LDAC ADVICE TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Recommendations for the 23rd Regular Session of the Commission of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC23)

Port Vila, Vanuatu – 30 November - 5 December 2026

Adopted by the LDAC Executive Committee: 30th of October 2026

R-08-Ej.20 (2026-2027)/WG1

1. Management of tropical tunas

1.1. Management procedures

The LDAC notes that work is going on both a framework for a more equitable high-sea allocation of purse-seine opportunities and the bigeye tuna harvest strategy program. Regarding bigeye tuna specifically, the 22nd session of the Scientific Committee recommended that the Commission should adopt a management procedure after completing the evaluations of the different scenarios.

The LDAC also notes that **SC22** did not accept the 2026 assessment by consensus. It regarded it as scientifically advanced, but there was a substantive disagreement over how the uncertainty ensemble should be constructed, driven particularly by treatment of tagging data. Therefore, for formal stock-status advice to the Commission, SC22 reiterated the previous SC19/2023 advice rather than replacing it with a new agreed 2026 status determination[1].

Finally, the LDAC understands that there is no specific plan to discuss the Day Allocation Scheme in high seas this year. As a reminder, currently, no capacity limitation applies to the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), in high seas, to the contrary to other parties.

Recommendations for management of tropical tunas:

R1. The LDAC recommends that the EU promotes a scheme where the total number of purse seine fishing days resulting from the MP are shared using the existing allocation as base, considering both days within CPC EEZs and high seas days.

R2. The LDAC recommends that the Commission explicitly assess the consequences (trade-offs) of both existing skipjack management procedures and candidate bigeye management procedures on yellowfin tuna and other tropical tuna fisheries before adoption.

R2.bis The LDAC recommends that the EU request the WCPFC, in negotiation of a preferred scope for the MP, to consider the impact of any fisheries subject to exclusions from effort or catch allocation (e.g., archipelagic, coastal and SIDS longline, PNA purse seine high seas, etc.), and the likely impact on the future MP.

R3. The LDAC recommends not waiting a new stock assessment of bigeye tuna to adopt a management procedure on bigeye tuna.

[1] SC22 Outcome document, section 4.3.2 WCPO bigeye tuna, paragraphs 22–23

1.2. Observer coverage

The LDAC reminds that no general increase in mandatory observer coverage was adopted at WCPFC22. However, the Commission continued work on EM and independent monitoring. SC22 recommended that TCC and the Commission consider expanding human and electronic monitoring on longliners. It noted that coverage of at least 10% of effort would allow reasonably good estimates for frequently caught species, while higher coverage would be needed for rarer bycatch such as turtles and cetaceans[2].

The LDAC also reminds that WCPFC22 adopted a 2026 ER&EM work programme covering, inter alia, data/reporting, assurance/audit and development of a WCPFC EM programme. SC22 recommended that TCC and WCPFC progress a draft CMM for a WCPFC Electronic Monitoring Program[3].

Recommendations on observer coverage:

R4. The LDAC also recommends that the EU propose an increase of the observer coverage to 20%, or at least stepwise increase to 10% with an outlook to 20% within a time-limited period, be it through human, electronic, or both types of observers.

R5. The LDAC also recommends, in order to preserve level playing field for its longline fleet, that the EU puts pressure on all CPCs to respect and fully implement the current observer coverage rules or otherwise face the consequences as per CMM 2023-01.

2. Other management procedures

2.1. Pacific Bluefin Tuna

The LDAC notes that in 2026, the joint IATTC–WCPFC-NC (Northern Committee) process completed the Interim Pacific Bluefin Tuna Management Procedure and recommended its adoption, while advancing a draft WCPFC implementing CMM for finalisation by the Northern Committee[4]. The IATTC has already adopted the interim MP through Resolution C-26-01, while WCPFC23 is expected to consider adoption of the corresponding Pacific bluefin Management Procedure and implementing arrangements for the WCPFC Convention Area.

