



Progress Report

Fishery Improvement Project for the Republic of the Cook Islands Domestically-based Pelagic Longline Yellowfin Tuna Fishery

Anova Food LLC & Luen Thai Fishing Ventures

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The participants of the Fishery Improvement Project for the Cook Islands pelagic longline yellowfin tuna fishery periodically produce reports to document progress in implementing activities and milestones identified in the project workplan. The progress report is presented in three sections: section 1 presents a summary of all improvement project activities since the project's inception; section 2 reviews in progress activities; and section 3 assesses project progress against the current workplan activities and milestones.

Please review the project website at <http://fishing-living.org/cook-islands-fisheries-improvement-program-fip/> for more information, including background on the fishery, improvement project participants, reports from pre-assessments conducted against the Marine Stewardship Council standard, results of other public evaluations (SFP FishSource, MBAq Seafood Watch, various WWF program ratings, Safina Center), current 2014-2018 workplan and materials from stakeholder consultations

1. Chronology of Project Activities

The following is a current description of project activities since inception in 2013.

- March 2013 - the catch sector Luen Thai Fishing Venture adopts a company policy banning the retention of sharks or fishing gear and methods to target sharks (http://fishing-living.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/LTFV_shark_policy_Bilingual_R2.pdf (this constitutes an SFP Stage 4 result -fishing practice change to improve the fishery).
- April 2013- Luen Thai Fishing Ventures contracts a Conformity Assessment body to conduct an MSC pre-assessment; CAB finalizes the report in April 2013.
- July 2013- Anova Food LLC/Fishing & Living joins the FIP and conducts a site assessment in Pago Pago (American Samoa) to review data collection processes and fishing practices.
- March 2014- Anova Food LLC/Fishing & Living prepares a FIP scoping document and FIP workplan for stakeholder review and comment. These documents are made public in March 2014.
- May 2014- LTFV and Anova Food LLC join the MSC Principle 1 Alignment group
- April-August 2014 Prepared materials for capacity-building 'train-the-trainer' program to enable Cook Islands Ministry of Marine Resources staff to conduct longline fisher training, including in: (i) Cook Islands longline rules, (ii) proper completion of Secretariat of the Pacific Community logbook forms, (iii) species identification training, to improve the quality of logbook data, and (iv) handling-and-release best practices for sea turtles, elasmobranchs (sharks and their relatives), cetaceans and seabirds. Training materials are posted at: <https://sites.google.com/site/seafoodcompaniestunamanagement/home/training-materials-for-longline-fishers>.
- August 2014- initial train-the-trainer workshop convened and a workshop report was posted to the FIP website.
- September 2014 - An independent audit of the traceability system in place for the supply chain for the Luen Thai Fishing Venture vessels participating in the Cook Islands longline fishery was completed and a public report posted to the FIP website
- December 2014- LTFV and Anova Food LLC/Fishing & Living participated in the 2nd in-person meeting of the western and central Pacific Ocean tuna MSC alignment group (see https://sites.google.com/site/seafoodcompaniestunamanagement/home/wcpo_tuna-p1_alignment)

2. In-Progress Activities

Western and central Pacific Ocean tuna MSC alignment group: To implement MSC principle 1 improvements related to improving the harvest strategies and status of albacore, bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks that occur in the convention area of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, the FIP participants continuously participate in activities of the "WCPO Tuna MSC Alignment Group". This Group is comprised of client groups of fisheries certified and under assessment against the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standard and of participants of Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) for fisheries for albacore, bigeye and yellowfin tunas in the Convention Area of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), and other stakeholders. See https://sites.google.com/site/seafoodcompaniestunamanagement/home/wcpo_tuna-p1_alignment for more information on the group.

Stakeholder consultation: The next in-person stakeholder consultation is tentatively planned to be convened as a side event to the WCPFC annual session in December 2015 in Indonesia.

3. Assessment against 2014-2018 Workplan Activities and Milestones

Table 1 identifies the FIP workplan activities to address deficiencies and information gaps for MSC PIs found to not achieve an unconditional pass through a MSC pre-assessment, FIP process activities, planned schedule for completion, milestones (expected

Table 1. Planned actions and milestones, and progress to date in implementing these activities and achieving expected outcomes, for the FIP for the Cook Islands domestically-based longline tuna fishery

