

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

MEETING OF COASTAL STATES AND DISTANT-WATER FISHING NATIONS
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 18 - 22 June 1984)

RELEVANT SECTIONS OF REPORTS OF:

- (a) 1983 Planning and Evaluation Committee Meeting
- (b) Fifteenth Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries
- (c) Twenty-Third South Pacific Conference

(a) RELEVANT SECTION OF THE REPORT OF
THE 1983 PLANNING AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE MEETING

Agenda Item 8 - Conservation of the Tuna Resources of the Western and Central Tropical Pacific

69. The Secretariat advised that Working Paper 7 was not a Secretariat position paper, but was provided purely as a basis for discussion.

70. The Representative of France advised that his country wished to see the programme continue but in a different and more broad-based form as suggested in the working paper. He then announced that the French Government had decided to proceed with the establishment of satellite-based oceanographic research equipment in Noumea which would be made available to all Pacific Island countries and which could in particular be used for fishing purposes.

71. The Secretariat advised that the yellowfin tuna resource was presently under serious threat of depletion, due to an increase of fishing activity in the area.

72. The Representative of New Caledonia supported the extension of the programme in a broad-based form using the existing Tuna Programme at the SPC as a base structure. The new organisation should include all countries of the region and it could be formulated in detail at the next SPC Regional Fisheries Technical Meeting to be held in August. Vanuatu endorsed these comments.

74. The Secretariat confirmed that the SPC continually consulted with the Forum Fisheries Agency, but added that it would be very difficult to pursue conclusively the suggested broad-based organisation before the current Tuna Programme ended in September 1984. The Secretariat noted that as matters now stood any depletion of tuna resources in the Pacific region would be the result of fishing by foreign vessels in the region, and not by the island people themselves.

75. The Representative of Federated States of Micronesia advised that concrete resource management recommendations were required from the SPC and that the Technical Meeting should be instructed to produce a proposal. The Representative of the Forum Fisheries Agency stated that the FFA strongly supported the continuation of such research as is currently undertaken by the SPC Tuna and Billfish Programme. The FFA Representative advised that the 1983 Forum Fisheries Committee had instructed the FFA to report on alternatives available leading towards better management to meet the requirements of its members and said that the FFA would be happy to assist SPC in the evaluation of proposals for the conservation and management of tuna resources of the Pacific. The Representative of New Zealand commented that there was a need for a comprehensive approach to the management of the tuna resource and that the range of options needed to be examined in detail. The Secretariat commented that future assessments of fisheries resources would always be subject to change as the resources were continually affected by various fishing methods employed in the region.

76. The Representative of Western Samoa stated that the advent of purse-seining in the Pacific region is responsible for the depletion of the yellowfin tuna resource, and there has been a percentage reduction in longline and pole-and-line catches. The Representative of France suggested that a new formula should be sought to establish a broad-based organisation from the existing Tuna Programme. A Representative of ORSTOM advised of the problem of gaining reliable statistics from non-SPC countries in the Pacific area, to enable proper management and fishing of the resource.

77. The Secretariat advised that countries would have to decide at the SPC Technical Meeting what the future of the Tuna Programme should be and what kind of arrangement should follow it. The Secretariat suggested that the SPC and FFA prepare a joint paper to be placed before the coming SPC Technical Meeting to assist countries in deciding their course of action. The Secretariat explained the procedures relating to attendance at the SPC Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries and the Expert Committee in response to a question from Solomon Islands.

78. The Representative of Federated States of Micronesia suggested that the Committee should recommend to the Conference that the Tuna Programme continue and that any proposal for management of the tuna resources be organised jointly by the FFA and SPC. The Representative of French Polynesia advocated that all countries of the Pacific should be involved in any discussions on management of fisheries for the entire Pacific, especially if regulations were to be considered. The Representative of American Samoa advised that based on the value of the Tuna Programme to his country he would like to see the programme continue until the issue of a broad-based organisation was discussed further. The Representative of Solomon Islands again requested an explanation from the Secretariat as to why its FFA nomination to the Expert Committee had not been accepted.

