, the SBT stock was historically subject to high levels of fishing pressure and remains in a depleted state. CCSBT has adopted a Management Procedure (MP) – a pre-agreed set of rules that specify changes to the TAC based on updated monitoring data – with the aim of rebuilding the stock based on scientific guidance on TAC setting.

The CCSBT adopted an MP, known as the ‘Bali Procedure’, in 2011 to guide the setting of the global SBT TAC for the fishing years from 2012 and onwards. It presided over the rebuilding of the stock from approximately 5% of the original spawning biomass in 2010 to approximately 20% in 2020, which was the CCSBT’s interim rebuilding target.

In 2019, the CCSBT developed a new MP, known as ‘Cape Town Procedure’ which incorporates new data series and a new rebuilding objective to guide the setting of TACs for 2021 and onwards. The Cape Town Procedure is tuned to a 50% probability of achieving a biomass level of 30% of the original spawning stock biomass (SSB) by 2035, which is the current CCSBT’s rebuilding target.

Since 2017, CCSBT has measured reproductive capacity as Total Reproductive Output (TRO) rather than Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB). The 2020 stock assessment indicated that the SBT TRO is at 20% of its initial biomass as well as below the level that could produce maximum sustainable yield. In 2022, the stock status through reconditioning and future projections using the Cape Town Procedure suggested the stock is continuing to rebuild, and in 2021 the SBT TRO was at 22% of its initial biomass, still below the level that could produce maximum sustainable yield.

3. Objective, vision and goals

This strategic plan sets out the objective of the Commission (consistent with the Convention text). The plan also establishes a common vision for how Members would like to see the Commission operate in the future. Components of that vision include the state of the southern bluefin tuna stock; how the Commission operates to effectively manage the stock; and how Members are implementing their obligations and benefiting from their successful management of the stock. Each of these components is associated with specific goals – the desired future state of the Commission – and strategies – the suggested approach to achieving the desired future state.

Convention objective

The objective of the Convention is to ensure, through appropriate management, the conservation and optimum utilisation of southern bluefin tuna.

Vision and goals

Management of SBT

The Commission agrees the SBT tuna stock is to be managed at a biomass level that supports the maximum sustainable yield, and the risks related to fishing for SBT and impacts from fishing for SBT on ecologically related species are mitigated.

- This includes strategies concerning stock rebuilding, allocation and ecologically related species.
- This also includes consideration and review of all other risks including, but not limited to, marine pollution and human safety.

Operation/Administration of the Commission and Secretariat

It was agreed the Commission should operate effectively and efficiently, to responsibly manage fishing for SBT.

- This includes strategies for effective and efficient operation of Commission, its subsidiary bodies and Secretariat, including harmonisation with other RFMOs.

Participation and implementation by Members, including Compliance.

Members are actively participating in management of SBT through the Commission and implementing its decisions.

- This includes strategies concerning MCS, sanctions and assistance to developing countries.

4. 2021 CCSBT Performance Review

The CCSBT Performance Review Panel included 75 priority recommendations for CCSBT's consideration (Sinan et al., 2021). These recommendations were prioritised by the Panel through allocating a ranking of very high, high, medium, or low. The report of the 2021 Performance Review² of the CCSBT was provided to CCSBT Members on 1 March 2022.

The Performance Review evaluated the CCSBT based on 29 criteria and found that most of them were rated as satisfactory or better. However, the review also identified three specific criteria where the CCSBT's performance was rated as 'bad'. These criteria were the status of major non-target species, the relationship with Non-Cooperating Non-Members, and responding to the special requirements of developing States.

The report was also provided to the Ecologically Related Species Working Group (ERSWG), Compliance Committee (CC) and Extended Scientific Committee (ESC) for these subsidiary bodies to consider and provide advice on any recommendations to the EC relevant to those bodies.

²https://www.ccsbt.org/sites/default/files/userfiles/file/docs_english/operational_resolutions/2021_CCSBT_Performance_Review.pdf

The Commission considered Performance Review recommendations and recommendations from subsidiary bodies in reaching its decision of priority actions to include in the Strategic Plan for the next 5 year period, noting however that some of the recommendations from the Performance Review did not fall within the mandate of any subsidiary body but were assessed as part of the SFMWG review process.