MSC Performance Indicators (If a line is grey, no activities required)		Activities/Tasks	Milestone(s)	Schedule	Progress
P1	1.1.1 Stock Status				
	1.1.2 Reference Points	Activity 1. Engage with relevant stakeholders to pursue improvements in WCPFC governance, including adoption of formal target reference points for WCPO Yellowfin.	Milestone 1a. Evidence of engagement with relevant stakeholders, seeking their support for WCPFC adoption of formal target reference points.	annually	FIP participants participate in the WCPO Tuna MSC Alignment Group. Two meetings took place in 2014 (May and December. 2014). Next meeting is planned for December 2015. Participants also contribute to delegations to WCPFC. Anova is part of the SFP WCPO's Tuna Roundtable which aims to "provide a platform to discuss matters of common interest; identify fisheries where improvements are required; catalyze, monitor progress, and support the successful implementation of FIPs; and discuss future partnership and cooperation opportunities to improve key fisheries, as well as opportunities for joint action on several projects."
			Milestone 1b. MMR and scientists participating in SC WGs and WCPFC general session discussions on reference points.	annually	In progress
			Milestone 1c. Workshop on exploring/establishing	Q4 2014	In progress

		limits based on TRPs and LRPs and CMM 2013-01 (years 2001-2004 levels), and making allowances for uncertainties.		
		Milestone 1d. WCPFC adopts a formal target reference point for WCPO YFT tuna.	Q4 2016	CMM 2014-06 requires that the Commission agrees on a workplan and indicative timeframes to adopt or refine harvest strategies for skipjack, bigeye, yellowfin, South Pacific albacore, Pacific bluefin and northern albacore tuna by no later than the twelfth meeting of the Commission in 2015. Each harvest strategy must contain the following elements: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Defined operational objectives 2. Target and limit reference points 3. Acceptable levels of risk of not breaching limit reference points 4. A monitoring strategy 5. Decision rules that aim to achieve the target reference point and avoid the limit reference point 6. A management strategy evaluation
1.1.3 Stock Rebuilding				
1.2.1 Harvest Strategy	Activity 2. Engage with relevant stakeholders to pursue improvements in WCPFC governance, including adoption of a harvest strategy for WCPO YFT that is responsive to stock status.	Milestone 2a. Evidence of engagement with relevant stakeholders, seeking their support for WCPFC adoption of formal harvest strategy that is responsive to the state of the stock, and based on limit and target reference points.	Bi-annually	Achieved biannually on an ongoing basis until harvest strategy is adopted as described. FIP participants conduct ongoing participation in the WCPO Tuna MSC Alignment Group. Last meeting was in Dec. 2014. Participants also contribute to delegations to WCPFC.
		Milestone 2b. Development and implementation of a harvest strategy by the WCPFC that is responsive to stock status and fulfils management objectives. WCPFC adopts a tropical	Q4 2017	CMM 2014-06 requires that the Commission agrees on a workplan and indicative timeframes to adopt or refine harvest strategies for skipjack, bigeye, yellowfin, South Pacific albacore, Pacific bluefin and northern albacore tuna by no later than the twelfth meeting of the Commission in

		tuna harvest strategy that is responsive to the state of the stock.		2015. Each harvest strategy must contain the following elements: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Defined operational objectives 2. Target and limit reference points 3. Acceptable levels of risk of not breaching limit reference points 4. A monitoring strategy 5. Decision rules that aim to achieve the target reference point and avoid the limit reference point 6. A management strategy evaluation
	Activity 3. Development and implementation of Cook Island harvest strategy that is responsive to stock status, fulfils management objectives and complies with WCPFC CMMs.	Milestone 3. National harvest strategy in line with WCPFC requirements.	Q1 2018	
	Activity 4. Evaluate whether the harvest strategy is fulfilling stock management objectives.	Milestone 4. There is evidence that the harvest strategy and HCR (at regional and national level) are fulfilling stock management objectives.	Q4 2018	
1.2.2 Harvest Control Rules and Tools	Activity 5. Engage with relevant stakeholders to pursue improvements in WCPFC governance, including the development of robust harvest control rules (HCR) within a binding CMM that is based on the harvest strategy and target and limit reference points.	Milestone 5. WCPFC adopts a well-defined and effective harvest control rule for regional management of Yellowfin tuna that is consistent with any adopted FFA sub-regional measure, and at a regional level establishes catch limits by CCM, and explicit pre-agreed actions to be taken to reduce the exploitation rate if the stock approaches or falls below reference points.	Q4 2016	

