

---

**PREPARATORY CONFERENCE FOR THE COMMISSION  
FOR THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF  
HIGHLY MIGRATORY FISH STOCKS IN THE WESTERN  
AND CENTRAL PACIFIC**

Third session  
Manila, Philippines  
18 – 22 November 2002

WCPFC/PrepCon/20  
22 November 2002

---

**WORKING GROUP II: SCIENTIFIC STRUCTURE AND PROVISION OF INTERIM  
SCIENTIFIC ADVICE**

Summary report by the Chair of the Working Group to the third session of the  
Preparatory Conference

1. In accordance with its terms of reference as agreed at PrepCon I (WCPFC/PrepCon/4), WG.II recognized two main tasks:
  - (a) the need to review the WCPFC Convention to identify science needs, data requirements, priority-setting, planning and coordination of research, and the review of scientific work; and
  - (b) the need for provisional scientific advice on the status of tuna stocks in the Convention Area.
2. WG.II recalled the terms of reference for the Scientific Coordinating Group as agreed at PrepCon 2 (WCPFC/PrepCon/15) and that the Scientific Coordinating Group is intended to assist WG.II in carrying out those terms of reference which require special scientific and technical consideration.
3. The position of Chair of the Scientific Coordinating Group was open for nomination with a single nominee, Dr. Yuji Uozumi (Japan), put forward and agreed.
4. WG.II received the report of the first meeting of the Scientific Coordinating Group, including statements of stock status for the four main tuna stocks, bigeye tuna, yellowfin tuna, skipjack tuna and South Pacific albacore tuna (WCPFC/PrepCon/17).
5. WG.II accepted the following elements of the report from the Scientific Coordinating Group:
  - (a) the format for reporting to the Preparatory Conference on the status of stocks and other scientific and technical issues;
  - (b) summary statements on the status of skipjack tuna, yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna and South Pacific albacore tuna stocks and other scientific and technical information pertaining to such stocks (WCPFC/PrepCon/15/Annex II) including stock status comments as follows:
    - (i) Skipjack tuna – the skipjack stock appears to be capable of sustaining the current catch without adverse effects to the overall stock and this conclusion is not affected by different model assumptions considered by the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish (SCTB).

- (ii) Yellowfin tuna – the assessment for yellowfin tuna indicates that the stock is likely to be nearing full exploitation.
  - (iii) Bigeye tuna – the assessment for bigeye tuna indicates that the stock is nearing full exploitation. The catches and fishing mortality of juveniles have increased greatly over the past decade, due primarily to increased catches in Indonesia, Philippines and the international purse seine fishery. In respect of the purse seine fishery, the increased use of drifting fish aggregating devices (FADs) has increased juvenile mortality of bigeye tuna.
  - (iv) South Pacific albacore tuna – the Multifan-CL assessment indicates that albacore appear to be only lightly exploited and this conclusion is not affected by different model assumptions considered by the SCTB.
- (c) recognition that the stock assessments used to provide advice on the status of the WCPO stocks are subject to uncertainty, the results of uncertainty in the inputs and model specification and structure. The SCG acknowledged the ongoing need for development, testing and review of current and new assessment methods.
- (d) WG.II noted that the SPC/OFP, facilitated through the forum of SCTB, compiles several types of fisheries and biological data to support a comprehensive programme of research on tuna fisheries in the WCPO.
- (e) WG.II recommended that the data available for stock assessment should be improved by:
- (i) Strengthening of data collection (improved catch, effort and size composition data) from Indonesian and Philippine domestic fisheries; and
  - (ii) Improved sampling of the proportion of bigeye and yellowfin tuna in purse seine catches.
- (f) WG.II recognized that existing regional arrangements for the compilation and dissemination of data, coordinated by several relevant international and national sources and the SCTB, are suitable in the interim.
- (g) WG.II noted that several relevant international and national sources including the SCTB had also highlighted a number of issues of importance including:
- (i) The need for more reliable statistics on catches of non-target species through improved observer coverage and other means.
  - (ii) The need for continued acquisition of data on bigeye tuna habitat through archival and pop-up satellite archival tagging and incorporation of these data into habitat models.
  - (iii) The need for additional conventional tagging of the four main tuna species to provide additional information on fishing and natural mortality, movements and other parameters.

- (h) WG.II recommended that the SCG continue its work at further meetings;
- (i) WG.II considered the special requirements of small island developing States in relation to data needs and scientific research as recommended by the SCG.
6. WG.II recommended that additions be made to future reports of stock status prepared by the Scientific Coordinating Group including a brief statement regarding interactions between the target fisheries and other elements of the ecosystem, a statement regarding the magnitude of uncertainty associated with each statement of stock status, a glossary of relevant terms, a summary report of comparison studies on various modelling options for stock assessment and a short introduction on assessment of tuna stocks. The chairman of WG.II will consult with the Interim Secretariat and the chairman of the Scientific Coordinating Group to progress preparation of these documents.
7. In considering the data requirements, including current gaps in data coverage and standards for data collection and management, data security, and data confidentiality during the interim period, WG.II received a presentation on the document WCPFC/PrepCon/WP.10, entitled Review of data standards, technical capabilities and data sharing policies for the Western and Central Pacific Region, as a guide for further discussions.
8. WG.II agreed that the detailed technical work in relation to the Commission's data requirements should be handled by the next meeting of the Scientific Coordinating Group including consideration of a revised version of document WCPFC/PrepCon/WP.10. Revisions to the original paper will be completed by the authors and these will include revisions identified by WG.II and others, as appropriate.
9. WG.II agreed that the next meeting of the Scientific Coordinating Group should focus on data issues and the development of updated statements on stock status of the four main tuna species.
10. It was agreed that, subject to funding availability, the second meeting of the Scientific Coordinating Group should take place from 17 to 19 July 2003, immediately following the 16th Meeting of the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish in Mooloolaba, Australia.
11. With reference to article 30 of the Convention, WG.II discussed the special requirements of small island developing States in relation to data needs and scientific research. The Interim Secretariat was requested to prepare a paper, in conjunction with interested parties, on the special requirements of developing States, in regard to data requirements and technical capacity needs, for consideration at the next meeting of the Preparatory Conference.
12. The issue of scientific structures to address scientific functions of the Commission was discussed with the revised possible model for meeting the science and data needs of the Commission developed by WG.II at PrepCon II serving as a guide for the discussion. If scientific services are contracted out, delegates reinforced the requirement to make use of existing regional organizations, to the greatest extent possible, as indicated in article 13 (1) of the Convention. Some delegations suggested that data functions and stock assessment functions should be closely linked, due to the dependency of the stock assessments on access to data. It was agreed that ecological, biological, social, and economic research, as needed, should be carried out under contracts to the Commission and not be carried out by scientific staff in the Secretariat. There was

concern expressed by some delegations regarding confidentiality of data and access to data by contractors.

13. No agreement was reached on an organisational model for meeting the science and data needs of the Commission. Further work will be required to progress this issue and it is suggested that some elements of this work proceed intersessionally under the guidance of the chairman of WG.II with the assistance of the Interim Secretariat.

- - -