Recommendation on Pacific Bluefin Tuna:

R6. The LDAC recommends that the EU support the adoption of the proposed Pacific Bluefin Tuna Management Procedure together with implementing arrangements.

[2] SC22 Outcome document, paragraph 13
[3] SC22 Outcome document, paragraph 14
[4] WCPFC-NC22(2)-2026-WP01 [IATTC-NC-JWG11(2)-2026-00], *Chairs' Summary of the 11th Joint IATTC and WCPFC-NC Working Group Meeting on the Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna*, *Second Session*, Agenda item 3.2, paras. 11–17, and Agenda item 4, paras. 18–27, in particular paras. 17 and 27

2.2. South Pacific Albacore

WCPFC22 already adopted the South Pacific albacore Management Procedure through CMM 2025-01, effective from 16 February 2026. At SC225 the Scientific Committee reviewed the first 2026 MP run (WCPFC-SC22-2026-MI-WP07) and the associated monitoring strategy, to inform implementation of the MP. The remaining key decision for WCPFC23 is therefore the adoption of the implementing arrangements for CMM 2025-01.

Recommendation on South Pacific Albacore:

R7. The LDAC recommends that the EU support timely adoption of implementing arrangements for CMM 2025-01, consistent with the MP outputs and SC22 scientific advice.

3. Management of Sharks

3.1. General considerations

The LDAC notes that the EU raised the issue and consideration of improved handling and release guidance continued, but WCPFC22 did not incorporate mandatory handling rules into the shark CMM (CMM 25-06) noting that best handling practices for the safe release of sharks (other than whale sharks and mantas/mobulids) adopted in 2018 are neither comprehensive nor binding.

The LDAC also notes that SC22 continued to identify post-release mortality and shark data quality as important research issues. Some CCMs specifically supported prioritising post-release survival estimates for silky, oceanic whitetip and whale sharks.

The LDAC notes that the 2025 stock assessment found tentative signs of recovery in the WCPO oceanic whitetip shark stock, with recent biomass estimated to have increased from around 4% to around 6% of unfished biomass and fishing mortality reduced to levels considered compatible with rebuilding. The LDAC acknowledges this small but encouraging improvement of the Oceanic whitetip shark population in the WCPFC and urges the EU to continue supporting the rebuilding of this and other overfished stocks of threatened sharks in the WCPFC, including oceanic whitetip sharks and silky sharks.

The LDAC highlights the importance of full compliance with existing conservation measures to effectively reduce oceanic whitetip shark mortality. These measures should be complemented by the implementation and continuous improvement of science-based best handling and live release practices aimed at maximising post-release survival.

Recommendation on management of sharks:

R8. The LDAC welcomes the SC21 recommendation that the IATTC Best Handling and Release Practice (BHRP) Guidelines for Sharks (SAC-16-10) be used as a reference in the 2027 review of WCPFC CMM 2025-06. The LDAC further notes and recommends considering the more recent work undertaken by the IOTC Scientific Committee and Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch in the compilation of best handling and release guidance, that includes gear-specific guidelines for sharks, whale sharks and mobulids and a broader multispecies framework covering other vulnerable bycatch taxa.

[5] SC22 Outcome document, agenda item **5.1.3**,

R8bis. The LDAC then recommends that the EU propose at WCPFC23 that scientifically supported best handling and live release practices for sharks be incorporated without waiting for the scheduled 2027 review of CMM 2025-06, while promoting harmonisation with relevant best-practice guidance developed by other tuna RFMOs, especially those that were already recommended by the IOTC Scientific Committee.

