Summary of the FFC Species Working Group meeting on Options for Bigeye Management

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1. In May 3, 2002, the FFA Species Working Group (SWG) met in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, to review the work on the Options for Management of the Bigeye Fishery. The meeting had two presentations, one on (1) the overview of the fishery presented by SPC and the other was (2) Options for Bigeye Management presented by the FFA Secretariat.

2. The SWG, group which was set up by the Forum Fisheries Committee (FFC) made a summary report to the Fiftieth Meeting of FFC (FFC51) held also in Pohnpei from 6-10 May 2002. The first part of the meeting, which was a presentation by SPC is not summarised here as this will be presented again during the Methods Working Group and the SCTB15 next week.

3. On the options for management of the bigeye, several management options were looked. These include time/area limits; use of tender vessels; Limits on FAD numbers or FAD sets per vessel; compulsory retention/no discards of juvenile tuna; limits on net depths; overall (holistic) bigeye management; covering both surface and longline fisheries; and compliance aspects.

Objectives

4. The meeting agreed that further consideration should be given to the development of management objectives particularly given the development of reference points by SPC. It was noted that the management objectives set out in the WCPF Convention of managing stocks at a biomass level that produces MSY could also be used in developing management objectives.

Time/area limits

5. While there is some concentration of purse seine bigeye catches in certain areas east of 160°E, purse seine skipjack and yellowfin catches are also concentrated in this area. Therefore any limiting on fishing activities in this area would have a very large and costly effect on skipjack and yellowfin catches, and also tend to divert the effort to other areas resulting in comparable bigeye catches. There is no apparent seasonal pattern that would support the imposition of limits during any specific time period. Overall, it would seem that time/area limits have little chance of success for bigeye management in the WCPO and their application would be at considerable cost to the fishery.

Use of Tender vessels

6. The meeting noted that in comparison to the eastern Pacific, tender vessels were not widely used in the WCPO, other than in domestic anchored FAD fisheries. This option was discarded for the time being.

Limits on FAD numbers or FAD sets per vessels

7. The meeting noted that the increase in catches of bigeye, especially juvenile bigeye by purse seining is directly related to the increasing in fishing on floating objects, including logs and drifting FADs. There are practical difficulties in managing limits on floating objects but the measure may be more practical than some of the other options that has been considered.

8. The meeting agreed that the option needs to be broadened to include limits on fishing on logs as well as FADs i.e. fishing on floating objects.
Compulsory retention/no discards

9. The meeting noted that this option might be appropriate in the WCPO. However, in the first year of a Pilot Program in the EPO, the measure did not seem to provide the necessary incentive to avoid catches of small fish. The IATTC has extended the EPO Program for another year and this should provide further information on its potential effectiveness.

10. The meeting agreed to defer consideration of this option until the success of the IATTC program could be evaluated.

Limits on net depths

11. The meeting agreed that there is no indication that the use of deeper nets, already standard in the WCPO, has been implicated in the increased catch of bigeye, and it is unlikely that limits on net depth would have any effect in limiting bigeye catch in the region.

Overall (holistic) approach to bigeye management, covering both surface and bigeye fisheries

12. The meeting noted that in the long run, it seems and overall (holistic) approach involving management of both surface and longline fisheries through catch or effort limits will almost certainly be necessary, but there are substantial constraints to be overcome for the application of this approach. Some work on optimal mix of catch by gears is being undertaken, and more information will become available over the next 12 months.

13. The meeting was also presented with an update on management measures applied to fisheries taking bigeye in other regions. In both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, current bigeye catches are above estimates of MSY, but limited progress has been achieved to date in the application of various management measures.

Compliance aspects

14. The meeting noted the need to ensure compliance with the three options identifies for further attention above including the following:

- Limits on sets on floating objects; would require 100 per cent observer coverage to monitor the implication of the measure, backed up by maritime surveillance.
- Compulsory retention/no discards of juvenile tuna: would require 100 per cent observer coverage to ensure that small fish are not dumped, backed up by VMS and port sampling.
- Overall (holistic) bigeye management, covering both surface and longline fisheries: compliance requirements would depend on the form of management applied – effort limits would require less regorous compliance programmes, while catch and effort limits would require less vigorous compliance programmes, while catch limits would require at least comprehensive timely reporting, and high levels of observer coverage or port sampling.

15. The meeting further noted that a clear implication of the compliance needs of bigeye management options is that substantial strengthening of observer and port sampling programmes will be required along with full implementation of VMS. Specifically, an early upgrading of observer coverage to 20 per cent on the purse seine fleet is an important priority.

Other issues related to bigeye management

16. The meeting also noted the need for:

- Improving data available for bigeye stock assessment, especially estimation of surface catch;
Ensuring compliance with any measures adopted; and measuring performance of any measures adopted.

**FFC51 Decision**

17. In considering the report of the SWG, FFC51 made the following decisions:

(i) endorsed the need for further consideration of objectives for bigeye management, noting the recommendations of SCTB, objectives under the WCPF Convention and noting that an analysis of reference points for bigeye has been undertaken by the SPC/OFP;

(ii) agreed that further attention to bigeye management options should be focused on:

- Limits on purse-seine sets on floating objects
- Compulsory retention/no discards of juvenile tuna
- Overall (holistic) bigeye management, covering both surface and longline fisheries

(iii) noted the priority for strengthening observer and port sampling programmes for purse seining for the purposes of:

- Improving data available for bigeye stock assessment, especially catch estimation
- Ensuring compliance with any measures adopted
- Measuring performance of any measures adopted

(iv) endorsed the proposed amendment to MTCs\(^2\) to increase observer coverage (in this case for purse seine vessels) to 20%, and requested the Secretariat to report on the pattern of observer coverage; and

(v) agreed that FFA member countries take the bigeye management issue further and that the issue be promoted within the wider forum of the Preparatory Conference.

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\(^2\) Minimum Terms and Conditions – standardised licensing conditions for licensing foreign fishing vessels to fish in the EEZs of FFA member countries. This is also one of the initiatives of the PNA.