

INFOFISH is greatly privileged to have had the opportunity to interview three eminent Pacific women leaders who were present at the 8th Pacific Tuna Forum 2023 (PTF 2023) to share their valuable insights into tuna sustainability, and industry development in the region.



INFOFISH speaks to ... **RHEA MOSS-CHRISTIAN**

**Executive Director, Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)
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Q At its last meeting in December 2022, the WCPFC was commended for making progress on several issues, such as the adoption of a management procedure (MP) which was hailed as the first management strategy evaluation (MSE)-tested procedure for a tuna species adopted in the WCPFC, and indeed, the first across the Pacific. One observation made by several NGOs¹ is that the MP lacks a direct link to setting effort and catch limits in the skipjack fishery. At the recently-concluded WCPFC 19th Scientific Committee Meeting in Palau from 16-24 August 2023, what was decided on this issue, and what are the forthcoming initiatives in this regard?

RM SC19 reviewed the outputs of the initial run of the MP which indicated appropriate baseline levels for relevant catch and effort levels in purse seine, pole-and-line, and other fisheries. Future work was also identified that would reduce uncertainties relating to the estimation model used in the MP. That said, the Commission considered the MP outputs in its most recent workshop on the review of the tropical tuna measure and the MP will continue to feature in those ongoing discussions.

I appreciate the concerns expressed around the MP not setting effort and catch limits in the SKJ fishery. This is an outcome that the Commission is moving toward, and the MP starts that process. Importantly, the MP provides Commission members with an opportunity to enhance their understanding of how harvest strategies will work, and how the traditional approach to managing tuna fisheries will change. The PNA are to be commended for their efforts to move the Commission further along in its harvest strategy work plan. It enables the Members to see a way forward for other species, as well.

The Commission has acknowledged the complexities of managing multi-species fisheries and the impacts that management approaches in one fishery will have on another. An important

¹ Tuna Fisheries Regional Management Organizations Need to Prioritize Transition to Management Procedures. Authored by Sara Pipernós (The Ocean Foundation), Shana Miller (The Ocean Foundation), Grantly Galland (The Pew Charitable Trusts). Published in Fisheries Volume 48, Issue 6, June 2023, pages 225 – 272.

principle in the WCPFC's tropical tuna measure is balance, meaning that management measures in one fishery should not create inequitable effect in the other fishery. In this case, it means that measures applied in the purse seine fishery in respect of skipjack must be balanced by measures adopted for the longline fishery, which tends to experience positive benefits from strong purse seine management measures.

In an organisation like the WCPFC with the range of stakeholder and fishery interests, small steps are important and should be taken as cumulative together with other gains by the members each year. A particularly challenging piece of the issue of setting effort and catch limits is how to allocate those limits. The Commission has committed itself to developing an allocation framework and this effort is ongoing.

Q It has been reported that the WCPFC plans to adopt MPs for all five tuna stocks within the next three years, starting with North and South Pacific albacore this year (2023). Do you expect any delays in the workplans?

RM The WCPFC's Harvest Strategy Workplan was adopted as a living document, meant to guide the Commission's efforts without scheduling unrealistic timelines. So I wouldn't characterise the annual revisions of the Workplan as a reflection of delay necessarily, but rather it's a reflection of the complexities associated with adopting a harvest strategy management approach in a multi-species, multi-gear fishery in the midst of a wide variety of competing interests and priorities. Can the organisation move faster? Perhaps, but each year the stakes grow higher, and priorities also increase, so it's difficult to see what has to give in order to make more time and resources available for harvest strategy development.

The Northern Committee adopted a revised NP Albacore harvest strategy that is expected to be adopted by the Commission in December, which together with the NP Albacore harvest strategy adopted by IATTC this year, means that a Pacific-wide harvest strategy will be in place for a key tuna stock.