3.2. Hammerhead sharks

The WCPFC designates four hammerhead species, *Sphyrna lewini*, *S. mokarran*, *S. zygaena*, and *Eusphyra blochii* as Key Shark Species for Data Provision, requiring relevant scientific data to be provided to the Commission. Nevertheless, substantial gaps remain in species-specific catch, discard, and biological information, limiting the ability to assess population status and the impacts of WCPFC fisheries. The LDAC notes also the updated ecological risk assessment presented to SC22 (WCPFC-SC22-2026-EB-IP11), which provides new information on the relative vulnerability of elasmobranch species to WCPO tuna fisheries and ranks *S. lewini, S. mokarran, and S. zyagaena* as most vulnerable out of the 33 assessed shark species in the WCPO.

Recommendation on hammerhead sharks:

R9. The LDAC urges the EU to support improved species-specific reporting of catches, discards, and biological data for hammerhead sharks, in particular *S. lewini*, *S. mokarran* and *S. zygaena*, for the WCPFC Scientific Committee to get essential data for future stock assessments. Furthermore, the Scientific Committee should be tasked to gather and review information and data on key habitats including nurseries, migratory pathways and aggregation areas (*S. lewini*) for hammerhead sharks in the WCPO.

R9bis. The NGO member organisations Seas at Risk, Pew, WWF, Oceana and EJF recommend that the Scientific Committee should be tasked to advise the Commission on management and conservation measures that inter alia could be identified testing their efficacy via simulations applying the EASI-FISH framework as recommended by the SC22. The EU Commission should, due to the high vulnerability of hammerhead sharks, propose ad interim a retention ban for all hammerhead sharks in the WCPFC until further, more targeted measures have been identified by the SC and implemented by the Commission.

3.3. Management Procedures for Commercially Fished Species of Sharks

Blue shark and Shortfin mako shark

The LDAC notes that blue sharks are generally not a bycatch, but an actively targeted species or secondary target species taken by several fisheries in WCPFC, including Taiwan, Japan, Spain, Vanuatu, and Fiji. Shortfin mako sharks are mostly caught along with blue sharks in longline fisheries targeting swordfish and blue sharks.

Diverging position from NGOs and fishing industry on shortfin mako and blue sharks:

While the NGO group of the LDAC wishes to remind that both shortfin mako and blue sharks have substantial commercial value and are subject to CITES Appendix II requirements, the fishing sector members underscore the growing regulatory and bureaucratic pressure on blue shark and mako shark. In the view of the fishing sector, this means that catches already assessed and managed by the WCPFC as sustainable are nonetheless subject to an additional CITES certificate for international trade, a requirement that adds a further layer of control without providing any new scientific insight, undermining the management of this RFMO.

The LDAC notes that stock assessments in 2022 found that North and South Pacific Blue Shark populations are neither overfished nor subject to overfishing [1]. The 2024 North Pacific shortfin mako assessment also indicated that the stock was likely neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing, although substantial uncertainties remain [2] In the South Pacific, shortfin mako stock status remains uncertain because available data have not supported a sufficiently robust assessment [3] Gaps in catch, discards and observer data continue to limit confidence in estimates of mako shark mortality.

The LDAC also notes that SC22 designated a Southwest Pacific blue shark stock assessment for SC23 as "essential". The Global Blue Shark Management Strategy Evaluation Workshop, presented to SC22 as WCPFC-SC22-2026-MI-IP06, developed a common framework for advancing MSE-tested management procedures for blue shark across tuna RFMOs.

This work coincides with the planned 2027 stock assessments for both North Pacific and Southwest Pacific blue shark, providing an opportunity to begin developing the management objectives and reference points needed for future MSE work.

Recommendations for blue shark and shortfin mako sharks:

R10. The LDAC encourages the EU to advocate for compliance of all CCMs with current reporting requirements (including discards).

R11. The LDAC recommends that the EU advocate for the development of MSE-tested Management Procedures for blue shark. As a first step, the EU should request that WCPFC initiate work in 2026 on appropriate target, threshold and limit reference points for blue shark, with this work developed in conjunction with the North and Southwest Pacific blue shark stock assessments scheduled for 2027 and taking into account the outcomes of the Global Blue Shark MSE Workshop (WCPFC-SC22-2026-MI-IP06).

