



Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna— Options for providing focus and direction to the work of the Ecologically Related Species Working Group

Purpose

At the 24th Annual Meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) Australia agreed to prepare a paper for the 25th Annual Meeting of the CCSBT (CCSBT25) with options on how the Extended Commission (EC) might provide focus and direction to the work of the Ecologically Related Species Working Group (ERSWG).

This paper is intended to open discussion on the scope of the CCSBT's management of ecologically related species (ERS) and the future role of the ERSWG. The paper proposes that Members agree to annual consideration of these issues, as required, at the CCSBT annual meeting and for the Commission to cooperate closely with relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) on ERS issues. We note that if these suggestions are accepted, the ERSWG Terms of Reference would need to be amended to reflect this.

Background

Australia presented a paper¹ on this topic to the March 2018 meeting of the Strategy and Fisheries Management Working Group (SFMWG). The paper concluded that, despite being in place since the early days of the CCSBT, the ERSWG had only made limited progress on ERS issues. Further, Members did not agree on the mandate of the Commission with respect to ERS, the scope of work to be undertaken or the most practical approach to managing ERS aspects of southern bluefin tuna (SBT) fishing.

At the SFMWG meeting most Members agreed the ERSWG had been ineffective. Issues discussed at the meeting included:

- whether the CCSBT Convention provides a mandate to address ERS issues
- potential duplication of ERS measures in other RFMOs that apply to SBT fishers
- lack of complete coverage of possible SBT fishing grounds by RFMO ERS measures
- not all CCSBT Members were members of the relevant RFMOs
- reporting arrangements for the ERSWG through the Extended Scientific Committee (ESC)
- noting current ERS provisions are recommended but not mandatory which complicates the role of the Extended Compliance Committee (ECC) and the application of the Corrective Actions Policy
- potential duplication of the work of other groups such as work conducted under the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels and Birdlife International.
- fishing for SBT potentially posed additional risks to ERS, compared to fishing for other fish species, for example because SBT fishing can occur in latitudes where seabirds are more abundant or endangered.

Considerations

In considering the future work of the Commission and the ERSWG, it will be important to improve the efforts of CCSBT Members to minimise ERS interactions, without unnecessary cost or duplicating the work of other organisations, to meet broader community expectations and to

¹ https://www.ccsbt.org/en/system/files/SFMWG5_06_AU_ERS_Vision_DiscussionPaper_Rev1.pdf



demonstrate the CCSBT is a responsible management organisation. For the CCSBT to maintain the confidence of the international community, it needs to be the competent authority for managing SBT fisheries, and for managing related ERS interactions.

If the CCSBT is to rely on ERS measures of other RFMOs, it needs to ensure these measures are comprehensive, cover the entire range of SBT fishing and are subject to regular review. The CCSBT needs to be an active participant in this work. At the same time, the Commission would benefit from working with organisations and experts that are already active in this area. In this way best practice approaches can be identified and duplication of reporting minimised.

The CCSBT has Memoranda of Understanding or Arrangements with the three relevant RFMOs—the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)—and also with the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). These arrangements provide the opportunity for cooperation in this area. Issues for cooperation might include the adoption of best practice seabird bycatch mitigation measures and extending the WCPFC ERS seabird measure boundary from 30°S to 25°S in line with scientific advice on the range of key seabird species.

While this paper proposes greater coordination with activity in other RFMOs and elsewhere, it will also be important for the Commission to identify any aspects of SBT fishing that pose different or unique issues to those of other fisheries. This includes species that are more at risk because of the area, time of year or fishing methods of the various SBT fleets.

Way forward

Australia proposes a series of changes or new actions to provide focus and direction to the work of the ERSWG.

Australia proposes ERS issues remain a standing item on the Annual Meeting agenda and be discussed annually, as needed. To facilitate discussions the Secretariat could be tasked with providing a summary report, based Members' Annual Reports, of Member ERS performance, including any trends in ERS interactions.

We propose that EC Members would place ERS issues on Annual Meeting agendas as required and lead discussions at these meetings. If there is consensus to progress consideration of the issue, either a specific ERS measure, or the modification of any existing measure, could be discussed, or further advice sought from ECC or ESC, or elsewhere.

We propose meetings of the ERSWG continue to be held on an ad hoc basis to consider specific requests from the Commission. Where possible, to reduce cost these meetings would be held in the margins of other CCSBT meetings.

Noting ERS issues are not within the exclusive remit of any CCSBT Committee, Australia suggests reports or recommendations from ERSWG meetings be provided directly to the EC for consideration. The EC may either task the ESC or ECC as necessary with providing advice on any scientific or compliance issues associated with an ERSWG report or recommendations. This approach would not restrict the Commission's capacity to otherwise seek advice from these Committees on reducing ERS interactions.

We suggest the CCSBT, through the Secretariat, regularly consult experts groups to identify any desirable changes to the ERS measures of other RFMOs to further reduce ERS interactions while fishing for SBT. Members could propose and agree the groups to be consulted at Annual Meetings and the attendance of these groups at Annual Meetings could be invited.



Noting the preference of some Members to rely on the ERS measures of other RFMOs, Australia proposes the CCSBT focusses on regularly communicating with other RFMOs and relevant management bodies on options to reduce ERS interactions in SBT fisheries. It will also be important for the CCSBT to work with other RFMOs to ensure ERS data reporting is comprehensive and readily available to allow ongoing analysis of the performance of ERS measures.

Summary of recommendations

- Agree ERS remain a standing item on the Annual Meeting agenda, and ask the Secretariat to provide annual reports on Members' performance with respect to ERS.
- Convene the ERSWG on an ad hoc basis, to address specific issues identified by the Commission
- Agree the ERSWG report directly and makes recommendations to Annual Meetings of the Commission
- Agree, that when reporting on issues where the Terms of Reference for the ERSWG and those of the ESC and ECC overlap, the Secretariat should forward its report to those bodies for their information
- Agree the Secretariat consult expert groups or bodies on ERS issues relevant to SBT fisheries as required to identify any desirable changes to the ERS measures of other relevant fisheries
- Agree the Commission, through the Secretariat, communicates and cooperates with other relevant RFMOs on their ERS measures.

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