Commission for the Conservation of
Southern Bluefin Tuna

みなみまぐろ保存委員会

CCSBT-ESC/2608/07

Report from
The Sixteenth Meeting of the Ecologically Related Species Working Group
(ESC Agenda item 13)

Background

The Sixteenth Meeting of the Ecologically Related Species Working Group (ERSWG 16) was held from 3-6 March 2026 in Canberra as a hybrid meeting.

In accordance with the Ecologically Related Species Working Group (ERSWG) Terms of Reference, the report of the ERSWG has been provided to the Extended Scientific Committee (ESC) as **CCSBT-ESC/2608/Rep02**. The ESC may provide comments on the report to the Extended Commission (EC).

Outcomes from ERSWG 16 directly related to the ESC's discussion

Although ERSWG 16 did not make a specific request for ESC's consideration, ESC may wish to refer to the following outcomes from ERSWG 16 for its consideration:

1. ERSWG agreed its Report to the EC on Progress against the CCSBT Strategic Plan, as shown in **Attachment A** of this paper. As **Attachment A** is a part of the report of ERSWG 16 (Attachment 7), ESC may provide comments if necessary. The ESC will discuss this matter under ESC Agenda item 6.1.
2. ERSWG's discussion on Electronic Monitoring (EM), particularly related to the relationship between the 10 % observer coverage target under the Scientific Observer Program Standards (SOPS) and EM review rates. EM-related matters will be discussed under ESC Agenda item 14. New Zealand and Australia were expected to work intersessionally to demonstrate how information is collected by EM to meet the requirements of the SOPS and provide a paper to ESC 31.
3. ERSWG's discussion on seabird priority species and high-risk areas on seabird bycatch within CCSBT fisheries based on the outcomes from the CCSBT's Spatially Explicit Fisheries Risk Assessment (SEFRA), and additional measures to address high-risk areas of seabird bycatch using the recommended toolbox. This matter may relate to the ESC's future activities on BBNJ, particularly in the context of Area-based Management Tools (ABMT), environmental impact assessment (EIA) and Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM). The ESC will discuss this matter under ESC Agenda item 18.1.

Other relevant recommendations to the Extended Commission from ERSWG 16

The ERSWG recommended that the EC:

1. Decide seabird priority species and high-risk areas on seabird bycatch within CCSBT fisheries based on the recommendations and advice from ERSWG in Attachment 4 of the report of ERSWG 16;
2. Adopt additional measures to address high-risk areas of seabird bycatch using the toolbox specified in paragraph 65 of the report of ERSWG 16 to better understand and reduce risk to seabirds in identified high-risk areas;
3. Support a phasing in approach over time and over areas (accounting for risk level in each area) and progress from better understanding risk to reducing risk over time and ideally aligning timeframes across Members;
4. Establish a process to annually notify Member commitment to a seabird bycatch mitigation plan in identified high-risk areas to the Secretariat starting reporting in 2027, including timeframes for implementation;
5. Add a standing Agenda Item for future Compliance Committee (CC) and ERSWG meetings from 2027 on Members' seabird bycatch mitigation plan in high-risk areas;
6. Adopt the revised ERSWG Data Exchange Requirements, as shown in Attachment 6 of ERSWG 16 meeting report;
7. Confirm resources to lead the review of the Multi-Year Seabird Strategy, which is due at the next meeting of the ERSWG;
8. Hold ERS Tech meeting in March 2027 focusing on the review of the Multi-Year Seabird Strategy as an online meeting, unless the EC raises issues with the ERSWG's recommendations on seabirds, in which case an in-person or hybrid meeting may be required;
9. Discuss the persistent non-compliance issue of Members with seabird mitigation measures in the context of the recommendations of the ERSWG regarding the need to reduce seabird bycatch;
10. Approve ERSWG's work program for 2026/2027.

Other relevant advice to the Extended Commission from ERSWG 16

The ERSWG provided the following advice to the EC, which may have relevance to the ESC:

1. ERSWG agreed that its previous advice on seabirds (shown in bullet points below) is still relevant but it builds on that advice with the recommendations shown in the above section;
    - The level of interaction between seabirds and SBT fisheries remains a significant concern.
    - The ERSWG noted that the most recent version of the SEFRA indicates that Wandering and Royal Albatross species groups are at high-risk. Species in these groups are of high conservation concern and ACAP indicated that some populations are in sharp decline.
    - The SEFRA indicates areas with higher risk in some parts of the Tasman Sea (especially), Southern Atlantic, and Southern Indian Ocean. These areas account for a

large proportion of the modelled risk to seabirds from SBT surface longline fisheries, but contain a very small proportion of SBT surface longline fishing effort.

- Based on the best scientific information available, the ERSWG recommends that CCSBT Members consider taking further actions that would ensure robust seabird mitigation measures and effective monitoring of implementation of the mitigation measures, whilst minimising impacts on SBT surface longline fisheries effort.

