

OPRT Business Plan for 2023

I Current status of tuna stocks and tuna fishing and the challenges of the OPRT

1. Current standings of tuna RFMOs and their issues in 2023

Many meetings of regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) were held in a hybrid style (both in-person and online) in 2022 as the COVID-19 pandemic was subsiding. Although RFMO meetings are likely to continue to be held in a hybrid style for the time being, they will gradually move to in-person meetings. It should be noted, however, that, based on the experience in the last two years, holding technical meetings where complex negotiations are not required online does not cause so much trouble and thus some of the technical meetings will be probably held online only.

There is still a grave concern about the negative effects of a large amount of juvenile bigeye catch by purse seine FAD operations on long line fishing operations. Reduction in the juvenile bigeye catch will increase the MSY level, which would enable the increase in TAC, benefiting not only long line fisheries but also all the other fisheries. Since the reduction in the juvenile bigeye catch is quite important for improvement of the long line business operation, the OPRT needs to promote it. RFMOs have taken measures such as the limitation on the number of FADs that one purse seiner can deploy at one time and introduction of closure periods. In addition, IATTC adopted in 2021 a new measure that the closure period shall be extended if a purse seiner catches too much bigeye, but attention should be paid to the extent to which this measure will be effective. The FAD management measures in other RFMOs are still ineffective and more effective measures such as the limitation on the number of FAD operations should be introduced.

Among various monitoring and control measures, as to management measures on transshipment activities, the FAO adopted Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment at the 35th Session of the Committee on Fisheries in September 2022. There will probably be a proposal to align the existing management measures on transshipment taken by RFMOs with the Guidelines. In particular, since the Guidelines state that only carrier vessels entitled to fly the flag of RFMO Members or Cooperating non-Members should be used, a proposal may be submitted to prohibit the use of carrier vessels flying the flag of non-Members that are currently permitted.

The current status and issues to be discussed this year are explained below for each RFMO.

(1) WCPFC

WCPFC will comprehensively review the conservation and management measures (CMM) for tropical tunas this year, particularly on an effort limit for purse seiners on the high seas and how to allocate it as well as a bigeye catch limit for long liners and how to allocate it. For this purpose, WCPFC established a 2023 work plan at last year's annual meeting, which states that: (i) the Chair will circulate a paper describing points subject to amendment by the end of February; (ii) Members will give feedback to the Chair on the paper by the end of March; (iii) the Chair will compile and

circulate comments submitted by the end of April; and (iv) a workshop will be held in June and October to discuss the CMM on tropical tunas. The October workshop will also discuss the necessity to hold additional workshops as well as a contingency plan in case the annual meeting (Cook Islands from December 4 to 8, 2023) cannot agree to it.

There is concern about the stock status of North Pacific striped marlin. Discussion took place at the 2022 annual meeting, which produced no conclusion, and this will be discussed at this year's annual meeting again. At last year's annual meeting, FFA Members advocated the need to introduce stringent measures such as prohibition of retention of this species on board fishing vessels, considering the stock status. They are likely to say this again this year. A focus would be how to promote the conservation of this species while minimizing the negative impacts of measures on the catch of target species as this species is basically a bycatch species.

Some discussion took place on labor standards of crew on board fishing vessels at the 2022 annual meeting, which confirmed the continuation of the discussion. The United States expressed its desire at the meeting to establish a binding measure to address this issue at the 2023 annual meeting. The discussion is likely to happen through working group meetings before going to the annual meeting.

(2) ICCAT

As to tropical tunas, the annual meeting last year could not agree to an increase in the TAC of bigeye tuna and a new allocation method. To agree on these issues at the annual meeting this year (Egypt from November 13 to 20), preparatory discussion will take place at two intersessional meetings in March and June. It is not clear if agreement can be reached as there is still a large difference of views among Members on the level of the TAC, allocation methods, FAD management measures and so on.

ICCAT agreed to the new management procedure (MP) for Atlantic bluefin tuna last year and adopted the annual total allowable catch (TAC) and allocations for the next three years. The remaining point for Atlantic bluefin tuna is an exceptional circumstances protocol, which is the last piece of the MP.

ICCAT plans to establish an MP for north Atlantic swordfish this year and will hold three intersessional meetings to enable this. If a new MP is established, which will calculate a new TAC, it is likely to be lower than the TAC calculated through a normal stock assessment as the MP takes more uncertainties into account. In that case, allocations will have to be adjusted.

The current TAC for north Atlantic albacore will be valid till the end of 2023. The MP will calculate a new TAC for 2024 and thereafter. If the TAC is changed, allocations will have to be adjusted. As the number of Members involved in this fishery is small, not so much difficulty is envisaged.