		Activity 6. Fisher awareness programme on harvest controls rules	Milestone 6. Fishermen training/workshop on harvest control rules.	Q1 2017	
	1.2.3 Harvest Strategy: Information and Monitoring				
	1.2.4 Assessment of Stock Status				
P2	2.1.1 Retained Species Status	No activities required	N/A	N/A	<p>Main retained species have now been identified and are: Bigeye Tuna and Blue Marlin.</p> <p><u>Blue Marlin</u>: no target or limit reference points have been established for this species. Compared to MSY-based reference points, the current (2011) spawning biomass is 29% above SSBMSY and the current fishing mortality (average across 2009-2011) is inferior to FMSY and 1-SPRMSY by 19% and 6%, respectively. Therefore, the blue marlin stock in the Pacific Ocean currently is not being overfished and is not in an overfished state. There is therefore a high degree of certainty that the species is within biologically based limits and is fluctuating around its target reference points.</p> <p><u>Bigeye Tuna</u>: only one limit reference point has been formally adopted for this species for management purposes (endorsed by WCPFC9 in 2012) set at 20% of the average annual total biomass over a recent period in the absence of fishing (SB_{current}, F=0). According to the latest stock assessment (Davies et al., 2011) B_{current} / Blim is estimated at 1.44; B_{current} is therefore well above the limit reference point. Furthermore, there is an estimated probability of only 13% that SB_{current} is actually below SBMSY - as such, it is both likely and highly likely that this species is within biologically based limits. Nevertheless, overfishing is occurring (F_{current} > FMSY for all model runs).</p>

2.1.2 Retained Species Management Strategy	Activity 7: Engage with relevant stakeholders to pursue improvements in WCPFC governance, including adoption of formal target reference points for WCPO bigeye, harvest strategy that is responsive to the state of the 2 stocks, HCR that is based on the harvest strategy and formally adopted target and limit reference points, and evidence that the HCR is meeting stock management objectives.	Milestone 7a: Evidence of engagement with relevant stakeholders, seeking their support for WCPFC adoption of formal target reference points, harvest strategy that is responsive to the state of the stock, and HCR within a binding WCPFC tropical tuna CMM that implements the harvest strategy and is based on limit and target reference points.	Biannually	Achieved biannually on an ongoing basis until target reference points, harvest strategy and HCR are adopted as described. FIP participants conduct ongoing participation in the WCPO Tuna MSC Alignment Group. Last meeting was in Dec. 2014. Participants also contribute to delegations to WCPFC.
		Milestone 7b: WCPFC adopts a formal target reference point for WCPO bigeye	Q4 2015	<u>Bigeye:</u> Bigeye is managed through CMM-2014-01. The CMM recognises that bigeye is currently subject to overfishing and seeks to reduce fishing mortality (F) so that the stock is - at a minimum - maintained at MSY. The CMM includes measures on FAD reduction, effort control, catch limits and capacity management. These measures should be considered to form at least a partial strategy, expected to keep bigeye at MSY levels.
		Milestone 7c: WCPFC adopts a tropical tuna harvest strategy that is responsive to the state of the stock and adopts a HCR within a binding CMM that is based on the harvest strategy and target and limit reference points.	Q4 2016	CMM 2014-06 requires that the Commission agrees on a workplan and indicative timeframes to adopt or refine harvest strategies for skipjack, bigeye, yellowfin, South Pacific albacore, Pacific bluefin and northern albacore tuna by no later than the twelfth meeting of the Commission in 2015. Each harvest strategy must contain the following elements: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Defined operational objectives 2. Target and limit reference points 3. Acceptable levels of risk of not breaching limit reference points 4. A monitoring strategy 5. Decision rules that aim to achieve the target reference point and avoid the limit reference point 6. A management strategy evaluation

		Milestone 7d. Regional FIP that includes longline and purse seine fisheries that result in WCPO bigeye tuna fishing mortality is established.	Q4 2018	The WCPO Tuna MSC Alignment Group, SFP's regional longline FIP, and ISSF activities contribute to this milestone.
		Milestone 7e. There is evidence that the harvest strategy and HCR are fulfilling stock management objectives	Q4 2018	
	Activity 8. Mitigation measures are implemented at the fishery level to reduce unwanted retained species.	Milestone 8: Blue Marlin and Bigeye tuna are on average <5% of retained catch over the next 5 years.	Q4 2017	<p><u>Blue Marlin</u>: 5.23% and 6.77% of total catch by LTFV vessels in Cook Islands EEZ in 2012 and 2013 respectively</p> <p><u>Bigeye Tuna</u>: Catch of BET is being reduced to approximately 5% on LTFV fleets for average of next 5 years. Bigeye represented 8.16% and 4.99% of total catch by LTFV vessels in Cook Islands EEZ in 2012 and 2013 respectively.</p> <p>Cook Islands MMR staff trained (August 2014) to conduct regular trainings of crew in part to improve logbook data accuracy for caught marlins.</p>
	Activity 9. Cook Islands MMR develops and implement a national harvest strategy and Harvest Control Rules in line with WCPFC CMMs.	Milestone 9a: MMR participating in SC WGs for the revision of the core WCPFC CMM on Bigeye strategy	Q4 2014	In progress
		Milestone 9b: Catch and / or effort limits set for bigeye tuna for Cook Islands consistent with WCPFC methodology (either 2001-2004 levels or an alternative) and based on an historic reference point.	Q1 2015	

