

Tuna scientists prepare for first WCPFC meeting for 2009

Scientists and fisheries managers representing the thirty seven members, cooperating non-members and participating territories (CCMs) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission will meet for the fifth annual session of the Commission's Scientific Committee at Port Vila, Vanuatu 10-21 August. The main issue on the agenda will be an appraisal of the likely outcomes of the Commission's bigeye and yellowfin Conservation and Management Measure that was adopted at the last Annual Session of the Commission at Busan, Korea in December 2008. That Measure set an objective of achieving a 30% reduction in the fishing mortality of bigeye tuna, and no increase in the fishing mortality of yellowfin tuna, from 2001-2004 levels. This was to be achieved during the period 2009-2011. Although several members have adopted alternative actions for their fleets since the adoption of the Busan Measure, the main response commences on 1st August 2009 with a closure of the purse seine fishery operating on floating objects in exclusive economic zones and on the high seas for 2 months. Fisheries officials from Members are currently actively involved in securing appropriately authorized observers to monitor the fishing activities of vessels that remain at sea during the closure period. Two hundred and seventeen purse seiners operate in waters beyond national jurisdiction in the WCPO purse seine fishery. In excess of 250 observers have been trained for the monitoring purpose. At least 350 observers will be required from 2010 when observer coverage will increase to 100% of purse seine fishing operations throughout the year. One hundred and forty participants are expected at the Scientific Committee meeting. The meeting will provide scientific advice and recommendations to the next annual session of the Commission which is scheduled for December 2009 at Tahiti, French Polynesia.