Members have agreed on an Action Plan, found at **Attachment A**, that is aimed at addressing those recommendations having been deemed of the highest priority. Members note that there are a range of activities that are critical to the performance of the Commission that were not identified as requiring new action or resources but are currently being undertaken as part of the strategic ongoing work of the Commission outlined in **Attachment B**.

5. Annual Monitoring and Implementation

To ensure that the objectives of the Strategic Plan are met, the CCSBT will undertake annual monitoring and reporting against the actions agreed under the plan. As was the case with the implementation of the previous Strategic Plan, the EC will hold ultimate accountability for monitoring of the Strategic Plan and this task will be considered as part of a standing agenda item for the annual meeting. The Secretariat will be responsible for compiling the information necessary for the EC to conduct its annual monitoring review.

Subsidiary bodies holding responsibility for particular action items are expected to report back on the progress of those activities as part of their respective meeting reports. Subsidiary bodies will also need to reflect any priorities identified in the Strategic Plan that were not previously included in the appropriate planning documents (e.g. Compliance Action Plan).

The Finance and Administration Committee will also take into consideration the priorities identified in the Strategic Plan as part of its budgetary deliberations during the EC.

Action Plan

		Responsibility	Priority	Short Term		Medium Term		Long Term
				2024	2025	2026	2027	2028++
(A) Goals Concerning Management Of SBT								
1 Status of Living Marine Resources								
1a Southern Bluefin Tuna								
i	PR2021-02: Explore the need for additional measures (such as protected areas and area closures) to support spawning and recruitment.	ESC	Medium			●	●	
ii	PR2021-29: Due to the central importance of spawning and recruitment for stock rebuilding, additional efforts should be made to develop, in Indonesian waters, spatio-temporal restrictions, equitable and compatible with the rest of the management strategy.	ESC/EC	Medium					●
1b. Ecologically Related Species and Bycatch								
i	Noting the Multi-year Seabird Strategy adopted at ERSWG 14, develop an Ecologically Related Species and Bycatch Action Plan based on the recommendations from the Performance Review.	ERSWG	High	●	●			
2 Quality of Data and Scientific Advice								
i	Further increase efforts, including analysis on the application of electronic monitoring, to improve and supplement observer coverage in accordance with Scientific Observer Program Standard (SOPS)	CC/ESC	High	●	●			

		Responsibility	Priority	Short Term		Medium Term		Long Term
				2024	2025	2026	2027	2028++
ii	PR2021-07: Improve transparency by providing and making public, historical data and information that are not currently accessible in the public domain.	CCSBT/EC	Medium					●
(B) Goals Concerning Operation / Administration of the Commission and Secretariat								
3	<i>Operation of the Commission / Secretariat</i>							
i	Prioritise the establishment and ongoing review of long-term research strategic planning in the ESC	ESC	Very High	●	●			
ii	PR2021-72: Formalise a reserve/savings fund to be utilised in extraordinary circumstances.	FAC	Very High	●	●			
iii	PR2021-73: Develop mechanisms to improve communication between the Finance and Administration Committee and various subsidiary bodies.	FAC	Very High	●	●			
iv	PR2021-31: Review the existing allocation mechanism to ensure that it reflects the current makeup of the Membership and principles of international law.	CCSBT/EC	High		●	●		
v	PR2021-32: Modify the CCSBT Convention to include modern fisheries management concepts agreed by Members at the international level.	CCSBT/EC	Medium					●
vi	PR2021-34: The CCSBT should consider alternative decision-making models in the CCSBT Convention modernising processes.	CCSBT/EC	Medium				●	●

		Responsibility	Priority	Short Term		Medium Term		Long Term
				2024	2025	2026	2027	2028++
vii	The CCSBT should review transparency of decision-making by reviewing the CCSBT's Rules of Procedure or other options.	CCSBT/EC	Low	●	●			
viii	PR2021-35: The CCSBT should consider developing an alternative approach to dispute settlement/ conflict resolution to avoid the potential for future stalemates that could significantly compromise the conservation and management of SBT resources.	CCSBT/EC	Low					●
4 Relationships								
i	PR2021-58: Access to the CCSBT compendium of measures is made available on the public portion of the CCSBT website	Secretariat	High		●	●		
ii	Improve existing guidelines to determine what, if any, allocation should be made to new Members and CNMs.	CCSBT/EC	Very High	●	●			
iii	Consider the introduction of a science management dialogue to be held, as required, between scientists and fisheries managers.	CCSBT/EC	Very High		●	●		
(C) Goals concerning participation and implementation by Members								
5 Compliance Action Plan								
i	PR2021-36: Update or revise the 2018-2020 Action Plan to the next five-year phase as a matter of urgency based on the recommendations from the Performance Review	CC	Very high	●	●			