R12. For shortfin mako shark, the LDAC recommends that the EU support improved species-specific catch and discard reporting, higher-quality biological and observer data, and continued work to strengthen the scientific basis for stock assessment, particularly in the South Pacific where stock status remains uncertain. The LDAC further recommends that the Scientific Committee consider the development of appropriate reference points and a future management strategy framework once sufficiently robust assessment information is available.

3.4. Fins naturally attached policy

The EU has been a pioneer in ensuring full utilization of sharks through the adoption of its Regulation (EU) No 605/2013 (so-called "Shark Finning Regulation").

In 2024 WCPFC adopted a new shark measure (CMM 2024/05), superseded in 2025 (CMM 2025/06), including provisions for "Full utilisation of shark and prohibition of finning". For 2025, 2026 and 2027 all sharks must be landed with their fins naturally attached. However, two alternatives are still permitted: the wiring of cut fins to the carcass and a tagging system allowing inspectors to easily identify corresponding fins and carcasses, both of which must be stored in the same hold.

Member states are required to report annually to the Secretariat explaining why an alternative had been used, how many vessels have used the alternatives, how monitoring and enforcement were ensured, and how incidences of non-compliance have been addressed. Failure to provide this information will cause the use of alternatives to expire in 2027 for this CCM.

The WCPFC has thus further strengthened its requirements by limiting the acceptable alternatives to only 2 and prohibiting, since July 2025, the storage of cut fins together with the carcasses in bags. The Technical and Compliance Committee (TTC) and Commission are to review members' compliance with these provisions by 2027

The LDAC also reminds that in 2025 the IOTC adopted Resolution 25-08 on the conservation of sharks caught in association with fisheries managed by IOTC, which limits alternatives to the fins naturally attached policy in the Indian Ocean, to binding fins to carcasses or using matching tags. These however apply only to sharks landed frozen. Each CCM could select only one of the alternatives that will apply for the complete period of 2026–2028.

CCMs had to inform the Secretariat by 1 September 2025 about the selected alternative if any. Failure to report in any year the required compliance and enforcement information to the Compliance Committee makes that fishery ineligible to use any alternative, meaning it must comply fully with the fins naturally attached policy.

This is important to ensure reporting requirements and progressive implementation of the fins naturally attached policy also in the Pacific, where low observer coverage makes the detection of offenses, especially in small scale fisheries that land sharks fresh, particularly difficult if not impossible to detect.

Recommendations on fins naturally attached policy:

R14. The EU should ask for confirmation that the same alternatives to fins naturally attached reported for 2025 will also be applied in 2026 and 2027; if not confirmed, the Member must be bound to use only fins naturally attached.

R15. Members that fail to comply with reporting requirements should be immediately bound to fins naturally attached and shall no longer be allowed to use alternatives, not waiting until 2027.

R16. Alternatives to fins naturally attached should only apply to sharks landed frozen; all sharks landed fresh should be required to be landed only with fins naturally attached.

4. Monitoring, control and surveillance

4.1. Monitoring of transhipments at sea

The LDAC insists that transshipments at sea are a likely source of IUU and need to be eliminated as soon as possible. However, for practical reasons, the LDAC promotes as a minimum requirement to start with the adoption of the following measures to better monitor transhipment at sea:

Recommendations on monitoring of transhipments at sea

R17. Implement real time, or near real-time, reporting requirements for all components of transhipments, including electronic verification and validation tools.

R18. Ensure data fields on IMO numbers, date, location, catch and duration of the transshipment (start/stop times) are added to those fields in an oversight, those critical data fields were not included in the forms.

R19. Support 100% observer coverage on delivering and receiving vessels engaged in at-sea transhipment.

R20. Prioritise the development and application of EM for transhipment monitoring.

R21. Support or endorse the use of technology to verify and validate transhipment activity.

