



Kobe II Bycatch Workshop - Brisbane 23–25 June 2010

WWF Views Paper

Preamble

Bycatch mitigation is a high priority for WWF and the Kobe II Bycatch Workshop (K2B) presents an excellent opportunity for the five tuna RFMOs to agree and implement a more collaborative process toward effective bycatch reduction in tuna and tuna-like fisheries. WWF would like to thank the co-hosts – the United States and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) - for the opportunity to present this 'views' paper to the K2B delegates.

Introduction

Bycatch can pose a serious threat to populations of species typically referred to as 'non-target' (e.g. marine turtles, marine mammals, seabirds, sharks and other fishes). In addition to the impact on species and ecosystems, bycatch is often extremely problematic to fishers, considerably slowing down their operation and posing a serious risk to their livelihood when closures are threatened if bycatch exceeds maximum allowable levels. Additionally, bycatch of target species (e.g. tuna and tuna-like fishes), especially juveniles, is not only potentially damaging to stock sustainability and the ecosystem at large. It also represents foregone wealth in terms of the potential market value those same juveniles would have if allowed to reach adulthood, notwithstanding the amount of offspring they could have produced before capture.

With bycatch being such a serious issue, it is of particular concern that, despite a few exceptions, RFMOs are routinely failing to effectively mitigate bycatch and, where measures are in place, there are inconsistencies in the bycatch mitigation efforts between the tuna RFMOs. Thus we must examine the causal factors of RFMO poor performance to help improved management whilst also recognising, learning from, and replicating some of the good work already underway. At the most basic level, one of the biggest problems preventing informed management are bycatch related data deficiencies, whilst a lack of coordination/collaboration between management bodies further inhibits effective bycatch mitigation efforts, particularly where jurisdictional overlaps occur. Thus WWF believes the four objectives of this workshop are amongst the right questions to ask, and the aim of this paper is to provide recommendations that directly address each of those objectives.

K2B OBJECTIVE

1) Make recommendations on mechanisms to streamline the work of tuna RFMO Working Groups in this field in order to avoid duplication

Bycatch is an issue that affects various fisheries in different places that are regulated by different bodies and which sometimes involves the same populations of bycatch species. Given this complexity, there is a clear and present need to explore opportunities for those different fisheries regulatory bodies to cooperate regarding their bycatch mitigation strategies. Something on a global scale, covering the range of problems, areas, fisheries and governing bodies (in addition to coordinating and integrating advice and recommendations from regional, national and NGO specialists/experts), would go a long way to avoiding duplication of effort whilst also helping to leverage the existing good work already underway.

WWF Recommendation

WWF proposes the establishment of a cooperative institutional mechanism/Body, explicitly recognised by all five tuna RFMOs as having the status, mandate and authority to develop and adopt bycatch mitigation strategies for various non-target taxa (either individual species – e.g., turtles - or groups of species/genera – e.g., sharks - as appropriate), and to make subsequent recommendations to tuna RFMOs with respect to specific measures that need adoption to give effect to/implement the strategies.

The Body would have to ensure that measures taken are consistent across tuna RFMOs and sufficient to conserve species whose range occurs in more than one jurisdiction. The Body could also ensure that appropriate mitigation strategies be developed and applied wherever relevant, regardless of how many bodies might be involved. As a result, tuna RFMOs would receive coherent and comprehensive advice from a single entity, rather than having to respond to myriad advice from different bodies. The mandate should be broad enough to allow the Body to formulate advice on the full range of relevant management responsibilities – not only gear type and operation specifics, but also (for example) scientific observer programmes and catch documentation schemes. WWF further recommends that the Body adopt the Kobe II Decision Matrix to ensure a more standardized and structured approach to decision making.

K2B OBJECTIVE

2) Review available information on incidental catch of non-target species and juveniles of target species

Effective bycatch management is difficult without a clear understanding of the current situation. Consequently, this objective is essential to properly inform this meeting. Already there is an enormous amount of information regarding this issue, but its usefulness is reduced because multiple reviews sit in multiple institutions in multiple locations, making it difficult to consolidate the many strands of data.

