

OPRT Business Plan for 2024

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

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided, many meetings of regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), particularly technical ones, were still held in a hybrid style (both in-person and online) or online in 2023. This tendency will probably continue in 2024 as online participation saves travel time and cost although online participants must handle time difference.

The negative effects of a large amount of juvenile bigeye catch by purse seine FAD operations on long line fishing operations cannot be ignored yet. 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. Several 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 FAD 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. The OPRT will monitor effectiveness of this measure. 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 in addition to the reduction in the number of FAD to be used and introduction/expansion of FAD closure periods.

As to fishing crew labour standards, discussion is going on at the WCPFC and ICCAT. In particular, there is a possibility that the WCPFC will establish binding labour standards at this year's annual meeting. Such standards must be practical while responding to the criticism against longline fishing.

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

(1) WCPFC

The WCPFC adopted a new conservation and management measures (CMM) for tropical tunas at the 2023 annual meeting (WCPFC20) for 2024 to 2026. No discussion is expected on FAD management measures, purse seine fishing efforts, bigeye catch limits and other related measures in 2024. The WCPFC is supposed to agree to target reference points for bigeye and yellowfin as part of the work to establish a management procedure (MP) for these species at the 2024 annual meeting (WCPFC21)(in Fiji from December 2 to 6).

North Pacific striped marlin has been in a bad shape in recent years. However, there is a doubt about the validity of the stock assessment. Accordingly, the WCPFC decided to conduct an independent peer review of the stock assessment in 2024. If the peer review endorses the stock assessment, the WCPFC will discuss strengthening of the current CMM at WCPFC21.

There was no substantive discussion on the crew labour standards during WCPFC 20. A half-day meeting will be held in April and June 2024 with a view to agreeing to a new CMM on crew labour

standards at WCPFC21.

Regarding the strengthening of the regulations on at-sea transshipment, no agreement was reached at WCPFC20. A working group meeting will be held in September with a view to adopting a new CMM at WCPFC21.

Under the current CMM on sharks, separation of fins from bodies at sea is in principle prohibited and, if separated, certain alternative measures are applied for storing the separated fins and bodies on board vessels. The WCPFC will review the implementation of these measures this year.

Regarding the current CMM on seabirds, NZ will review scientific information with concerned Members with a view to submitting a draft amendment to this year's annual meeting.

(2) ICCAT

As to tropical tunas, ICCAT could not agree to amendments to the TAC of bigeye, a new allocation scheme of the bigeye TAC and management measures for FADs at the last year's annual meeting. ICCAT is planning to hold the first intersessional meeting in May and the second one just prior to the annual meeting (in Cyprus from November 11 to 18) with a view to agreeing to them at the annual meeting. The fishing activities were stagnated under the COVID-19 pandemic, which kept the total catch of bigeye under the TAC. In 2022, the total catch was close to the TAC with the recovery of the fishing activities after Corona and this tendency is likely to continue. Without a proper allocation scheme, there is a risk that the total catch may exceed the TAC and the bigeye stock, which is on the recovery, may worsen again.

As to north Atlantic swordfish, ICCAT could not agree to an MP and a new TAC was not calculated at the last year's annual meeting. Accordingly, ICCAT decided to roll-over the current measures for one year. This year's annual meeting is expected to adopt an MP to calculate a new TAC.

At the 2023 annual meeting, a proposal to prohibit separation of fins from shark bodies at sea was not adopted. Given that the WCPFC and the IATTC have already adopted the prohibition of separating fins at sea with alternative measures, a similar proposal may be submitted to the 2024 annual meeting.

As to the catch documentation scheme (CDS), which currently covers only Atlantic bluefin tuna, establishment of a new working group was agreed at the last year's annual meeting to discuss establishment of a scheme for other species. This is an important measure to eliminate IUU fishing and the OPRT should promote it.

(3) IOTC

Since the conservation and management measures on yellowfin adopted in 2021 was objected by 6 Members, the IOTC, at the last year's annual meeting, was expected to adopt a new Resolution which would not see the objection from Members, but there was no agreement. The 2024 annual meeting (in Thailand from May 13 to 17, 2024) is expected to agree to a new and more conservative measure as the yellowfin tuna stock is assessed overfished and subject to overfishing.

The IOTC at its special session in February 2023 adopted new FAD management measures. Since seven Members had lodged an objection to it before the 2023 annual meeting in May, the IOTC

discussed possible amendments to such measures at the annual meeting, but there was no agreement. After the annual meeting, the number of Members lodging an objection reached 11 and the measures did not enter into force in accordance with the IOTC Agreement. This year's annual meeting is likely to discuss introduction of FAD closure periods and a reduction in the number of FADs to be used. An agreement could be reached as to a reduction in the number of FADs while an agreement on the FAD closure is difficult. It would be wiser to separate these issues.

At the 2023 annual meeting, the IOTC discussed prohibition of both wire trace and shark lines as well as prohibition of separating fins from bodies at sea with alternative measures similar to those of the WCPFC. There was no agreement and the IOTC requested the relevant Working Parties and Scientific Committee to provide advice. If such advice comes up, a similar proposal will be submitted to this year's annual meeting.

(4) IATTC

The IATTC adopted conservation and management measures for tropical tunas in 2021, which include: (i) the individual vessel limit on the catch of bigeye tuna for purse seiners (the FAD closure period will be extended if the vessel caught more than 1,200 metric tons of bigeye tuna); and the gradual reduction in the number of FADs used at one time by the size of the vessel. At the 101st meeting scheduled in Panama in early September, the IATTC is expected to review the measures based on this year's stock assessments on tropical tunas and decide whether they should be extended or amended for 2025 and beyond.

(5) CCSBT

At the last year's annual meeting, the CCSBT adopted a TAC for 2024 to 2026, which was calculated by the MP. No substantial discussion is expected for the TAC in 2025 and 2026 unless exceptional circumstances not envisaged in the MP is detected. The CCSBT also agreed to allocations among Members, but one Member registered its intention to come back to the allocation issue at the 2024 annual meeting (in Taiwan from October 7 to 10).

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

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

(1) The Secretariat will continue to monitor meetings of tuna RFMOs in 2024 to the extent possible and provide related information to Members (see Attachment for the schedule of major RFMO meetings in 2024). To save the cost, however, the Secretariat will not attend RFMO meetings if they are held only in-person.

(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 the WCPFC. As the use of electronic monitoring is likely to increase in the next few years, information sharing among OPRT Members will be promoted, taking into account the availability of the necessary budget.

(3) Since the bycatch of sharks, sea turtles and seabirds may undermine the continuation of long line

fishing unless properly addressed, the OPRT will follow discussion at RFMOs and revise its bycatch policy, as appropriate.

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 longliners. 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.

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, efforts should be continued 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. As 20 years have already passed since the starting of the campaign, the future of the campaign should be reconsidered, taking into account the availability of the budget. 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.

Remote administrative processes and web-based meetings, which have been utilized during the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be utilized to the extent that they can improve operational efficiency.

- (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 frozen wild sashimi tunas
- (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
 - (ii) Provision of related information
- (6) Promotion and education of the concept of responsible tuna fisheries

- (i) Publication and distribution of OPRT Newsletters
- (ii) Provision of information to the public through OPRT website (English and Japanese)
- (iii) Holding of OPRT seminars on topics such as:
 - Electronic monitoring
 - Management strategy evaluation
- (iv) Recruiting new OPRT Supporting Members
- (v) 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