79. The Chairman proposed the following resolution which was adopted by the Committee:

The Committee recognised the importance to the region of the activities of the SPC Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme and requested the 1983 SPC Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries to consider alternatives for the continuation or otherwise of such activities in their present or a modified form with a view towards making detailed and specific recommendations for consideration by the Twenty-third South Pacific Conference. To assist the Technical Meeting on Fisheries in its deliberations the Committee directed the Secretariat to submit alternatives to the Technical Meeting in consultation with the FFA.

(b) RELEVANT SECTION OF THE REPORT OF
THE FIFTEENTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES

A. Review of progress with priority items of the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme

21. The Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme Co-ordinator, Dr Robert Kearney, opened discussion of this item by commenting on the funding of the Programme. Confirmed funding will carry the Programme through until April 1984, and further funds recently committed by the Government of France and possibly other sources should enable the Programme to run until its scheduled termination in September 1984.

22. In referring to Working Paper 4, the Tuna Programme Co-ordinator reviewed progress with priority items within the Programme. Under item 8, ORSTOM research scientist, Dr Alain Morlière, outlined the progress of the French Government in implementing its satellite imagery service, in accordance with the request made at last year's meeting. The system should come into operation during 1985, and data from the geostationary satellite would make it possible to obtain sea surface temperatures and meteorological information, while data from the satellite in polar orbit will provide information about terrestrial sources and the lagoon.

23. It emerged from Dr Kearney's presentation that in view of recent developments in Pacific tuna fisheries, some reassessment of the Programme's priorities may be necessary. There followed a lengthy discussion of the Programme's work, during which Dr Kearney presented information detailing recent developments in the tuna fisheries of the western Pacific, and particularly the recent increases in purse seining. Much attention was given to the interactions between fisheries, and many of the participants described relevant experience in other parts of the world.

24. M. Jean-Paul Rebert, observer from ORSTOM, gave a slide presentation outlining changes in the thermal structure of the Pacific during 1982-83 El Nino phenomenon, the most intense and prolonged so far recorded.

25. The Chairman then invited the Tuna Programme Co-ordinator to give his views on changes of priority within the work programme. Dr Kearney commented that this would be to some extent determined by the length of time the Programme had to run, but that major priority areas were:

- (a) Collection and evaluation of catch and effort data;
- (b) Assessment of interaction between fisheries, particularly those involving yellowfin;
- (c) Collection of biological information on yellowfin and other tunas.

26. The other items listed in Working Paper 4 would have to be dealt with on an ad hoc basis, although some, such as the question of observer programmes, could be incorporated to meet the high priority objectives.

27. There was a series of questions regarding the extent of the data already received by the Programme and the additional data required for assessment of the stocks. Dr Kearney estimated that of the total catch of skipjack taken in the SPC area, only 35 per cent were declared to the South Pacific Commission. Statistics are currently provided by domestic fisheries, and Korean vessels. Data are not available to the SPC from U.S. purse seiners and vessels fishing international waters within the SPC area. To achieve an adequate coverage, these data would need to be collected, together with information from outside the area. A system of verification would also be required, which could include the collection of unloading data, catch sampling, and observer programmes.

28. Commenting on observer programmes, the Tuna Programme Co-ordinator referred to difficulties in obtaining the funding required to appoint a co-ordinator of regional observer programmes, as recommended by last year's meeting, and to the problems of separating the dual objectives of data collection and surveillance, the latter of which was seen as being outside SPC's mandate. Dr Kearney noted, however, that SPC had placed observers on two Japanese purse seiners. These trips produced useful information which will help to improve the data collection systems.

29. In reviewing the activities of the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme, the delegates noted that most of the present knowledge about skipjack in the western Pacific has been obtained through the activities of the Programme and its predecessor, the Skipjack Survey and Assessment Programme. If the Tuna Programme was not continued, the region would be put back in the position it was before the Skipjack Programme started.