2. It was acknowledged that improving the accuracy of mortality estimates relies on Members' observer coverage, data quality, and reporting, and that addressing these issues is the responsibility of individual Members;
3. For sharks, given the overlap in membership across tuna RFMOs, Members agreed that those other tuna RFMOs are the most appropriate for progressing future shark stock or risk assessments and that CCSBT's role should focus on contributing relevant data to support these processes;
4. For sea turtles, Members acknowledged that many turtle species likely have less overlap with SBT fisheries and agreed that other tuna RFMOs are generally better placed to lead assessments. The ERSWG recommended that Members continue supporting risk assessment efforts in other tuna RFMOs;
5. To satisfy the current EDE requirements, New Zealand will provide the 10 % random representative portion of reviewed camera data for input to the "observed" CCSBT dataset, noting that its exact EM review rate is not made publicly available for individual fleets.

Other matters

Some other matters were considered by ERSWG 16, that were not included in its formal recommendations and advice from the ERSWG but are nonetheless worth noting. These included:

1. The ERSWG conducted its first Capacity Building Needs Assessment for the ERS-related area. The ERSWG did not identify specific areas requiring capacity building, nor did it agree on the need to develop any new initiatives. However, New Zealand stated that it would consult with Indonesia intersessionally and explore a possible capacity-building initiative on EM for consideration by the EC.
2. The ERSWG now has a standing Agenda item on Climate Change. At ERSWG 16, it was noted that several studies on the relationship between climate change and fisheries or fish stocks have been conducted by various parties, and Members were encouraged to submit documents relevant to the CCSBT for future ERSWG meetings.

Prepared by the Secretariat

Attachment A
(Attachment 7 of the report of ERSWG 16)

Report from CCSBT Subsidiary Bodies on Progress Against Strategic Plan	
Subsidiary Body: ERSWG	**Year: 2026**
Vision and Goals	
	Comments from Subsidiary Body
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.	• ERSWG developed, and EC 32 adopted the CCSBT Ecologically Related Species Bycatch Strategy. • ERSWG has adopted and is in the process of actioning the Multi-year Seabird Strategy – for 2026 this includes defining high risk areas and priority species, and defining a relative mortality rate, as well as making a recommendation to the EC on possible management actions. • ERSWG developed and ran a SEFRA for seabirds. The CCSBT SEFRA model was finalised in 2025, and the EC 32 approved the 2025 SEFRA Technical Report. • The CCSBT SEFRA model contributed to the Global Risk Assessment for Seabirds under the CCSBT Seabird Project funded by Common Oceans ABNJ II project.
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.	• ERSWG 15 has developed and agreed new Terms of Reference for the ERS Technical Group, and ERSTech2025 was held in April 2025 in Wellington as a hybrid meeting. • ERSWG has agreed to meet on an annual basis by including a technical working group in the years where ERSWG does not meet to continuously advance the ecologically related species work.

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.	• The CCSBT Seabird Project has actively engaged with Members to improve on MCS measures, specifically emphasising engagement with developing countries. • Members reported ERS data submission[1], mitigation measures and education. In addition, some Members took part in the evaluation on mitigation measures, assessment of SBT-fishery-bird interaction, and outreach activities through the Seabird Project. • Compliance with ERS measures, and relevant corrective actions including sanctions for any non-compliance, is considered annually at Compliance Committee. • The Member Participation Fund was utilised in both 2025 and 2026 to support developing Member participation at ERS meetings.

Action Plan		
Action	**Progress since previous report**	**Planned work**
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.	• CCSBT 32 in 2025 adopted the ERS Bycatch Strategy.	• This Action is completed. • ERSWG and Members are committed to actioning the adopted ERS Bycatch Strategy. • ERSWG16 updated the EDE template to include marine mammals which interact with SBT fisheries.

Ongoing Work Plan		
Action	**Changes since previous report**	**Planned work**
PR2021-24: CCSBT should continue to implement CMMs based on ESC and ERSWG advice for both target and non-target species.	• ERSWG15 updated its advice to EC on seabirds.	

[1] The inability of some Members to reach the target level of observer coverage is constraining the availability of useful ERS data for analysis.

PR2021-25: CCSBT members should continue to strengthen the implementation of the IPOAs and FAO guidelines in fishing operations.	• In 2024, Members noted that some NPOAs have been adopted, e.g. Australia's NPOA-Sharks, South Africa's NPOA-Sharks. • Indonesia planned to update its NPOA-Seabirds in 2025. • South Africa is currently in the process of updating its NPOA–Seabirds, which is now in the final stages of approval and sign-off. • Taiwan and New Zealand are updating their NPOA-seabirds and plan to publish it in 2026.	• Members continue to review NPOAs in line with IPOAs and FAO guidelines.
PR2021-13: Achieve a better balance between the scientific efforts dedicated to SBT and ERS.	• ERSWG has undertaken a technical SEFRA risk assessment examining the risk to ACAP seabirds from CCSBT fisheries. • Members provided extensive effort to the intersessional SEFRA work in 2024 and 2025, including many meetings of the SEFRA Technical Group and the ERSTech, and the CCSBT SEFRA model was finalised. • CCSBT 32 approved the 2025 SEFRA Technical Report to support the ERSWG's ongoing work in line with the CCSBT's Multi-Year Seabird Strategy.	• The future of the SEFRA initiative will be dependent on the decision of the EC, however, could entail additional iterations using supplementary Member data, implementing additional mitigation/monitoring measures in high-risk areas, and/or socialising the work with other RFMOs. • Review working and reporting relationships between ESC and ERSWG and the Extended Commission.