	Activity 10: Evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation measures for all retained species.	Milestone 10: There is evidence that regional & national management mitigation measures for all retained species are effective and achieve management objectives.	Q4 2016	
2.1.3 Retained Species Information / Monitoring	Activity 11. Extend and improve port sampling procedures in Rarotonga and Pago Pago to ensure that all vessels landings outside of Cook Islands are covered. Port sampling procedure should cover catches of all retained species and record length frequency data for all retained species. Port sampling records landings of >95% of retained catch to the species level.	Milestone 11: Port sampling takes place in Rarotonga and Pago Pago to ensure that all vessels landings outside of Cook Islands are covered. Port sampling procedure covers catches of all retained species and record length frequency data for all retained species. Port sampling records landings of >95% of retained catch to the species level.	Q4 2014	<p>Landings are mainly made in Pago Pago (American Samoa), Rarotonga (Cook Islands).</p> <p><u>Pago Pago:</u> Currently around 11% of the LT and other vessels fishing in Cooks Islands waters and landing in Pago Pago are inspected. This will, however, change in the near future. MMR has recently established the Cook Islands Fisheries Field Office (CIFFO) in Pago Pago, which will be permanently staffed to enable an expanded programme of port inspections.</p> <p><u>Rarotonga:</u> In Rarotonga, a catch manifest is sent to the authorities prior to entry into port and quayside inspections are carried out for 100% of the landings. Inspections involve verification of the hold quantities and a sub-sample (~20%) of unloadings is checked.</p>
	Activity 12. Improve logbook completion by crew with regards to all retained species and bycatch (including bait) (e.g. species identification and separation), including trips in the High Seas. Logbook data captures information on all catch and discards to the species level.	Milestone 12: Logbook data captures information on all catch and discards to the species level.	Q4 2014	<p>The principal data source used to quantify main retained species are the SPC logbooks, detailing estimated volume (tonnes) and number of individuals of retained catch per species.</p> <p>For blue marlin, the fishery has had issues with misidentification of blue, black and striped marlin. Crew training activities designed to improve the quality of logbook data took place in August 2014.</p> <p>Cook Islands MMR staff trained (August 2014) to conduct regular trainings of crew in that covered improvement of logbook data accuracy, ETP handling & release best practices and Cook Islands regulations.</p>
2.2.1 Bycatch Status				

2.2.2 Bycatch Management Strategy				
2.2.3 Bycatch Information / Monitoring	Activity 13. Increase on board observer coverage to >10%. Ensure observer training follow SPC guidelines. Ensure onboard observer data collection protocols and practices include recording all bycatch to the species level, haulback disposition of discards, and relevant gear design and fishing method factors needed to develop robust standardized catch rate models for associated and dependent species.	Milestone 13: Onboard observer coverage rate >10%, including those trips on the High Seas	Q4 2015	
2.3.1 ETP Status	Activity 14: Develop a 'train-the-trainer' ETP workshop to build the capacity for Cook Islands government and catch sector company dockside staff to train longline captains in the Cook Islands longline albacore fishery to: (i) understand Cook Islands government longline rules, (ii) improve species identification, (iii) understand proper methods for completing SPC logbook forms, (iv) understand handling and release practices for seabirds, sea turtles, cetaceans and elasmobranchs to optimize the probability of post-release survival.	Milestone 14. Train the trainer ETP workshop is conducted for Cook Islands MMR staff.	Q3 2014 and then annually	Cook Islands MMR staff trained (August 2014) to conduct regular trainings of crew in that covered improvement of logbook data accuracy, ETP handling & release best practices and Cook Islands regulations.
	Activity 15 All captains attend a minimum of one ETP training workshop per year	Milestone15a. Vessels can demonstrate that all Cook Islands regulations on fishery interactions with sea turtles are consistently	Q4 2015	Cook Islands MMR staff trained (August 2014) to conduct regular trainings of crew in that covered improvement of logbook data accuracy, ETP handling & release best practices and Cook Islands regulations.

