

1. What is the WCPFC?

The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention (WCPFC) is an international fisheries agreement that seeks to ensure, through effective management, the long-term conservation and sustainable use of highly migratory fish stocks (i.e. tunas, billfish, marlin) in the western and central Pacific Ocean. Conservation and management measures that are developed under the terms of the Convention apply to these stocks throughout their range, or to specific areas within the Convention Area. **Click [HERE](#) to display a map of the Convention Area.**

The WCPFC was established following seven negotiating sessions known as the Multilateral High Level Conference (MHLC), which began in 1994. Not until the second MHLC and the adoption of the Majuro Declaration in 1997 did the international negotiations gain impetus and direction for moving forward. The Majuro Declaration, named for the location of MHLC2 in Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands, reflected basic principles on which to base the ensuing negotiations. These included principles from the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement such as the application of the precautionary approach, management decisions to be based on the best available science, ecosystem considerations and recognition of special requirements of small island developing States.

The final MHLC took place in Honolulu, Hawaii in 2000 where the Convention was adopted and opened for signature. Following adoption of the Convention, a series of preparatory conferences (PrepCon) were held to develop the necessary administrative and procedural elements that would ultimately guide the work to be accomplished under the Convention.

The Convention establishes a governing body known as the Commission, which is comprised of representatives from countries that have ratified the Convention. When the Convention text was adopted in 2000, only those countries that participated in the MHLC negotiations were permitted to become members. Other countries can become signatories of the Convention only by invitation following a consensus decision of the Commission. As of December 2009, there are 25 members of the Convention, including the fishing entity of Chinese-Taipei. Seven Territories (American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and Tokelau) also participate in the work of the Commission.

2. What area is the WCPFC responsible for?

The area covered by the Convention covers almost 20 per cent of the Earth's surface (see Convention Area map). Although the western boundary notionally extends to the east Asian seaboard, it is understood that the Convention Area does not include the South China Sea. In the east, the Convention Area adjoins, or overlaps, the area of competence of the Inter-American

Tropical Tuna Commission. The southern boundary extends to 60 degrees south and the northern boundary extends to Alaska and the Bering Sea.

3. What fisheries is the WCPFC concerned with?

The Pacific Ocean is home to some of the world's most abundant populations of tuna species such as albacore, skipjack and yellowfin, and to billfish species such as marlin and swordfish. Collectively, these fish are often referred to as *highly migratory stocks* because of the great distances they can swim, often across ocean provinces and the boundaries of multiple countries. In the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) several countries fish commercially for these species, representing an annual multi-billion dollar industry. But like most natural resources, fishery resources are finite and if not managed responsibly, can face the threat of over exploitation. The WCPFC, therefore, focuses on the effective management and conservation of these highly migratory stocks for sustainable use.

There are many different methods used for capturing highly migratory stocks, but the WCPFC is primarily concerned with the management of fishing vessels that use longlines (fishing line with hooks set at regular intervals) and purse seine gear (large nets that surround schools of fish and cinch at the bottom, much like a drawstring of a "purse"), as well as troll lines, pole and line gear and other small scale fishing methods, including some artisanal methods. The Commission develops conservation and management measures that are often specific to fishing gear types, primarily because different gear types target different species. Longline gear, for example, is most often used to catch adult bigeye tuna, yellowfin tuna and swordfish, while purse seine gear targets skipjack tuna.

The warm tropical waters near the equator in the WCPO are fertile fishing grounds for vessels targeting most types of tuna, as well as some species of marlin and swordfish. Many island countries are situated throughout these fertile fishing grounds, creating the need for close cooperation between the island countries whose waters are home to abundant fish stocks, and the developed countries such as Japan, Korea, Chinese Taipei and the United States, that support fleets of vessels fishing for these stocks.

4. What is the relationship between WCPFC and other organizations?

The WCPFC is one of several global organizations known as a regional fisheries management organization (RFMO). As a member of the global RFMO family, the WCPFC has concluded a number of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with related fisheries organizations, including the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). These

MOUs help foster a close relationship between the WCPFC and these organizations and ensures that the lines of communication are open to discuss matters of common interest.

One particularly important relationship for the WCPFC is with the regional fisheries body known as the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). The FFA is an organization comprised of independent Pacific Island countries who share a common fisheries interest in the Pacific Ocean region. The WCPFC coordinates very closely with the FFA, whose members are also members of the WCPFC. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) is another important relationship for the WCPFC. The SPC's Oceanic Fisheries Programme serves as the Commission's Science Services Provider and Data Manager. This relationship ensures that there is no duplication of effort in the area of collection and processing of scientific data on fishing activities in the region.

The Convention further encourages the Commission to cooperate with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and other related United Nations organizations that may share common interests with the WCPFC.

5. How is WCPFC governed?

The Convention establishes a governing body known as the Commission which is comprised of representatives from members, cooperating non-members and participating territories (collectively, CCMs). The Commission holds annual meetings and is presided over by a Chairman and a Vice-Chairman, who are elected from amongst the membership.