- The implementation of a new conservation and management measure (CMM) for the safety, security and well-being of fisher crews is another area that the WCPFC was asked to look into. As the CMM is voluntary in nature, will there be a stronger legally binding decision from the Commission which will act like a labour standard?*
- RM The CMM may start out as voluntary, and this is OK as it's still an important starting point that members can work to strengthen over time. The WCPFC has had to navigate the careful balance between carrying out its mandate while not veering into mandates of other established international organisations, such as the ILO. That said, the WCPFC has clearly acknowledged that the safety and well-being of fishing vessel crew is a fisheries issue, and cannot logically be divorced from the mandate to conserve and sustainably manage the region's fisheries resources. Members are united in their resolve to do something to ensure vessel crew are protected; it's the details and extent of that "something" that are still under negotiation.
- You have the distinction of being the first woman in the world to head one of the five global tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs). Why do you think it has taken so long to break the glass ceiling, and how can young women from the Pacific be empowered to follow in your footsteps and those of other women leaders such as Dr Sangaa Clark and the current WCPFC Chairperson, Dr Josie Tamate?*
- RM These jobs don't come along very often and there aren't that many of them to begin with. This year happened to present an opportunity for new leadership in the WCPFC. The landscape has changed dramatically since I first started attending regional fisheries meetings in the mid-1990s and far more women are participating in fisheries policy now. Perhaps this is a reflection of an opening up of more opportunities, or the level of importance that tuna fisheries has in the region that it is attracting more people overall, many of whom just happen to be women.
- I don't think of myself as having broken a glass ceiling, although I'm more than happy to break it. I have spent the majority of my career and have invested my life's work into this field and my elevation to this role is a natural progression for me based on my professional life, to date. I would say the same of my colleagues Dr. Clark and Dr. Tamate, and I would also add the FFA Director-General Dr. Manu Tupou-Roosen to this list. These leaders have devoted their careers to this field and find themselves in their roles not because they are women, but because they have been committed to the work and progressing in this direction throughout their professional lives.
- I don't want to diminish the unique circumstances that women sometimes face in career progression and what it means to push through some very real obstacles, but I also want to acknowledge the work that many of us put in to progress our careers. None of us would ever want anyone to think that we are in our roles because we are women. We are in our roles because we have worked hard, we believe in what we do, and we happen to be women.
- Would you say that the interplay between the WCPFC and the PNA represents a kind of functional multilateralism utilising both regional and sub-regional governance platforms for the management of shared resources? Could you present an example where the cooperation has been successful in combatting IUU fisheries and enhancing monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) initiatives?*
- RM I think that's a fair characterisation, functional multilateralism. It aptly describes the origins of the WCPFC, as well. The FFA membership initiated the negotiating sessions in 1994 for a regional body to manage fishing on the high seas. The negotiations paused while the UN Fish Stocks Agreement was nearing its negotiating conclusion, and then the negotiating sessions resumed in 1997 for what would become the WCPFC. FFA Members recognised very early on the value and the necessity for shared management of shared resources. WCPFC's geographical management area is comprised mostly of EEZs and what happens in the high seas has impacts in-zone, and vice versa.
- I see the WCPFC as a series of concentric circles, each circle representing a group of like-minded Members, whether it's PNA, FFA, developed fishing States, Asian fishing States, market States, etc. These circles are all overlapping each other, shifting at times and always within the larger circle of ensuring the region's fisheries resources are well managed into the future. PNA is an important circle within this relationship, having the responsibility for managing the world's largest skipjack fishery. I wouldn't say it's an interplay between WCPFC and PNA, because PNA Members are Members of the WCPFC. It's more of an interplay of PNA within WCPFC, or between PNA and other members of the WCPFC.
- In WCPFC, flag States are the responsible authorities for combatting IUU fishing. Each Member has an obligation to carry out its duties as flag States, coastal States, port States, and licensing States, and members hold each other accountable. Cooperation takes place in many forms, whether it's in sharing data or sharing assets, and there is an overarching commitment across the membership to supporting strong MCS initiatives. But gaps remain, for example in the longline fisheries on the high seas in the WCPFC Convention Area. Monitoring in these fisheries is currently low and initiatives to change have been slow, making it difficult for the Commission to reach consensus.
- The Commission's VMS is an extension of the FFA VMS, called "Pacific VMS". It builds on the FFA VMS that covers EEZs by extending Vessel Monitoring System coverage to the high seas. The FFA Secretariat is a service provider to the Commission of the VMS. That in itself is a form of close cooperation between a group of WCPFC Members, in this case the FFA, and the organisation.
- The Commission continues to review its monitoring programs on an annual basis and to strengthen activities, where needed, such as in the vessel monitoring system and the record of fishing vessels. Both are important tools to combat IUU fishing and Members have demonstrated strong commitment over the years to strengthening these tools.