A new stock assessment will be conducted for north Atlantic blue shark this year, which will be the basis for reviewing the TAC. If the TAC is changed, allocations will have to be adjusted.

A working group meeting will be held in May to discuss labor standards for crew on board fishing vessels. Discussion at the meeting will clarify what the United States, which is taking the initiative

in this work, expects to see as the final outcome.

Discussion will take place through a working group meeting on whether the CDS, which currently covers only Atlantic bluefin tuna, should be expanded to other species. The CDS is an important tool to eliminate IUU fishing and the main point would be how to overcome implementation difficulties.

(3) IOTC

Last year, IOTC discussed the strengthening of measures for yellowfin tuna but could not agree to it. Instead, IOTC decided to hold two special sessions to discuss regulations on fish aggregating devices (FADs) and conservation measures for yellowfin tuna so that the annual meeting (Mauritius from May 8 to 12) can agree to them. The first special session adopted by voting strengthening of FAD measures such as a FAD closure period and a reduction in the number of FADs. Since Comoros and Oman have already lodged an objection to the measures and the EU suggested that it would lodge an objection to it, there may be some movement towards the annual meeting. IOTC is experiencing an abnormal situation for yellowfin tuna as six Members lodged an objection to the current measures adopted in 2021. To avoid this, any agreement must consider the positions of these Members. Since some of the objecting Members oppose any regulation on the development of their own fisheries, the negotiation will be difficult. Buyers from Europa and North America are taking a firm position that they will not buy tunas if IOTC cannot adopt proper conservation measures. This is a serious problem for IOTC Members which depend on the export of tuna products.

IOTC will continue discussion on allocation criteria and hold several working group meetings. Although there is a general agreement that allocation should be transferred from developed Members to developing Members to help their fishery development, the difference of views is huge as to the initial allocation levels and the speed of such transfer. There is little possibility to see agreement in the near future.

(4) IATTC

IATTC adopted, in 2021, conservation measures for tropical tunas that are valid until the end of 2024. The measures are supposed to be reviewed every year, taking into account a new stock assessment (bigeye in 2023), changes in purse seine fishing capacity and the scientific advice of the Secretariat scientific staff. This review will be conducted at the annual meeting (from August 7 to 11).

As to management measures on transshipment, the EU proposed prohibiting the use of carrier vessels flagged to non-Members last year, but no agreement was reached. As the FAO Guidelines were adopted after that, the EU is expected to submit the same proposal again this year.

(5) CCSBT

At last year's annual meeting, the MP recommended that the TAC for southern bluefin tuna be increased by 3,000 t for 2024 and thereafter. The meeting could not endorse this recommendation, however, as NZ opposed this because there had been little progress to address the issues of

stereoscopic cameras and the Japanese market. As a result, the meeting decided to defer the discussion to the 2023 annual meeting (Busan from October 9 to 12). Accordingly, the allocations for 2024 and thereafter will also be discussed at the annual meeting this year.

2. Suggested responses of the OPRT to those issues at tuna RFMOs

Taking into account the issues listed above, the OPRT will implement the following activities.

(1) The Secretariat will continue to monitor meetings of tuna RFMOs in 2023 to the extent possible and provide related information to Members (see Attachment for the schedule of major RFMO meetings in 2023). It should be noted, however, that the Secretariat will not attend RFMO meetings if they are held only in-person for cost saving.

(2) The Secretariat and Members should pay attention to issue which may affect long line fisheries such as management of FAD operations, management of transshipment, observer coverage (including electronic monitoring), CDS, and labor standards. The Members should, if necessary, communicate their views to their authorities. In particular, for labor issues, attention should be paid to the discussion at WCPFC and ICCAT.

(3) Since the bycatch of sharks, sea turtles and seabirds may undermine the continuation of long line fishing unless properly addressed, the OPRT will try to establish its common policy on how to tackle this issue.

3. Suggested responses of the OPRT to other issues

(1) Overcapacity

For sustainable utilization of tuna resources, the OPRT, based on the agreement among its Members at the World Conference of Tuna Longline Fisheries in 2003, needs to continue its efforts to control the total number of large-scale long liners. At the same time, in order to carry on the effects of OPRT's efforts over the past years, discussion should take place among the Members about introduction of more effective measures as necessary.

The OPRT registration of Taiwanese small-scale longline fishing vessels that target bigeye tuna for export of the frozen tuna to Japan has been discussed between the two governments. Since the incorporation of such vessels within the OPRT framework is expected to contribute to strengthened control of long line fishing vessels, the OPRT will promote this once agreement is made.

In case any overseas longline tuna fisheries organizations express intention to acquire OPRT membership with a view to preventing and eliminating IUU fisheries and controlling fishing capacity, appropriate steps should be taken to examine the qualifications of such organizations based on the advice of appropriate authorities and related bodies of those countries.

