

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION
TWENTY-FOURTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 3-7 August 1992)

TUNA AND BILLFISH ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME
DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN 1992-1996
(as amended by SCTB4)

AN UPDATE

(Paper prepared by the Secretariat)

Background

1. The South Pacific Commission's (SPC) Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme (TBAP) was first implemented in October 1981 as the successor to the Skipjack Survey and Assessment Programme (SSAP). The TBAP had an initial mandate to run for three years, with a priority task of establishing a Regional Tuna Fisheries Database. As tuna catches, fishing fleet diversity and fleet size in the SPC area increased, the TBAP was required to undertake a more diverse range of research tasks, and the programme was extended firstly for two years and subsequently for a further five years. This last five-year period will be completed on 30 September 1991.
2. SPC member countries have strongly supported the TBAP and expressed their desire for the programme to continue. As an initial step in this process, the 1990 Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish (SCTB) recommended that "...a Strategic Plan for the next five-year period (1992-96) be prepared to guide the future direction of this programme, and proposed that the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish be authorised to develop a draft document for consideration at the 1991 Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries...". This recommendation was accepted by the 1990 Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries (RTMF) and a draft Strategic Plan developed by a sub-committee comprising SPC Fisheries Scientist, Dr Antony D. Lewis, and EC-funded consultant, Dr Timothy Adams, Mr Peter Sitan (FSM), Dr Talbot Murray (NZ) and Mr Andrew Richards (PNG).
3. This draft Strategic Plan was reviewed by the Fourth Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish, and a modified document produced (attached). The new draft Strategic Plan clarifies the basic philosophy of the TBAP, and provides objectives to be used in the evaluation of existing and proposed new activities. The strategies to be applied in pursuit of these objectives are also listed. The new draft Strategic Plan was presented to the 23rd RTMF as SPC/Fisheries 23/WP.4. The 23rd RTMF endorsed the Strategic Plan contained therein and made the following recommendations to CRGA 15:

RECOMMENDATION No. 1.

In order to facilitate the role of the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish in providing technical review of the work of the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme for RTMF, the Meeting endorsed the recommendation of the Fourth Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish that the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme prepare and distribute to Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish members prior to each meeting:

- a detailed description of any proposed new activities.
- a projected work plan for the year.

RECOMMENDATION No. 2.

The Meeting endorsed the recommendation of the Fourth Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish that a detailed operational plan for 1992-1996 be developed by the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme and distributed in advance of the Fifth Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish for evaluation by that meeting.

4. Recommendation No. 1 was accepted by CRGA 15 and subsequently approved by the Thirty-First South Pacific Conference. The recommended actions were undertaken by the Secretariat for the Fifth Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish. However, Recommendation No. 2 was not accepted by CRGA 15 or Conference following an intervention by the Representative of Solomon Islands, who opposed the recommendation on the grounds that "greater participation of non-regional countries in the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme should not be allowed to occur" (paragraph 27, Report of the Thirty-first South Pacific Conference).

5. Subsequent discussions with the Forum Fisheries Agency and the Representative of Solomon Islands at CRGA 15 have clarified the matter. No greater participation of non-regional countries in the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme is intended beyond that already mandated by the agreed procedures governing membership of the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish. This membership includes " Scientists from countries with a commitment to tuna fishing in the South Pacific Commission region, specifically including both Island states and distant water fishing nations " (paragraph.59, 19th RTMF Report of Meeting).

Action required by this Meeting

6. The non-acceptance of Recommendation No. 2 by CRGA 15 and the Thirty-first South Pacific Conference means that

- (i) there is no formal endorsement of the draft Strategic Plan, and
- (ii) the TBAP continues to operate without a formal mandate.

The Meeting is therefore invited to reconsider the draft Strategic Plan and Recommendation No 2 above, along with the issue of the continuation of the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme beyond its current formal mandate (30 September 1991), with a view to making appropriate recommendations to CRGA 17 and to the Thirty-second South Pacific Conference.

DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN (as amended by SCTB 4)

MISSION

To provide member countries with the scientific information and advice necessary to rationally manage fisheries exploiting the region's resources of tuna, billfish and related species.

OBJECTIVES

The TBAP embraces all the principles of the South Pacific Commission. In promoting the rational exploitation of the tuna and billfish resources of the region, the TBAP will foster both regional and national capabilities to assess and manage those resources, maximise scientific cooperation for the benefit of all members, and maintain a commitment to high standards of fisheries science.

The TBAP objectives are:

- *To ensure that member countries receive the best available scientific advice.*
- *To provide member countries with accurate assessments of tuna and billfish stocks and the effects of fishing on the stocks.*
- *To provide member countries with timely reports from an accessible, high-quality service database encompassing the activity of all domestic and DWFN fleets in the region and adjacent areas.*
- *To enhance the national and regional awareness of fisheries issues through reporting research results and fisheries developments throughout the region.*
- *To maintain a commitment to developing national and regional capabilities in fisheries science.*

STRATEGIES

To ensure that member countries receive the best available scientific advice, the TBAP will

- *Maintain and enhance capabilities to monitor fisheries exploiting tuna and billfish stocks in the region.*
- *Liaise with member nations to determine national requirements.*
- *Establish research and monitoring programmes which are well designed and peer reviewed.*
- *Communicate the results of research and review to member countries.*
- *Facilitate programme evaluation and review of research directions and progress.*

To provide member countries with accurate assessments of tuna and billfish stocks and the effects of fishing on the stocks, the TBAP will

- *Attract and retain highly motivated and well-trained fisheries scientists.*
- *Develop and apply fisheries assessment techniques appropriate to the region's stock assessment needs.*
- *Contribute to and collaborate in complementary stock assessment activities elsewhere.*
- *Conduct research to improve knowledge of the biology of the region's major tuna and billfish species in support of stock assessment.*

To provide member countries with timely reports from an accessible, high-quality fishery database encompassing the activity of all domestic and DWFN fleets in the region and adjacent areas, the TBAP will

- *Collaborate with member countries and other regional organisations to acquire comprehensive statistical data sets on fisheries exploiting the region's tuna and billfish stocks.*
- *Produce a range of fishery reports in support of national and regional requirements.*
- *Maintain and enhance in-country database capabilities for timely national fishery reports.*

To enhance the national and regional awareness of fisheries issues through reporting research results and fisheries developments throughout the region, the TBAP will

- *Produce briefings, newsletters, research reports and other publications on research findings and fishery developments.*
- *Organise meetings and workshops on key fisheries issues relevant to national and regional needs.*

To maintain a commitment to developing national and regional capabilities in fisheries science, the TBAP will

- *Assist in the development of national capabilities in the compilation of fishery statistics.*
- *Facilitate staff attachments in the TBAP and other appropriate training opportunities for Pacific Island nationals in TBAP research projects.*

IMPLEMENTATION

These strategies will be implemented through activities in four programme areas

Statistics and monitoring

Database maintenance, development and reporting.

Biological research

Population biology of tunas and billfishes; age, growth, migration, stock structure.

Stock assessment and modelling

Data analysis and modelling of the status and impact of fishing on the major tuna stocks of the region.

Reporting and liaison

Interaction and reporting to member countries; promoting collaborative research towards TBAP objectives.

Operational plans for 1992-1996 will be developed by TBAP and distributed in advance of the next SCTB for evaluation by that meeting.