		Responsibility	Priority	Short Term		Medium Term		Long Term
				2024	2025	2026	2027	2028++
6	<i>Improvement in Monitoring and Control of SBT in the Global Market</i>							
i	Improve arrangements to collect and analyse the information of SBT distributed in the global market, and consider strengthening relevant measures to monitor and control trade of SBT products in the markets.	CC	Very High	●	●			
7	<i>Capacity Building Workplan</i>							
i	PR2021-22: Using the recommendations from the Performance Review, formulate and implement a capacity-building work plan to improve data collection, scientific analysis, and compliance-related activities.	CCSBT/EC	Very High	●	●			

Ongoing Work Plan

	Performance Review Recommendation	Goals and Objectives Area	Priority
1	PR2021-01: Members continue to support the MP, by remaining within their allocation limits, and eliminating areas of uncertainty such as Non-Member catches that could undermine its performance.	Goals Concerning Conservation and Management	Very High
2	PR2021-26: Continue monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of the rebuilding strategy for SBT	Goals Concerning Conservation and Management	Very High
3	PR2021-12: Continue to develop and embed innovative methods such as gene-tagging and close kin mark-recapture to improve scientific processes.	Goals Concerning Conservation and Management	Very High
4	PR2021-24: CCSBT should continue to implement CMMs based on ESC and ERSWG advice for both target and non-target species ¹ .	Goals Concerning Conservation and Management	Very High
5	PR2021-71: Maintain a healthy flow of income (through Member's contribution and other sources) that exceeds CCSBT's expenses.	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	Very High
6	PR2021-25: CCSBT members should continue to strengthen the implementation of the IPOAs and FAO guidelines in fishing operations.	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	Very High
7	Apply the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) Program to countries and/or entities who join the Commission in the future. Ongoing QAR program for existing Members is subject to the decision by the EC based on further advice from the Compliance Committee.	Goals concerning participation and implementation by Members	High
8	PR2021-13: Achieve a better balance between the scientific efforts dedicated to SBT and ERS	Goals Concerning Conservation and Management	High

¹ Species that belong to the same ecosystems as, or are associated with or dependent upon, the major target stocks. (Paragraph 18 of the report of the 2021 CCSBT Performance Review)

	Performance Review Recommendation	Goals and Objectives Area	Priority
9	PR2021-74: Encourage earlier nominations for Chair of CCSBT from hosting Members ahead of Commission meetings	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	High
10	PR2021-75: Encourage the re-election of Chairs for up to 4 years as is allowed in 4(1) of the Rules of Procedure to provide better governance of the CCSBT.	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	High
11	PR2021-55: ESC to improve accessibility of reports to non-technical readers.	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	High
12	PR2021-57: Process for review of external documents, including possible non-compliance on the part of Members, should be monitored to ensure that it does not create a barrier for external engagement with the CCSBT.	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	Medium
13	Encourage non-Members to increase engagement in CCSBT processes, including joining the CCSBT and utilising the CDS	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	High
14	PR2021-44: Continue to formalise and strengthen information sharing with other RFMO secretariats and alternative information sources.	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	High
15	Ensure members are submitting high quality, clear, consistent and completed reporting	Goals Concerning Conservation and Management	Medium
16	PR2021-56: Use of head of delegation meetings at the EC should be minimised to the extent possible.	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	Medium
17	PR2021-64: Members look for additional opportunities to engage with one another outside of the traditional meeting dates of the CCSBT to ensure that the limited time available at CCSBT meetings is maximised.	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	Medium
18	PR2021-63: Members look for opportunities to continue and reinvigorate the cooperation instigated through the Kobe Process.	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	Medium

	Performance Review Recommendation	Goals and Objectives Area	Priority
19	PR2021-68: Continue to engage with Kobe intersessional processes, particularly as they relate to areas of shared interests.	Goals Concerning the CCSBT / Secretariat Operations	Medium
20	PR2021-16: Continue to study the spatial aspects of the SBT stock structure and movements, and the fleets that exploit SBT	Goals Concerning Conservation and Management	Medium