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WPEA-ITM Project Update

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Alice McDonald¹

PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief update on activities under the Western Pacific East Asia Improved Tuna Monitoring (WPEA-ITM) project over the past 12 months, for the information and noting of the Scientific Committee.

BACKGROUND

2. The tuna fisheries in the Pacific Ocean waters of Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam represent around 30% of the annual catches of key tuna species in the WCPO, including a significant proportion (40%) of the total yellowfin tuna catch in the WCPO. The lack of accurate data on catch, effort and the composition of catches in these waters has been highlighted as a key uncertainty in WCPO stock assessments at WCPFC for a number of years.

3. In an effort to improve understanding of these fisheries and increase the accuracy of data available for stock assessments, a series of projects have been implemented since 2000 to support data collection in Indonesia, the Philippines and more recently Vietnam. These projects have included the Indonesia and Philippines Data Collection Project (IPDCP), the West Pacific East Asia Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (WPEA-OFM), and the Sustainable Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the West Pacific and East Asian Seas (WPEA-SM). The WPEA-SM project, implemented by the WCPFC Secretariat and national project coordinators in the three countries, terminated on 27 April 2019.

4. Since these projects were first instituted in 2000, significant progress has been made on data collection, data analysis and verification, and the provision of catch estimates. Consequentially, the uncertainty in WCPO tuna stock assessments associated with tuna data in these three countries has been reduced. More detail on the activities and achievements of these projects can be found in WPEA updates to previous Scientific Committee meetings.

5. Recognising the importance to the WCPFC of continuing to improve tuna data from these three countries, the Government of New Zealand is providing NZD 4.91 million over the period 2017-2023 for the Western Pacific East Asia Improved Tuna Monitoring Project (WPEA-ITM). The goal of the

¹ WPEA-ITM Project Manager

WPEA-ITM is to improve monitoring and management of tuna catches in Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam and contribute to reduced Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

6. The WPEA-ITM project is being managed by the WCPFC Secretariat, working closely with the national fisheries authorities in the three countries, and with SPC FAME playing a critical implementation role. Project components include expanding the capacity of enumerator programs to gather tuna landings and port sampling data, build the capacities and sustainability of fisheries observer programs, supporting additional national policy and legal reviews to improve catch monitoring and governance, and building the capacity of national fisheries data management and analysis efforts.

SUMMARY OF WPEA-ITM ACTIVITIES IN 2020-21

7. The WPEA-ITM Steering Committee met virtually in November 2020 to review activities in 2020 and develop a work plan and budget for 2021. As with many things, the COVID pandemic has significantly disrupted implementation of planned WPEA-ITM activities in 2020 and 2021. With many activities in the Work Plan involving domestic and/or international travel, COVID-related travel restrictions have meant that many activities have been delayed or where possible, held online.

8. Importantly, critical national tuna data collection programs have continued despite the disruptions, with enumerators and port sampling continuing in all three countries with support of the project. Other critical activities, such as the Annual Catch Estimates workshops have also been able to progress either remotely, in-person or using a combination of both. All three countries have also met their WCPFC reporting obligations, with the submission of their provisional data to WCPFC on time. Given the office closures, travel restrictions, health concerns and other complications, maintaining these core data collection activities throughout 2020 and 2021 is a significant achievement.

9. Recognising the importance of this project in supporting the continued improvement of data collection in the three WPEA countries, NZ MFAT has approved a no cost extension to the WPEA-ITM Activity for an additional year. This will utilise the underspent funds from past years to enable the continuation of these critical data collection and monitoring activities in all three countries through to March 2023.

10. A Mid Term Evaluation is currently being undertaken by Mr Andrew Wright to review the effectiveness of the Activity to date and strengthen implementation of the remainder of the Activity. All interested CCMs are encouraged to engage with the Evaluation to share their views and experience with the WPEA_ITM Activity. Please refer to “WCPFC Circular 2021-58” for further information.

