Commission for the Conservation of
Southern Bluefin Tuna

みなみまぐろ保存委員会

CCSBT-EC/2610/05

Further Consideration of New Member Joining Fee

Overview

In recognition of the financial pressures faced by the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), the Secretariat has been tasked to explore alternative sources of income other than those provided through the contributions made by Members.

One of the options that has received some consideration is the introduction of a one-time joining fee for future Members of the CCSBT. Such a fee would not only provide immediate relief to some of the financial pressures of the Commission but would also ensure that the past investments and sacrifices of current Members are recognised by new entrants.

Having previously explored the initial rationale, benefits and constraints of this potential change (CCSBT-EC/2510/07), this paper now focuses on the options available for the fee structure under this approach.

Background

At CCSBT 31, the Secretariat introduced the concept of a one-time joining fee for new Members (CCSBT-EC/2410/06) and sought support in-principle to further explore this concept and that (depending on the outcomes of the secretariat's review) a proposal be put forward for consideration at CCSBT 32. The recommendation that the Secretariat further explore the potential for a new Member joining fee was adopted.

During discussions at CCSBT 32, Members once again generally supported exploring the concept of a New Member Joining Fee and appreciated the intention to recognise the investment that existing Members have made to improving the stock to its current levels.

Members also generally agreed that such a fee should not be a deterrent to future Members, particularly developing States, and a fee structure should recognise and take those factors into consideration. The meeting agreed that more detailed discussions should be undertaken intersessionally on this matter before further consideration can be given at CCSBT 33.

As part of an intersessional Circular process (CCSBT Circular #2026/44), Members were asked to provide feedback on the previous proposal along with answers to specific questions aimed at reducing the number of potential approaches to implementation. Responses were received from four Members with one of those Members expressing no preferences for the options available and one Member suggesting a further alternative.

As part of its submission, Australia stated that their understanding is that Member fees are to fund the running of CCSBT and that we should avoid financial disincentives for new members joining. Accordingly, their current view is that a one-time joining fee for new

Members should cover only the additional costs to CCSBT of evaluating and processing the new member's application. This may include costs such as:

- Exchange initial letters
- Evaluate the applicant's commitment to the convention
- Negotiate an allocation with the applicant.

Australia further stated that if the costs linked to the application process are minor, then a new member fee may not be worth collecting.

The preferences of the other two Members are captured under the relevant sections below.

Financial Consideration

Size of contribution

The question of what constitutes an appropriate initial joining fee is highly subjective and has no precedent in the context of RFMOs. Members may wish to consider setting a fixed amount or alternatively a percentage of the most recent annual budget. In order to provide some context surrounding recent financial contributions of Members, the table below includes a summary of the most recent and the total Member contribution fees paid over the last ten years.

Table 1: Member Contributions for previous 10 years

	Latest Contribution (2025)	Total Contributions from 2016 to 2025
Japan	$937,631	$7,917,116
Australia	$937,631	$7,917,116
New Zealand	$266,593	$2,255,340
Korea	$286,732	$2,425,267
Fishing Entity of Taiwan	$286,732	$2,425,267
Indonesia	$255,150	$2,125,170
European Union	$124,186	$1,059,849
South Africa	$178,624	$1,454,895
Total	$327,3278	$27,580,020

The smallest contribution over this period was slightly in excess of a million dollars and this can be used as a starting point since it would be difficult to justify charging a new Member a greater amount than what has been paid by an existing Member.

There is a further argument for consideration of a smaller amount still since (in principle) the new Member has not received any benefits from the fishery to date unlike existing Members.

In addition, the financial contributions of existing Members have been spread over many years, whereas a new Member would need to amortise their fee over the expected lifespan of their membership. This last point could in fact create a positive incentive for new Members to retain their membership to justify the upfront investment and for existing Members to remain within the organisation in order to avoid being subject to the fee at a later date.