B. The future requirements for the conservation of the tuna resources of the region, and the role of the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme

30. After an exchange of views on the continuation of the Programme in its present or a modified form, the meeting expressed its strong support for the Programme and proceeded to discuss the priority items on the assumption that this work would continue. It was felt that statistical coverage in general needed improving, and the meeting discussed at length how such improvements might be achieved. The importance of precisely defining the objective of a statistical programme was noted, as this would determine the type of data that would be needed. There was a consensus that additional statistics were required both from within and outside the region. Major gaps in the present coverage and the ways of filling these were discussed, and this led to the question of funding and staffing the Programme should it be extended. Dr Kearney pointed out that recruiting and retaining appropriate staff was a major problem, and that no formal approach for funding an extension of the Programme has so far been made. He was, however, of the opinion that funding would be easier to solicit if the Programme was strongly supported by this meeting and the Twenty-Third South Pacific Conference.

31. The meeting then discussed various proposals aimed at broadening the collection of statistics beyond those now available to the Programme and particularly those from outside the region. Mr August Felando, observer from the American Tunaboat Association, informed the meeting that U.S. purse seiners provided statistics to international organisations under treaty obligations, but that there was no such arrangement in the SPC area. Dr Paul Hooker, observer from the Indo-Pacific Tuna Programme (IPTP) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), outlined the possibilities for interchange of data with IPTP. The representative of France offered to provide information on the functions of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) to the Secretariat for translation and distribution.

32. Subsequent discussion centred around the following major topics: funding and duration of any extension of the Programme; involvement of other interested organisations and distant-water fishing nations in the statistical network, and the organisation and timing of a meeting to facilitate this; the value of additional tagging of yellowfin and skipjack; and the need for and the problems of conservation and management of a single species in a multi-species fishery. The meeting discussed the need for future funding of the Programme and, in view of the priority attached to the assessment of interactions between tuna fisheries, noted that additional funding for further tagging work would be needed. The discussion yielded the following recommendations.

Recommendation No.4

The meeting commended the work carried out by the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme and strongly recommended its continuation for two years in the first instance, with priority accorded to the collection and evaluation of catch and effort data and assessment of interaction between fisheries.

Recommendation No.5

The meeting recognised that there are substantial gaps in the catch and effort data available to the Programme, but was unable to identify methods of obtaining the information required. Accordingly, the meeting recommended that the Twenty-Third South Pacific Conference explore ways and means of obtaining input from the distant-water fishing nations in pursuing the objectives of the revised work programme. The meeting suggested that this include the convening of a meeting of coastal states, distant-water fishing nations, and international organisations with an interest and experience in this field, such as the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), FAO, IATTC and ICCAT, to identify methods

of collection, integration, and analysis of statistical and other scientific data on highly migratory species in the region. The meeting understood that the information generated from the Programme would be used to identify issues relating to the conservation of highly migratory species in the region. The suggested meeting would therefore need to explore possible structural arrangements which might be required for the conservation of tuna stocks of the region.

33. The Secretariat's suggestion that the Forum Fisheries Agency be invited to co-sponsor the meeting was briefly discussed.

(c) RELEVANT SECTION OF THE REPORT OF
THE TWENTY-THIRD SOUTH PACIFIC CONFERENCE

31. The Conference noted the report submitted by the Secretariat which included the recommendations of the Fifteen Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries and agreed:

- to continue for two years in the first instance the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme with priority accorded to the collection and evaluation of catch and effort data and assessment of interaction between fisheries;
- to direct the Secretariat to consult with the Forum Fisheries Agency about convening a meeting of coastal states, distant-water fishing nations and international organisations with an interest and experience in this field, to explore ways and means of obtaining input from the distant-water fishing nations in pursuing the objectives of the revised priorities of the extended Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme.