Four subsidiary bodies support the work of the Commission and meet in the months prior to the annual meeting, which is always held in December. The Scientific Committee (SC) meets in August and ensures that the Commission has the best available scientific information on which to consider appropriate conservation and management measures. The Scientific Committee utilizes the services of expert fisheries scientists and its meetings usually comprise scientific and other related technical representatives. The SC also coordinates with the Technical and Compliance Committee on certain matters to ensure consistent advice is provided to the Commission.

The Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) meets in October and is the "enforcement" committee of the Commission. The TCC reviews members' adherence to Commission decisions and monitors individual countries' implementation of those measures. The TCC also makes recommendations to the Commission with respect to encouraging, improving and enforcing compliance by members with the decisions of the Commission.

The Northern Committee (NC) meets in September and makes recommendations to the Commission on species that are mostly found in the Convention Area north of 20 degrees north. Unlike the SC and the TCC, not all members of the Commission are represented on the NC. Although participation in the NC is limited to those members that are located in the area north of

20 degrees north, or are fishing in this area, any member of the Commission may participate in NC meetings as an observer. Any decisions the Commission takes on species under the purview of the NC must be based on recommendations from the NC.

The Finance and Administration Committee meets annually along with the Commission meeting and deliberates over the Commission's budget. All Commission members are represented on the Finance and Administration Committee and recommendations are forwarded to the Commission for adoption.

Decisions taken by the Commission are generally done by consensus. In cases where decisions have to be taken by vote, usually on substantive matters, a "two-chamber system" applies. The FFA members of the Commission comprise one chamber, while the non-FFA members form the other chamber. Decisions are taken by a three-fourths majority of those present and voting in each chamber and no proposal can be defeated by two or fewer votes in either chamber.

6. How does WCPFC promote compliance?

The Convention establishes a requirement for each member to establish and maintain a record of fishing vessels that are authorized to fish in the Convention Area beyond that member's area of national jurisdiction. The Secretariat maintains a central database of each member's authorized list of fishing vessels, which acts as a verification tool to ensure that fishing vessels are legally operating in the Convention Area.

The WCPFC establishes a number of monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) programme to promote compliance by Commission members with conservation and management measures and other decisions of the Commission (such as in relation to requirements concerning data submission). One such programme is the Regional Observer Programme (ROP), which manages the placement of personnel on board fishing vessels to observe and collect data on fishing operations. Data collected by observers is critical in assessing the effectiveness of measures, as well as providing scientists with important fishery independent information on the size and weight of species taken. In addition, the role of an observer can be useful in ensuring compliance, through verification of fishing information such as vessel location, time of year and species caught.

Complementing the ROP is the Commission's vessel monitoring system (VMS). Vessels fishing in the Convention Area are required to install a transmitting device known as an Automatic Location Communicator (ALC), which transmits a signal to a land-based receiving station where fisheries managers can view and track the location of fishing vessels. This tool allows fisheries managers to better promote compliance with any area closures or restrictions that may be in place at any given time. It also helps scientists and managers understand the nature of fishing

operations and where fishing is taking place. The Commission's VMS became operational in April 2009. By the end of 2009, over 2,000 vessels were reporting to the system.

A third important MCS element is the boarding and inspection of fishing vessels on the high seas by patrol vessels registered with the Commission by CCMs. These patrol vessels conduct routine operations throughout the Pacific Ocean. Under an important measure adopted by the Commission, members have agreed to allow their fishing vessels to be boarded and inspected by the patrol vessels of other members. Patrol vessels provide the Commission with an important tool with which to monitor and in some situations, take action against, fishing violations on the high seas.

Another critical component in the Commission's compliance toolbox is the list of vessels that have engaged in Illegal, Unregulated or Unreported (IUU) activities. Vessels that have been found, through sufficient evidence, to have committed violations as described by the Commission, are placed on what is known as an "IUU List". Members are prohibited from engaging in fishing activities or other related transactions with vessels that are on the IUU List, which can act as a strong deterrent for countries to closely monitor and regulate the activities of their fishing vessels.

7. How is WCPFC financed?

WCPFC is financed by annual dues from member countries, based on the following formula:

Base fee – all members pay the same base fee which accounts for 10% of the approved annual budget;

National wealth – comprises 20% of the budget and is based on the country's Gross Domestic Product, taking into account a member's ability to pay

Variable fee – based on the total catch taken within the exclusive economic zone of each member, and beyond areas of national jurisdiction by flagged vessels. A discount factor is applied to catch taken by developing States or territories in their own exclusive economic zone or by vessels flying its flag.

The Convention establishes the sources of funds for the work of the Commission as follows:

Assessed contributions;

Voluntary contributions;

A fund established to facilitate participation by developing States Parties; and

Any other funds which the Commission may receive.

