

Ms. Leticia Carvalho
Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority
Kingston, JAMAICA

Dear Secretary-General

I wish to first congratulate you on your appointment as Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority and wish you every success in your role.

The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) respectfully requests that the WCPFC be recognized by the Assembly as an observer to the International Seabed Authority, under the provisions of rule 82, paragraph 1 (d), of the rules of procedure of the Assembly.

The WCPFC is an intergovernmental organization established by the Convention for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPFC Convention), which entered into force on 19 June 2004. The objective of the Convention is to ensure, through effective management, the long-term conservation and sustainable use of highly migratory fish stocks in the western and central Pacific Ocean in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement. The area of the Pacific Ocean covered by the Convention covers almost 20 per cent of the Earth's surface. In the east, the Convention Area adjoins, or overlaps, the area of competence of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC).

WCPFC has 26 members and 7 Participating Territories, including Pacific Island coastal members and members that fish in the region. The Pacific Ocean is home to some of the world's most abundant populations of tuna species such as albacore, skipjack, and yellowfin, and billfish species such as marlin and swordfish. The WCPFC focuses on the effective management and conservation of these and other highly migratory stocks as well as non-target and associated and dependent species, such as sharks, seabirds, cetaceans, turtles, and mobulids.

WCPFC has a broad mandate not only to ensure the long-term sustainability of highly migratory fish stocks in the Convention Area, but to assess the impacts of fishing, other human activities and environmental factors on target stocks, non-target species and associated and dependent species, and to protect biodiversity in the marine environment. WCPFC is aware of international developments, including the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), which will require that WCPFC consider issues beyond traditional fisheries management. The BBNJ regime will serve to strengthen interactions between global, regional, and sectoral bodies to address issues of relevance for oceans governance.

At its Commission meeting in December 2024, WCPFC Members were briefed on the efforts of the International Seabed Authority to elaborate rules for governing deep seabed mining in the Northeast and Northwest Pacific, in areas that overlap with the WCPFC Convention Area. WCPFC is aware of the potential interactions between tuna fisheries and the deep-sea mining in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The objectives of the WCPFC therefore relate directly to the activities of the International Seabed Authority.

WCPFC is interested in becoming an official observer of the International Seabed Authority in order to gain awareness and understanding of deep seabed mining activities and their potential direct or indirect impact on highly migratory fish stocks and associated and dependent species in the WCPFC Convention Area, and to contribute WCPFC's experience in managing and conserving tuna fisheries and their associated ecosystems to the International Seabed Authority.

Please refer to the attachment for further background information.

WCPFC believes that it can contribute a unique and valuable perspective to the management of resources and the control of activities within areas beyond national jurisdiction. Accordingly, I request your support for our application for observer status.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Moss-Christian', with a stylized, cursive script.

Rhea Moss-Christian
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Supporting information to the request by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission for observer status in the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority

1. Name of organization

Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)

2. Office address, phone and fax number

Address: Kaselehlie Street, PO Box 2356, Kolonia,
Pohnpei State, 96941
Federated States of Micronesia

Phone: +691 320 1992 or +691 320 1993

Fax: +691 320 1108

Email: wcpfc@wcpfc.int

3. Names of proposed primary focal points

Rhea Moss-Christian, Executive Director (rhea.moss-christian@wcpfc.int)

Nicole Solomon, Secretary/Receptionist (wcpfc@wcpfc.int)

4. Purposes of the WCPFC

The objective of the Convention establishing the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission is to ensure, through effective management, the long-term conservation and sustainable use of highly migratory fish stocks in the western and central Pacific Ocean in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (Article 2).

5. Background Information on WCPFC

The Convention for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPF Convention) entered into force on 19 June 2004, following its conclusion in 2000 after six years of negotiation commencing in 1994.

The WCPF Convention draws on many of the provisions of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement including the application of the precautionary approach, management decisions to be based on the best available science, ecosystem considerations and recognition of special requirements of small island developing States. At the same time, it reflects the special political, socio-economic, geographical and environmental characteristics of the western and central Pacific Ocean region.

WCPFC sustainably manages the largest tuna fishery in the world. The WCPFC conservation and management efforts are such that all the major tuna stocks in the WCPF Convention Area are sustainably managed. WCPFC has reinforced these efforts to address both emerging and long-standing challenges in the sustainable management of migratory fish stocks. This includes the development and implementation of a harvest strategy approach for each of the key fisheries or stocks under the purview of the Commission, as well as the integration of new scientific findings, adaptive strategies to safeguard fisheries for future generations, and the incorporation of ecosystem-based management principles into the framework of fisheries conservation and management.