In line with previous advice, the Secretariat still considers that based on the investments made by existing Members to date and the ongoing value of access to the SBT fishery, a one-time joining fee of $500,000 AUD for new Members would be an appropriate starting point for discussion by Members. This level would recognise the financial commitments of existing Members while offering a discount (of approximately 50%) to account for the absence of access benefits to date.

A fixed entry fee would be susceptible to depreciation over time, which may justify the inclusion of a provision that allows the fee to be indexed for inflation. One option would be to apply the most recent 12-month Reserve Bank of Australia Consumer Price Index[1].

Alternatively, Members may wish to adopt an approach that is based on an agreed percentage of the most recent year's annual expenditure. This would ensure that the joining fee maintains the same relative level and is not diluted over time by inflationary pressures. Based on the initial figure provided of $500,000 and the total expenditure for the recent budgets, the current percentage would be set at roughly 10-12% of annual expenditure.

In response to questions posed in the Circular, Japan indicated a preference for an approach based on a fixed fee that is indexed to inflation with an initial starting point of $500,000 AUD.

On the other hand, New Zealand expressed a preference for a variable approach based on an agreed percentage of the most recent year's annual expenditure. New Zealand has suggested a 10% rate.

Accommodation for Developing States

One of the issues raised by Members is the potential for a new Member fee to create an unreasonable barrier to entry for developing States.

Members may wish to consider scaling (or waiving) the fee to reflect a State's development status. Although there is no precedent amongst tuna RFMOs for a joining fee, there are examples of adjustments being made to the contribution levels based on a Member's economic standing[2].

The Secretariat does not recommend the development of a specific formula that is based on an economic indicator for the new Member. A simpler approach would be to apply a set discount rate (e.g. 50% rebate) based on a particular qualifier (e.g. recognition of small island developing state (SIDS) status under the United Nations[3], UN's List of Least Developed Countries (LCDs)[4], or other agreed criteria).

In response to questions from the Circular, Japan expressed the belief that a one-time joining fee for new Members should not vary according to the level of development of the applicant, from the perspective that all new Members are required to establish and maintain an appropriate management system.

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[1] https://www.rba.gov.au/inflation/measures-cpi.html
[2] For example, the National Wealth Component of the Member Contribution Calculation is capped for Small Island Developing States at WCPFC.
[3] https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/list-sids
[4] https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/list-ldcs

Japan also suggested that the potential joining fee has been derived from the contribution level associated with the smallest quota allocation among existing Members, which is a quota intended to address bycatch. Japan further noted that the proposed joining fee of AUD 500,000 already represents approximately a 50% reduction from the lowest cumulative contribution level of existing Members. Accordingly, the proposed fee is already set at a substantially discounted level compared with the contributions made by current Members. For these reasons, Japan does not support the view that the one-time joining fee for new Members should be further reduced or waived for developing countries.

In its response, New Zealand supported the application of a reduced fee to accommodate developing States looking to join the CCSBT. New Zealand initially proposed a 50% discount rate, which would translate into a fee that would equate to 5% of the most recent budget based on their preference for a variable approach. New Zealand also suggested that eligibility for the discount could be based on an existing United Nations definition.

Potential Deterrent Effect

It is not possible to quantify the potential deterrent effect that the introduction of a new Member fee might create as this will invariably differ from one country to the next based on their individual circumstances. This fee would simply be part of the overall consideration that countries make prior to acceding to the Convention. This fee would be considered along with the existing costs associated with participation in the CCSBT and the administration of its obligations.

These costs must then be weighed against the potential benefits associated with CCSBT Membership. These benefits include those related to ongoing resource and market access along with the reputational benefits and being able to demonstrate engagement in responsible fishing.

Unlike other costs and benefits, the new Member fee is a one-time imposition and the Secretariat therefore believes that its relative importance in the overall decision on whether to accede will be limited.

Next Steps

Given the varying views on this topic, the Secretariat encourages Members to engage in further discussions as part of CCSBT 33 with the aim of reaching a final decision during the meeting. Members may also wish to consider this topic as part of the deliberations of the Finance & Administration Committee.

Prepared by the Secretariat