		complied with and that best practices are employed.		MMR has recently established the Cook Islands Fisheries Field Office (CIFFO) in Pago Pago, which will be permanently staffed to enable regular trainings of crew with regards to logbooks, current national regulations and ETP handling.
		Milestone 15b. Estimations of interactions with Seabirds, Sharks, Seaturtles and Cetaceans are improved through observer programs and logbooks recordings.	Q4 2016	Since the implementation of the Shark Sanctuary, shark discards are being recorded; however there are some remaining issues with misidentification of sharks in the logsheets. A capacity building workshop (Train the trainer) designed to train captains and crew to improve the quality of logbook data took place in August 2014.
2.3.2 ETP Management Strategy	Activity 16 Via a dockside inventory of longline vessel gear designs, estimate the depth of hooks in a basket (between 2 floats) when gear is soaking, and if some of the hooks are soaking shallower than 50m, identify options to get all hooks below 50m (a best practice gear design to avoid and minimize catch of sea turtles and some elasmobranch species).	Milestone 16 all vessels are employing gear designs that are predicted to result in the terminal tackle soaking below 50m depth.	Q2 2017	
	Activity 17 Review observer and logbook data on ETP interaction and develop measures to mitigate outstanding issues.	Milestone 17a. Observer records of handling and release practices for ETP species demonstrate longline fisher compliance with relevant binding measures.	Q2 2016	
		Milestone 17b. data on interactions with ETP species have been analysed and any issues in terms of outcomes for ETP species have been flagged.	Q4 2016	

		Milestone 17c. If necessary, further management actions are developed and implemented to address outstanding ETP issue(s).	Q2 2017	
	Activity 18: Evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation measures for all ETP species.	Milestone 18a: No individual shark species makes up >5% of discarded catch	Q4 2017	
		Milestone 18b: There is evidence mitigation measures for all ETP species are effective and achieve management objectives.	Q4 2017	
2.3.3 ETP Information / Monitoring	Activity 19 All captains attend a minimum of one ETP training workshop per year	Milestone 19. Logbook records of interactions with ETP species are consistent with observer records (demonstrated that an appropriate reporting system is in place and is being used by all LTFV crew).	Q2 2016	<p>Since the implementation of the Shark Sanctuary, shark discards are being recorded; however there are some remaining issues with misidentification of sharks in the logsheets. A capacity building workshop (Train the trainer) designed to train captains and crew to improve the quality of logbook data took place in August 2014.</p> <p>Crew training activities also included a review of current regulations and best handling practices for sharks, turtles and birds. Shark identification material is available on board all LTFV vessels.</p> <p>https://sites.google.com/site/seafoodcompaniestunamanagement/home/training-materials-for-longline-fishers</p>
2.4.1 Habitat Status				
2.4.2 Habitat Management Strategy				

	2.4.3 Habitat Information / Monitoring				
	2.5.1 Ecosystem Status				
	2.5.2 Ecosystem Management Strategy				
	2.5.3 Ecosystem Information / Monitoring				
P3	3.1.1 Legal/Customary Framework				
	3.1.2 Consultation, Roles and Responsibilities	Activity 20: Provide evidence that processes at national level are put in place to i) regularly engage with key stakeholders to seek and accept relevant information, and ii) demonstrate that the information obtained from such engagement has been duly considered.	Milestone 20. MMR convenes at least one stakeholder consultation per year to provide a venue to discuss and collect information on the domestic management framework for the Cook Islands longline albacore tuna fishery, and to request that, if the number of applications for longline licenses exceeds the limit, that a consultative Licensing Committee be convened.	Q2 2018	
	3.1.3 Long Term Objectives				
	3.1.4 Incentives for	Activity 21. Contribute to achieving effective sub-regional	Milestone21. robust sub-regional and regional	Q4 2018	

Sustainable Fishing	and regional management systems for the south Pacific albacore regional fishery, including the adoption of a formal target reference point that maintains the stock at a level consistent with BMSY or similar precautionary management target, a harvest strategy responsive to the state of the stock and designed to achieve the management objectives, and HCR and tools consistent with the harvest strategy that reduce fishing mortality as the BRPs are approached and which account for uncertainty. By securing this effective stock management system this will ensure that the impact of government subsidies is not able to result in unsustainable levels of fishing under WCPFC.	management systems are in place		
3.2.1 Fishery Specific Objectives				
3.2.2 Decision Making Processes	Activity 22. The Cook Islands Government amends national decision-making processes for the management of the Cook Islands longline albacore fishery so that it responds to serious and other important issues identified in relevant research, monitoring, evaluation and consultation, in a transparent, timely and adaptive manner and take account of the wider implications of decisions.	Milestone 22. The domestic consultative processes is in place and stakeholder consultations are be open to all interested parties.	Q2 2018	

	3.2.3 Compliance and Enforcement				
	3.2.4 Research Plan				
	3.2.5 Monitoring and Management Performance Evaluation				