Compliance and enforcement, including the need to address problems in the management of high seas fisheries resulting from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU), remain cornerstones of the WCPFC's mandate. As the WCPFC adapts to the growing challenges posed by adverse impacts on the marine environment, climate change, and evolving fisheries dynamics, its framework remains critical for maintaining the sustainability and resilience of key fisheries in the western and central Pacific Ocean.

6. Recent activities

WCPFC's conservation and management measures that took effect in 2024 are focused on regulating fishing activities, particularly through tighter controls on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), a strong emphasis on minimizing bycatch and addressing broader environmental impacts such as climate change. The Commission's activities demonstrated Members' commitment to a good understanding of fish stock status and proper management, including refining data collection, minimizing fishing impacts on associated and dependent species including cetaceans and seabirds, and supporting vessel crew safety. There has also been strengthened cooperation with the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission on shared stock management and additional focus on addressing IUU fishing, particularly through coordinated regional efforts and partnerships.

One of the key challenges WCPFC faces is the growing international focus on ocean conservation, particularly following the adoption of the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). This new framework places added expectations on regional fisheries bodies like WCPFC to contribute to global ocean health through stronger conservation measures, and to ensure that the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement complements and strengthens the existing successful fisheries management framework in the western and central Pacific Ocean.

7. Descriptive statement of the extent to which the purpose of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission relates to that of the International Seabed Authority and the contribution that the WCPFC can make to the progress of the Authority

The objective of the WCPF Convention is the long-term conservation and sustainable use of highly migratory fish stocks in the western and central Pacific Ocean and the mandate of WCPFC includes to assess the impacts of fishing, other human activities and environmental factors on target stocks, non-target species and associated and dependent species, and to protect biodiversity in the marine environment.

WCPFC is aware of the potential interactions between tuna fisheries and the deep-sea mining in areas beyond national jurisdiction. While there are no commercial seabed mining activities currently taking place in the WCPFC Convention Area or elsewhere, deep seabed exploration is taking place in the WCPF Convention Area's waters, including in the Clarion Clipperton Zone in the Northeast Pacific Ocean, and discussions are currently underway toward the commencement of deep seabed exploration in the Northwest Pacific Ocean, within the WCPFC Convention Area.

It is the primary role of the International Seabed Authority to manage the exploration and exploitation of marine mineral resources in the seabed and subsoil beyond national jurisdiction. The planned activities by the International Seabed Authority in the Northwest Pacific toward deep sea exploration and the ongoing deep sea exploration activities in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone present uncertainties around direct or indirect interactions between deep-sea mining activities and commercial fisheries for pelagic species.

The objectives of the WCPFC therefore relate directly to the activities of the International Seabed Authority. WCPFC is well placed to provide advice to the International Seabed Authority on the potential direct and indirect interaction between deep seabed mining and tuna fisheries and their associated and dependent species.

8. Structure

WCPFC is an intergovernmental organization with the following organs:

- a) The Commission, which is the primary decision-making body;
- b) Four subsidiary bodies: the Scientific Committee, the Technical and Compliance Committee, the Northern Committee, and the Finance and Administration Committee; and
- c) The Secretariat.

The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Commission and subsidiary bodies are elected by the Commission. The Executive Director is head of the Secretariat and is responsible for the administration and management of WCPFC. The Secretariat is located in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia.

9. WCPFC Members, Participating Territories and Cooperating Non-Members

WCPFC Members are: Australia, China, Canada, Cook Islands, European Union, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Republic of Korea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Chinese Taipei, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States of America, and Vanuatu.

WCPFC Participating Territories are: American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Tokelau, and Wallis and Futuna.

WCPFC Cooperating Non-members for 2025 are: The Bahamas, Curacao, Ecuador, El Salvador, Liberia, Panama, Thailand, and Vietnam.

10. Relationships with other international organizations

The WCPFC is one of several global organizations known as regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs). As a member of the global RFMO family, the WCPFC has concluded a number of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with related fisheries organizations, including the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC), the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO), the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). These MOUs, as well as MOUs with other collaborative organisations, including the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), help foster a close relationship between the WCPFC and these organizations and ensures that the lines of communication are open to discuss matters of common interest.

One particularly important relationship for the WCPFC is with the regional fisheries body known as the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). The FFA is an organization comprised of independent Pacific Island countries who share a common fisheries interest in the Pacific Ocean region. Members of the FFA are also members of WCPFC and the organization benefits from arrangements established by FFA members in the area of data collection and monitoring of fishing activities. Similarly, the WCPFC's relationship with the SPC is central to its work. The SPC's Oceanic Fisheries Programme serves as the Commission's Science Services Provider. This relationship ensures that there is no duplication of effort in the area of collection and processing of scientific data on fishing activities in the region.

The Convention further encourages the Commission to cooperate with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and other related United Nations organizations that may share common interests with the WCPFC.