(2) Measures against IUU fishing

It is important for the Members to exclude IUU tuna products from the Japanese market as the world's largest market of sashimi tuna. For this purpose, under Japan's prior confirmation system for frozen tuna import, the OPRT will properly carry out part of the work including compilation of information submitted and monitoring of tuna import cleared by customs in an expeditious and accurate manner. Particularly, tuna laundering (including falsified reports on the catch species and fishing ground and misrepresentation of the vessel name) by RFMO-registered fishing vessels diminishes the effectiveness of the resource management measures. Collection of information by utilizing vessel's unique identifier (the International Maritime Organization (IMO) number), analyses of imported tuna data, and implementation of DNA identification will be conducted in a comprehensive manner.

It is important that quicker feedbacks about the tuna exports from OPRT member country vessels to Japan should be given to the members and other related parties to ensure effective control and management.

(3) Promotion of wild sashimi tuna consumption

Promotion of sustainable utilization of tunas caught under appropriate stock management schemes is one of OPRT's stated missions. In Japan, fish consumption tends to decrease amid intensifying competition between seafood and other food commodities. Under this circumstance, greater efforts than ever should be made to expand opportunities to appeal to consumers the positive characteristics of sashimi tuna (Not only in terms of sustainable use of resources, but also as ingredients with excellent freshness and quality) produced by large-scale tuna longline fishing vessels. Also, the Secretariat will provide the know-how based on the past projects when OPRT Members make similar efforts outside Japan.

(4) FOC vessel scrapping project

The FOC vessel scrapping project is that the fund provided by the Japanese government was used to scrap FOC fishing vessels and full repayment of the fund shall be made using fees levied from the duly registered vessels of Japan, Taiwan and legitimized vessels of Vanuatu and Seychelles. The collection of the fees will continue in the same framework this year and repayment will be made to the Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation, the current loan provider.

II Business plan

Taking into account the above situation as well as its strained financial circumstances, the OPRT will carry out the following activities, with a view to reinforcing conservation and management of tuna resources and contributing to the sustainable development of tuna fisheries and stable supply of tunas to the markets.

It should be noted that as measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are still required in Japan, the OPRT will continue to work by telework, organize OPRT meetings and seminars online, and otherwise explore and adopt best available tools and methods of carrying out the business.

The planned research, meetings, events, and other activities described below may have to be cancelled or switched from in-person to online due to COVID-19. The Secretariat will respond as appropriate.

- (1) Monitoring and analysis of the state of tuna resources and the trend of international stock management
 - (i) Monitoring, analysis and dissemination of information related to RFMOs
 - (ii) Monitoring, analysis and dissemination of information related to environmental NGOs
- (2) Promotion of effective resources management
 - (i) Prevention and elimination of IUU fishing activities
 - Monitoring of tunas imported to Japan
 - Monitoring of Positive Lists of RFMOs
 - Implementation of part of work related to the prior confirmation system for tuna import
 - DNA inspection
 - (ii) Promotion of fishing capacity control
 - (iii) Management of OPRT-registered fishing vessels (including maintenance and management of the registered vessel list and its system modification)
 - (iv) Monitoring of the international transactions of second-hand tuna longline fishing vessels and investigation on the status of exported second-hand vessels
 - (v) Measures to mitigate bycatch and collection of related information
- (3) Promotion of responsible tuna fisheries through promotion of sustainable use of tuna resources
 - (i) Implementation of campaigns for sashimi tunas, with a focus on "October 10 Tuna Day".
 - (ii) Support and strengthening of events related to the tuna campaign
- (4) Research and studies on management, trade and market of tuna resources
 - (i) Monitoring of distribution of tunas imported to Japan's sashimi market
 - (ii) Survey on international distribution of tunas
- (5) Promotion of international exchanges and cooperation among fishers for conservation and management of tuna resources
 - (i) Holding of meeting to exchange views and information on topics such as:
 - capacity management
 - establishment of clear rules on trade of second-hand tuna long line vessels
 - tuna catches made by non OPRT Members
 - (ii) Provision of related information
- (6) Promotion and education of the concept of responsible tuna fisheries
 - (i) Publication and distribution of OPRT Newsletters
 - (ii) Renewal of the OPRT web site
 - (iii) Provision of information to the public through OPRT website (English and Japanese)

- (iv) Holding of OPRT seminars on topics such as:
 - NOAA's report to the US Congress on IUU
- (v) Recruiting new OPRT Supporting Members
- (vi) Promotion of OPRT activities through cooperation with friendly organizations
- (7) Management of the fund for FOC vessel scrapping project
 - (i) Smooth collection of fees
 - (ii) Payment to the Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation