

PROPOSAL FOR INTER-REGIONAL AGENCIES MEETING FOR IMPROVEMENT OF WORLD TUNA STATISTICS

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1. HISTORY

Several years ago, at one of its meetings, the Coordinating Working Party for Atlantic Fisheries Statistics (CWP-ATL) recommended consideration of establishing a CWP for tuna statistics on a world basis. The participants of the CWP-ATL recognized that the problems relating to tuna statistics are unique and different from most of the problems facing Atlantic regional agencies but are common throughout the world for tunas.

At that time, I proposed organizing an Ad Hoc Coordinating Working Party for World Tuna Statistics (CWP-TUNA). I received many favorable comments from various tuna scientists for organizing a system in which regional agencies may collaborate. However, the opinion was also expressed that it was a bit premature to organize it at that time. The proposal was left pending further discussion.

When tuna scientists met in La Jolla, California, January 16-20, 1984, they recognized the necessity of increased collaboration and coordination among regional and international organizations concerned with the collection and compilation of data. (See Appendix I for the pertinent part of the report of this group, "Considerations for Tuna Research to the Year 2000".)

Since then, no one has followed up this recommendation. As this group was of an informal nature and the recommendation which the group made was not addressed to any one organization or group, the responsibility for following up on the recommendation has somehow been dispersed.

2. TUNA STATISTICAL PROBLEMS

A few of the many major problems in tuna statistics which concern various oceans and regions covered by different agencies are listed below.

a. Mobility of tuna vessels

As we are now observing, the mobility of modern tuna vessels is increasing tremendously. Before, only the longline fleet was very mobile; however, at present, almost any of the industrialized purse seiners, longliners and baitboats can stay at sea for a few months and can fish in two or even three oceans without visiting any ports. When good fishing grounds are found, many boats may move to that area, even traveling from a different ocean. Good examples are the mass exodus of purse seiners from the east Atlantic to the west Indian Ocean and the movement of various seiners from various parts of the oceans to the west central Pacific. We are recently experiencing many cases where Pacific catches are unloaded at Atlantic ports and vice versa.

To collect statistics from such a fleet will require world-wide efforts and cooperation between regional agencies and national offices. In addition, if the statistical requirements for such vessels differ from one ocean or region to the other, serious problems would be created for the captains of the boats. If the catches from different oceans are mixed together, separation between oceans would be a serious problem.

b. Flag of convenience and joint-venture boats

This problem is classic but as the regulations for operation by a foreign fleet in exclusive economic zones become more and more stringent and as many countries are introducing limited licensing systems, the number of boats flying flags of convenience have been increasing. Also, as new fishing grounds are discovered in developing countries' waters, the number of joint-venture boats (flying foreign flags) has also been increasing.

These boats change flags frequently and fish in many different areas. At present, collecting statistics from these vessels is a real problem, particularly because most of the countries to which the boats are registered have no idea of the presence of such boats.

c. Rapid development of new tuna fisheries

As the prices for tuna are still high and tuna fishing is profitable, in spite of some recess in the world tuna market, many new tuna fishing grounds have recently been developed. Just a few examples are the west Indian Ocean, central south Pacific, west tropical Pacific, western south Atlantic and the Caribbean Sea and are mostly located in waters of the developing countries. The problems are also inter-related with those given above. Unless some system is devised, the most valuable data in these new grounds at the initial stage of fishing will be lost forever.

d. Logbook problems

When boats of many flags are involved in tuna fishing in one area, and if the logbooks are all different, the data thus collected will be different in quality as well as in nature. One example of difficulties we have experienced in the Atlantic is that one fishery recorded the effort as "number of days when the catches are made" while other countries recorded "number of fishing days including searching days without catches". These two series of effort data are not compatible.

Another problem is that if a boat moves from one area to another (even to another ocean) and if the logbook form required is different, it would cause some confusion and difficulties for the captains to keep up with all the different requirements.

We have had many inquiries as to how to design the logbooks from various coastal countries which began new tuna fisheries or which started requesting submission of logbooks from the foreign boats fishing in their waters. Naturally, there would be a difference depending on how the logbooks would be used and adjustments to the local fishery situation. Therefore, to keep the format of the logbook uniform for all occasions would be unrealistic. However, there are certain items which are essential in any

logbook form. There is an urgent need to identify these items and draw up a guideline for those countries which are planning to develop new fishing log forms, and if feasible, to adopt similar forms so that the captains do not have to learn to fill in different forms as they change fishing grounds.

e. Biological sampling guideline

The same is true for a biological sampling guideline as for the logbook guideline.

3. PRESENT SITUATION AND PROPOSALS

When we attempted to resolve some of the discrepancies between the FAO and ICCAT data bases (see SCRS/85/13) concerning Atlantic tuna statistics, we came across many difficulties which are related to the points listed under Item 2 above. It is clear that efforts by one agency or country alone cannot resolve them. Therefore, we were convinced of the necessity of closer coordination between regional agencies and international organizations in solving these problems.