WWF Recommendation

To ensure managers and decision makers always have access to the most up to date and relevant information, we recommend that reviewing the currently available information on the incidental catch of non-target species and juveniles of target species in tuna and tuna-like fisheries should be a formalized biennial process within the remit of the new Body. Successive reviews undertaken with a consistent approach will help build up an invaluable and comprehensive time-series database. Review of such information should not be solely confined to scientific data and should include, *inter alia*, the following areas:

- Stock status of non-target species and juveniles of target species
- Current bycatch mitigation efforts of the five tuna RFMOs
- Latest bycatch legal requirements/obligations
- Latest bycatch positions of non-governmental organizations
- Latest technological advances (all fishing methods/gears/areas)
- Listing IUU vessels and activities

K2B OBJECTIVE

3) Provide advice to tuna RFMOs on best practices, methods and techniques to assess and reduce the incidental mortality of non-target species, such as seabirds, turtles, sharks, marine mammals, and juveniles of target species

Some excellent bycatch mitigation work is already underway within tuna RFMOs (although this is mostly exception rather than rule), much of it in collaboration with other stakeholders, including NGOs. This, in addition to a wealth of information around generic bycatch mitigation best practice, means we now effectively have a toolbox from which to choose effective management measures. However, understanding what bycatch mitigation method is best applied to which fishery, where and how is not always clear, slowing down RFMO adoption of best practices.

WWF Recommendation

As part of the broader collaboration between RFMOs already mentioned, WWF recommends the establishment of international best practice bycatch mitigation guidelines that, at the very least, follow the advice of well-known tenets such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing, and the relevant FAO International Plans of Action (IPOAs) such as those for sharks and seabirds. These guidelines should be seen as an essential first step in implementing a consistently applied *Modus operandi* to bycatch mitigation practices among the five tuna RFMOs. WWF believes these guidelines must address, at a minimum, the following issues:

- Elimination of IUU
- Capacity reduction
- Setting bycatch mitigation strategies that follow scientific advice
- Ensuring adequate control and enforcement of bycatch regulations, including use of both onboard and virtual (e.g. video surveillance) observers
- Research most effective bycatch mitigation fishing gear/avoidance methodology to be used in a given situation at a given time
- Consideration of rights based management as an incentive based approach

K2B OBJECTIVE

4) Develop and coordinate relevant research programmes and observer programmes

Data deficiencies can prevent an understanding of priority bycatch mitigation issues. Certain elements of bycatch, for example, may be deemed unharmed simply because there is no evidence to suggest otherwise. However, as the maxim goes, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and therefore prudence must be exercised in such circumstances by applying the precautionary principle which, in reality, is rarely the case. Consequently, informed management relies on good quality data verified, where necessary, by onboard observers. This data should address the suite of bycatch issues and their distribution in time and space in order to better understand the impacts of bycatch on the ecosystem and thus inform bycatch mitigation management decisions. Towards this end, WWF is involved in some positive initiatives characterized by a close collaboration between scientists and fishermen. Recently, for example, the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) initiated at-sea research to address bycatch mitigation in relation to purse-seine fisheries that set on FADs (Fisheries Aggregation Devices) with the eventual aim of implementing identified remedies. Also, the IATTCs involvement in the programme of circle hook work in Latin America is an example that highlights the importance of a comprehensive observer programme.

WWF Recommendation

WWF recommends identifying relevant research programmes based on the findings of the advised review of available information on the incidental catch of non-target species and juveniles of target species (recommended under objective 2). Once this is undertaken, research priorities will have been identified and these will determine the nature, scope and partners necessary from which a full research and observer programme can be developed. In whatever form that takes, it is essential that information gathered in these research programmes is made publicly available through peer reviewed journals, or at least in official technical reports. WWF recommends that the proposed Body undertakes central coordination of the research and organizes the results into a central database, thus making it easier for this information to feed into the biennial review of currently available information.

Conclusion

We believe the recommendations set out in this document represent an essential first step from which effective bycatch management can take place, thus helping to build healthier ecosystems and, by extension, sustainable fisheries with a long term future. WWF is committed to working with RFMOs and other stakeholders to achieve this and we look forward to closer collaboration in the future.

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