8. What are the major challenges facing WCPFC?

The WCPFC faces a number of challenges in meeting its objectives of long term conservation and sustainable use of highly migratory species. As the world's population continues to grow, so does the demand for food and in particular, sources of protein. This increasing demand means greater pressure on the ocean's resources and their ability to reproduce in a sustainable manner.

The fishery resources of the western and central Pacific Ocean are relatively abundant and the returns on investments are high, with the fishery estimated to be worth approximately US\$5 billion annually. This has increased international interest in WCPFC, with more countries applying for participatory status in the Commission every year. With increased membership comes more diverse interests within the Commission, making negotiations and agreement ever more challenging.

The small island developing States of the Pacific have long held aspirations for developing their own domestic commercial fisheries and retaining an even greater share of the benefits from the multi-billion dollar fishery in their backyards. At the same time, the well-established fleets of the industrialized countries continue to grow and become more efficient with the advent of new and better fishing technology. Such growth in the number of fishing vessels in both small and large fleets, coupled with higher productivity in some fleets, poses real threats to the sustainability of WCPO tuna resources.

9. What are the priority science issues before the WCPFC?

Provision of scientific data by member countries continues to be a priority issue for the Commission. Without sufficient and accurate data on fishing operations, the task of the Commission becomes increasingly difficult and conservation and management measures may be less effective. Although the members of the Commission have all agreed to provide their scientific data to the Commission, timely collection and submission still remain a significant challenge for some members.

There is also a need to give increasing attention to the biological attributes of target species and species taken incidentally. Many of the biological parameters for species taken in WCPO tuna fisheries, such as natural mortality, growth, and reproductive biology are based on research information that is now 40 years old.

In addition, there is a need to better characterize the dynamics of fishing fleets operating in the WCPO. Fleet dynamics have changed significantly in the last decade as a result of technological developments and improved vessel design, with the result that the fishing efficiency has also changed. However, documentation of these changes remains poor. Additional information on how the fishing fleets behave will help scientists better target their research efforts and resources, including prioritizing the type and frequency of stock assessments required.

The Commission also requires regular scientific review of its conservation and management measures that are aimed at reducing the mortality rate of key species, as well as those taken incidentally, such as sharks. Because not all stock assessments need to be updated on an annual basis, the scientists are able to prioritize and focus their resources on particular species of concern in any given year.

10. What arrangements were in place before WCPFC?

Before WCPFC, there were no international arrangements in place to comprehensively manage the fishery resources of the western and central Pacific Ocean. The Pacific Island countries worked collaboratively through the FFA to harmonize management efforts in their exclusive economic zones, but no arrangements existed for conserving and managing fishing throughout the range of the stocks including in international waters or high seas. In addition, a multilateral treaty between the United States and 16 independent Pacific Island countries had been in operation for more than 10 years, but the treaty is primarily a fisheries access treaty and an avenue for fisheries development in the Pacific Islands.

The WCPFC was one of the first international fisheries agreements to be adopted following the conclusion of the 1995 United Nations Straddling Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA). The UNFSA is an important international agreement in that it represented a concerted global attempt to implement the provisions of the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention relating to straddling and highly migratory fish stocks, such as the tuna and billfish covered by the WCPFC. The provisions on straddling and highly migratory fish stocks are particularly important to small island developing States because they represent a primary source of achieving national food security, supporting livelihoods and sustainable economic development.

11. What is the WCPFC doing to protect bycatch and non-target species?

The Commission has adopted a number of measures to protect the unintentional catch, or bycatch, of marine mammals and other non-target species. Sea turtles, sharks, seabirds and some fish species other than tuna are often the unintended casualties of commercial fishing operations. The following are some examples of measures adopted by the Commission to decrease the interactions of these species with fishing activities:

- In 2008, the Commission adopted a conservation and management measure for sea turtles, that requires fishermen to employ proper handling and mitigation techniques that will maximize survival of sea turtles that may be captured incidentally during fishing operations (see <http://www.wcpfc.int/node/591>);
- A seabird mitigation measure was adopted in 2007 and seeks to minimize the bycatch of seabirds with a focus on longline operations. Similar to the measure for sea turtles, the seabird measure requires fishers to use proper handling and mitigation techniques

to minimize the number of seabirds affected by longline fishing operations particularly in southern and northern latitudes (see <http://www.wcpfc.int/node/588>);

- The Commission adopted a measure in 2009 to protect certain species of shark, which are also often taken as bycatch by longliners and purse seiners targeting tunas and billfish (see <http://www.wcpfc.int/node/594>).

In addition, juvenile tunas are taken as bycatch in certain fisheries which poses some threats to the reproductive sustainability of those stocks. For example, the purse seine fishery often captures young yellowfin and bigeye tuna while targeting skipjack, due to the use of fish aggregating devices. To help mitigate the catch of juvenile tunas, the Commission has adopted measures to control purse seine fishing around fish aggregating devices.

The Commission continues to collect data on bycatch and non-target species that are encountered during fishing activities, to ensure that existing measures are effective, as well as to identify gaps where additional measures may be necessary.