R22. Require reporting of non-fish transfers (e.g. exchanges of goods, crew, fuel etc.) involving registered WCPFC carriers.

4.2. Catch documentation scheme

Electronic Catch Documentation Schemes (e-CDS) are one of the most effective mechanisms for monitoring catches and preventing IUU fishing. They offer a cooperative, systematic, and collaborative way to ensure the legality of catches throughout the supply chain and are key to achieving a level playing field as also indicated in previous LDAC advice, including of July 2021 for a Level Playing Field for EU and non-EU fish products[6]. Other regional fisheries bodies, such as CCAMLR, CCSBT and ICCAT, have successfully deployed such schemes for years, with the latter in advance discussions on expanding it to cover more stocks. Furthermore, other tuna RFMOs, such as IOTC, have adopted a workplan on gradually introducing an e-CDS.

In December 2019, WCPFC19 updated the workplan for the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) for the 2022-2024 and included in its core tasks the review of the work of Intersessional Working Groups (IWG) which includes the CDS IWG. We note with regret that this was not thoroughly discussed and the CDS IWG has remained essentially defunct, not convening since 2016.

[6] LDAC Advice on LPF (2021): https://ldac.eu/images/EN_LDAC_Advice_LPF_25May2021.pdf

However, we are encouraged by the recent developments of the Joint IATTC and WCPFC-NC Working Group on Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS-06), the agreed workplan for introducing an electronic Pacific Bluefin Catch Documentation Scheme (ePBCD)[7] and the inclusion of developing a CDS proposal in the 2025-2027 workplan of the TCC.[8] As the work progresses, it is crucial that the key data elements of this new CDS are aligned with existing schemes and best practices. This includes ICCAT's eBCD and the latest version of the EU Catch Certificate as of 10 January 2026 and data fields such as IMO numbers, a better-defined catch area, authorisation to fish, port of landing and processing location.

Recommendations on catch documentation scheme

R23. The resuming of the CDS IWG with the ultimate goal of introducing electronic CDS in WCPFC and for the EU to ensure this is reflected in the 2025-2027 workplan of the Technical and Compliance Committee.

R24. The EU should support the work of the Joint IATTC and WCPFC CDS Working Group in establishing a CDS for Pacific bluefin tuna by the agreed deadline of 31 December 2026.

R25. The future ePBCD's key data elements should be aligned with existing best practices such as EU's catch certification scheme.

4.3. Port State Measures

Effective port State measures (PSMs) minimise the risk of illegally caught fish entering international markets. WCPFC adopted a CMM on minimum standards for ports State measures in 2017. The resolution is non-binding, and members must designate ports to opt-in – unfortunately only a small proportion of Members and CPCs (10 of 33) have done so.

The LDAC notes that WCPFC22 agreed a 2026 workplan for further review of the Port State Measures CMM rather than immediately adopting a fully revised measure.

Recommendations on port state measures:

R26. The EU call WCPFC to agree on next steps in the revision process, based on the six priority areas highlighted from the WG review process to deliver a proposal to WCPFC in 2027

R27. The revised CMM, at a minimum should align with the PSMA and include provisions that:

- **Require port designation and advance entry requests.**
- **Allow for authorisation and denial of port entry.**
- **Ensure effective national coordination and exchange of information to facilitate risk assessment in port.**
- **Develop a fund to support developing States and small island developing States to opt into the current measures or implement a revised measure.**

[7] Chair's Summary of the 6th Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS) Technical Meeting: https://meetings.wcpfc.int/node/26475

[8] Draft Updated TCC Workplan 2025-2027: https://www.wcpfc.int/sites/default/files/2026-03/TCC%20Workplan%20for%202025-2027_revised%202026_prep%20for%20release_0.pdf

5. Bycatch and habitat impacts

5.1. Sea turtles

The LDAC notes the ongoing review of CMM 2018-04 on Sea Turtles and supports strengthening mitigation, reporting and safe-handling requirements, including for longline fisheries.