I have discussed with a number of people in FAO the possibility of organizing an ad hoc inter-agency meeting to discuss these problems -- an idea to which FAO responded positively. We agreed that in order to minimize costs and maximize attendance, the meeting should be organized in conjunction with some other tuna meeting.

In 1985, there were scheduled meetings of IOFC in July, IATTC in October, ICCAT in November, and the Tuna Meeting of IOFC in December. It seemed that July was already too close and the next IPFC tuna group meeting in 1987 was too far away. Participation in IATTC and ICCAT is more limited than in the IOFC meeting. Therefore, a proposal was made to hold a meeting of concerned agencies in connection with the meeting of the IOFC Committee on Management of Tuna in the Indian Ocean and its related workshop.

The IOFC meeting is scheduled to be held from Wednesday, November 27, to Thursday, December 5, 1985. With this understanding, I circulated in

June, 1985, a letter to explain the need of world collaboration and proposed that consultations could be held immediately after this meeting, i.e., on December 6-7. This letter was sent to various regional agencies which are concerned with tuna statistics as well as to various pertinent tuna scientists.

All the responses received from organizations and individuals have been favorable for the proposal. As a result, FAO decided to sponsor the meeting as a part of the IOFC tuna meeting and invitations have been sent to:

- Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission
- South Pacific Commission
- Indian Ocean Fisheries Committee
- Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council
- FAO/UNDP Indian Ocean Tuna Project
- South Pacific Fisheries Forum
- FAO Fishery Information, Data and Statistics Service (FIDI)
- International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas

In addition, following the comments received from various people, some of the major longline and purse seine countries as well as developing coastal countries were invited.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

Objectives for the meeting are still being developed and defined through correspondence. However, in order to instigate the discussions, a draft tentative agenda was proposed and attached as Appendix II. At the first meeting, it is expected that at least information and experiences on solving difficulties can be exchanged. Discussion can be held as to how to establish a world-wide system of collaboration in collecting statistics for the future. Standardization of various logbooks and data collection procedures might be one of the subjects to be discussed. If time permits, we could discuss some individual problem cases. If everything goes well, we could consider how to continue.

In order to have an efficient meeting, each participating organization has been encouraged to prepare a paper which explains:

- Nature of the organization and member countries
- Statistical requirements of each agency
- System used to collect these required statistics
- Data management system
- Data base configurations and their availability
- Statistical publications
- Problem areas (very specific)
- Experience and proposals for solving these problems
- Sample of standardized logbooks and sampling procedures

Appendix 1

Excerpt from "Considerations for Tuna Research to the Year 2000"

E. Data group

A suggestion toward improving data would be better collaboration and coordination between the regional and international organizations concerned with the collection and compilation of data. For example, standard requirements and procedures by different organizations would greatly facilitate reporting by vessels fishing in different regions. A mechanism for collaboration in respect to general fishery statistics in the Atlantic exists in the Coordinating Working Party on Atlantic Fishery Statistics (CWP), but this group is not particularly useful for the somewhat specialized needs of tuna. It was therefore recommended that the concerned organizations dealing with tuna should arrange for regular consultations on data problems. These consultations should probably include, following the CWP pattern, representatives from countries particularly concerned with the particular problems being discussed. The precise agenda to be discussed at any time would need to evolve in discussion between the agencies. Two topics which are identified by the meeting (see earlier sections B and D) as deserving early attention and which might be handled by the proposed group were the development of a standard logbook and criteria for biological sampling procedures. It was felt important that participants at the consultations should be experts in the relevant technical and scientific fields, particularly biology, statistics, sampling design and data handling. It was recognized that because of the similarities in tuna fisheries throughout the world there would probably be technical and economic advantages in the eventual worldwide centralization of much of the work of data compilation. It would still be necessary to maintain some regional or subregional arrangements to adapt a data compilation system to specific local requirements. It is recommended that a study of this matter be initiated.

A standard recovery procedure for tuna tags is an issue. It is suggested that the FAO Working Party on tuna tagging extend its sphere of interest to cover all areas and that it be asked to give particular attention to encouraging the adoption of standard recovery procedures. It is also suggested that this Working Party could make a useful contribution in coordinating work on other tagging techniques, such as the use of timed-release, data-recording and sonic tags.

DRAFT TENTATIVE AGENDA FOR THE MEETING OF THE INTER-AGENCY
COORDINATING WORKING PARTY FOR TUNA STATISTICS

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Election of Chairman and the meeting arrangements
3. Adoption of Agenda
4. Presentation of experience papers by each agency
5. Identification of types of statistics to be collected on tuna
6. Standardization of logbook and criteria for biological sampling procedures
7. Examination of responsibility for collecting statistics
8. Examination of mutual problems in collecting statistics
 - a. Problems associated with the high mobility of the tuna fleets
 - b. Problems of collecting statistics from boats flying flags of convenience and from joint-venture fleets
 - c. Collection of statistics from newly developing fisheries
 - d. Other problems
9. Examination of the ways in which various organizations and countries can collaborate in collecting statistics
10. Future plan
11. Adoption of report
12. Adjournment