11. The WPEA-ITM Activity supports the development of catch estimates for the three project countries. The three countries have reported the following total tuna catches (mt) for all gears in the WCPFC Statistical area over the past 5 years:

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Indonesia					
Skipjack tuna	336,455	332,628	291,442	296,743	249,175
Yellowfin tuna	160,092	134,290	215,460	219,178	149,870
Bigeye tuna	28,344	12,095	19,573	19,163	40,472
Total	525,238	479,013	526,778	535,105	439,517
Philippines²					
Skipjack tuna	82,127	95,331	73,376	88,159	109,154
Yellowfin tuna	58,584	70,001	66,599	59,846	74,618
Bigeye tuna	2,845	4,454	2,364	4,464	4,035
Total	143,556	169,786	142,339	152,469	187,807

² Philippine catch figures do not include catches of Philippine flagged distant-water purse seine vessels.

Vietnam					
Skipjack tuna	93,561	86,295	91,528	87,357	81,009
Yellowfin tuna	21,811	3,923	24,704	19,499	17,587
Bigeye tuna	5,704	86,295	4,301	2,458	3,730
Total	121,076	176,513	120,533	109,314	102,326

12. The pivot to increased use of online tools for various project activities provided some benefits, one of them being the opportunity for more individuals to participate in the various WCPFC meetings during the year, given there were no travel costs limiting participation. Greater online accessibility to training materials and formats are also expected to provide benefits beyond the current disruptions.

13. Since the last update to the Scientific Committee, WPEA-ITM activities have included:
- a. All three countries submitted their provisional 2020 catch estimates to WCPFC.
 - b. Enumerators have been supported in Indonesia and Vietnam in 2021, with enumerators in 12 provinces supported in Vietnam and 15 officers (including enumerators, supervisors and data entry staff) supported in Indonesia. Port sampling monitoring and a science research specialist were supported in the Philippines to provide oversight and coordination of tuna data collection and capacity building.
 - c. Participants from all three countries remotely participated in the online sessions of the Scientific Committee, Technical and Compliance Committee and the WCPFC Regular Session.
 - d. Annual Data Review Workshops and Catch Estimation Meetings have been supported in all three countries, however the Indonesian workshop has been postponed until late July due to the national COVID emergency. Final catch estimates produced from the Philippines and Vietnam have been submitted to the WCPFC.
 - e. Funding has been provided to upgrade critical data collection IT needs and strengthen remote operating capacity in the Philippines and Vietnam.
 - f. Further enhancements were made to the TUFMAN2 database system to support the Vietnamese language in the data entry and reports (DORADO Reporting tool).
 - g. Vietnam completed an observer training workshop for longline/handline fisheries in September, and further training for data entry officers in Tufman 2 in October 2020 and May 2021. Vietnam also progressed in their endeavour to establish an observer diploma or certificate program, with a report completed on establishing a national fisheries observer training program, and further work currently being undertaken on the legal framework required to enable a national observer program.
 - h. The redevelopment of the Philippines National Stock Assessment project (NSAP) database system was completed in June 2021 and the User Acceptance testing by BFAR/NFRDI is planned for August-September 2021. This new system has been developed on a web-browser/cloud hosted platform and will facilitate the entry and management of Philippines landings and port sampling data collected from hundreds of landing sites in Philippines provinces.
 - i. Indonesia and Philippines both provided papers on their “other commercial fisheries” to the WCPFC Scientific Committee and Regular Session in 2020, and are updating them for further discussion this year.
 - j. SPC has also continued to provide a range of training and technical support for all three countries in data collection, entry, management, observers and database development.

14. The COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to disrupt the work program of the three countries and the project more broadly. While it was hoped that a number of activities reliant on travel that were postponed in 2020 could be held in 2021, that is now looking unlikely. In some cases online or virtual alternatives could be arranged, and the WPEA Project Manager is working with national project coordinators to consider where this might be appropriate.

15. Further project information and documentation is available at the WPEA project portal has been established (www.wpeaproject.org), including a detailed progress report for 2020 (www.wpeaproject.org/reports/WPEA-ITM) for those seeking further information.

AUTHOR: Alice McDonald, WPEA Project Manager, WCPFC Secretariat