The LDAC further notes the work undertaken by the IOTC Working Party on Ecosystems and Bycatch to harmonise best handling and release guidance for vulnerable bycatch species. In 2026, WPEB22 noted ongoing work to finalise sea-turtle handling and release guidelines and explicitly encouraged collaboration between WCPFC and other RFMOs, especially IATTC, to promote harmonised guidance, while acknowledging differences in fishing operations (IOTC-2026-WPEB22(DP)-R, paras. 69–72).

The fishing sector in the LDAC acknowledges that article 3 of IATTC resolution C-19-04 and article 6 of WCPFC CMM 2018-04 include that Contracting parties shall ensure that the operators of longline vessels carry and use equipment to handle and promptly release sea turtles caught or entangled. However, in IATTC operators and at least one crew member of vessels fishing for Convention species with interactions with sea turtles, especially without observers, should be trained in handling and release to improve survival. Such training is not mandatory in WCPFC.

Recommendations on bycatch:

R28. *The NGO group of the LDAC recommends that the EU support* strengthening CMM 2018-04 in line with IATTC requirements under Resolution C-19-04 for shallow-set longline fisheries, requiring the use of large circle hooks, finfish bait, OR another mitigation measure to reduce sea turtle bycatch that has been approved by the Commission. Furthermore, mandatory best handling and safe-release practices as already defined in IATTC EB 03-05 REV 2025 and IOTC WPEBB22(AS) App XVVII should be included together with the requirement of having appropriate release equipment on board and having crew trained in these BHSR practices.

5.2. ALDFG

The LDAC notes that WCPFC22 continued the intersessional review of CMM 2017-04 on Marine Pollution with a view to adopting a revised measure at WCPFC23. SC22 recommended strengthening and standardising monitoring and reporting of abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG), while noting that low longline observer coverage limits the scientific value of current data and that further research is needed on ghost-fishing and navigation risks. SC22 also concluded that a stepwise introduction of biodegradable dFADs in the WCPO is technically feasible (SC22 Outcomes, paras. 131–132).

Recommendation on ALDFG

R29. The LDAC recommends that the EU support a strengthened revised CMM 2017-04, including improved ALDFG monitoring and reporting. The LDAC also advocates to adopt a similar plan to the one adopted by the IATTC through Resolution C-23-04 for the transition to biodegradable dFADs, taking into account the relevant technical and supply constraints.

6. Coordination with other international treaties / organisations

The LDAC notes that ICCAT took a decision on 2023[9] on how to articulate its work on the international legal instruments such as the WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement, the Global Framework on Biodiversity Kunming-Montreal and the UN BBNJ Treaty.

The LDAC welcomes the recent ratification of 60 parties of the UN BBNJ, which will entry into force in January 2026. The LDAC asks the EU to defend the importance of well articulating the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement with the binding mandates and operational frameworks of RFMOs. The BBNJ presents a valuable opportunity to improve protection of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and its success will depend on the complementarity of its measures with existing regional fisheries management regulations and efforts. To avoid duplication, inefficiencies, or regulatory gaps, it is essential that BBNJ mechanisms build on and reinforce the science-based decision-making processes and scientific expertise already in place in RFMOs. In this respect, the inter-RFMO group coordinated by FAO seems a suitable forum for this coordination, where the WCPFC should be actively present and involved.

The LDAC stresses the fact that RFMO and BBNJ membership may not be the same, stressing the need to address the potential implementation gaps that may result from this and how they can undermine the effectiveness of future measures, also putting a disproportionate burden over BBNJ members, such as the EU.

Recommendation on coordination with other international treaties / organisations;

R30. The LDAC recommends a stronger participation of WCPFC to BBNJ, CITES and other related meetings whose decisions may have a direct impact on WCPFC business.

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[9] ICCAT Doc. PLE 121/2023