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COMMON OCEANS PROGRAM

PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND BIODIVERSITY IN THE OCEAN AREAS BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION

Tuna Project II - UPDATE

ICCAT 25

16 - 23 November 2026

Vilamoura, Portugal

The Project "Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction" is a continuation of an earlier project (2014-2019) of the same name. The Project seeks to achieve responsible, efficient, and sustainable tuna production and biodiversity conservation in the face of a changing environment.

This is a GEF- funded project, implemented by FAO, with activities carried out by the partners of the project - including intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector.

gef global environment facility INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

WHAT WE DO

Improve tuna fisheries management

Ensure all major tuna stocks are fished at sustainable levels using harvest strategies.

Operationalize ecosystem approach to fisheries management in regional fisheries management organizations.

Improve compliance and tackle IUU fishing

Training in monitoring, control and surveillance for more efficient enforcement of regulations.

Improve compliance with fishing regulations by promoting innovative tools like electronic monitoring and traceability systems.

Improve environmental performance

Decrease bycatch with better monitoring and promoting best practices in bycatch mitigation and alternative gear.

Reduce impacts by advocating for ocean-friendly fishing devices

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IMPROVE TUNA FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Develop capacity to implement harvest strategies

Project partner, The Ocean Foundation (TOF), supports capacity building for Management Strategy Evaluation and Management Procedures across tuna RFMOs through regional training workshops, **quarterly webinars** with simultaneous interpretation, and the development of educational materials. More information and all materials can be found here: **Harvest Strategies | 21st century fisheries management**.

- ✓ NEW – **FAO e-learning course series titled "Management procedures for sustainable tuna fisheries"** – The learning tool introduces key concepts needed to understand and develop management procedures, also called harvest strategies. It aims to increase the capacity of fisheries stakeholders to actively engage in the process of management procedures development and implementation.
- ✓ The course is currently available in English, French and **Spanish**.
- ✓ Capacity-building sessions on Management Procedures and Management Strategies were conducted in Seychelles, **Egypt**, and **Guatemala**, expanding regional capacity and knowledge on the development and implementation of management approaches.



Convene joint tuna RFMO workshops

Project partner, *ICCAT Secretariat*, together with FAO, is organizing three joint tuna RFMO workshops on topics of global relevance for managers and scientists. The proposed themes include bycatch, management strategy evaluation (MSE), and stock assessment.

- ✓ The **first workshop focused on bycatch** and was held from 27-29 January 2025 at FAO headquarters in Rome. The **joint workshop on bycatch in tuna fisheries report** is now available online.

- ✓ The second workshop focused on MSE and was held from 20-22 January 2026 at FAO headquarters. Key recommendations included strengthening stakeholder engagement, improving communication of MSE results and uncertainty, enhancing technical capacity, promoting harmonization across tRFMOs, and considering climate change impacts in future MSE frameworks.
  - Click here to access **the workshop report**.
- ✓ The third workshop will focus on stock assessments and will be held at FAO HQ in Rome from 18-22 2027.

Operationalize EAFM, including climate change, in tuna RFMOs

Project partner, the *International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)*, in collaboration with FAO, supports the operationalization of an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) in tuna RFMOs. The emphasis is on how to formalize the implementation of EAFM, building on the outputs from workshops held in 2016 and 2019.

Two workshops have been completed and a third one is planned to bring together stakeholders from the tuna RFMOs, including managers and scientists, to discuss approaches to address the integration of ecosystem science and climate change impacts into decision-making processes. The outputs from these workshops will be disseminated broadly.

- ✓ The first EAFM workshop of the second phase of the Project was organized from 21–23 January 2025 at FAO headquarters in Rome. A workshop report will be available soon. Read web story here: **Developing a blueprint for ecosystem-based management in tuna fisheries**.
- ✓ The **second Technical Workshop on Ecosystem Indicators for EAFM Implementation** was held in March 2026 in Nouméa, New Caledonia. **Download the report**.
- ✓ A third workshop is planned for the second half of 2027.

Project partner, *(ICCAT Secretariat* has been working on simulation studies using EcoTest (testing ecosystem-based indicators and management policies) to study how harvest rates will work under different assumptions of ecosystem and climate change conditions, taking into account the correlation of fishing mortality between target and secondary species in the catches.

Work on EcoTest is progressing under the guidance of the Subcommittee on Ecosystems and Bycatch. A second AI-based indicator was developed to evaluate pelagic species using large-scale simulations and neural networks trained diverse data types and fisheries configurations. Results demonstrated strong predictive accuracy and highlighted the value of multi-source data, making this indicator a useful tool for assessing secondary species and supporting ecosystem-based fisheries management.

- ✓ *The open-source EcoTest software package will be freely available.*

Modeling climate impacts on tuna distribution in the Atlantic Ocean

Project partners, *The Pacific Community (SPC), Mercator Oceans International,* and *Conservation International* are extending the SEAPODYM model to simulate spatiotemporal dynamics of tuna populations under the influence of both fishing and environmental pressures in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The goal of this work is to project climate change impacts on tuna distribution and provide this information to decision-makers for appropriate action.

This work builds on work carried out by SPC in the Pacific Ocean to model the effects of climate change on tuna fisheries which showed dramatic shifts eastward in the distribution of tuna stocks in the Pacific, hence predicting changes in the availability of the resources for some Pacific Island countries.

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IMPROVE COMPLIANCE AND TACKLE IUU FISHING

Develop human capacity for fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS)

Project partner, *ICCAT Secretariat,* is providing compliance-related capacity building to improve adherence to its conservation and management measures, including Port Inspection (i.e. implementation of the PSMA and ICCAT PSM CMM) statistical reporting.

- ✓ Since 2023, Port Inspection Training Courses were held in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Namibia, and Senegal. A port inspection needs assessment mission is scheduled in the Republic of Guinea for late October, prior to delivering the tailored training syllabus.
- ✓ Combined Statistics and Compliance training missions were carried out in São Tomé in 2024 and Senegal in 2025. Tunisia shall receive the next compliance mission in 2027.
- ✓ A recent PSMA training workshop in Senegal, organized from 30 March-3 April 2026, further strengthened fisheries inspectors' capacity to combat IUU fishing through effective port controls. A web story **Training the frontline: FAO and ICCAT strengthen port inspectors in Senegal to combat IUU fishing**, and accompanying videos, **On the frontline in the fight against IUU fishing: FAO and ICCAT train Senegal port inspectors** and **FAO-ICCAT: Training to stop IUU fishing** highlighting the workshop are available online.

Project partner, *The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)*, is developing, in close collaboration with ICCAT, a Certificate Fisheries Enforcement and Compliance program for MCS officers operating in the ICCAT convention area. A similar training program was developed under the first phase of the Tuna Project and is a University of South Pacific accredited qualification delivered online and face-to-face. The course has been a success in educating new MCS Officers and promoting regional cooperation.

Development of an ICCAT-focused training program includes contextualizing learning outcomes to suit the ICCAT region, procuring subject matter experts and working with key cooperating partners to develop learning and assessment material, and finally, trialing the program.

- ✓ *Nelson Mandela University's Fish Force Academy* has been identified as the academic institution for course accreditation.
- ✓ The course will be offered to compliance officials of ICCAT members beginning in 2027

Project partner, the *International Monitoring Control and Surveillance Network (IMCS Network)*, continues to convene the Tuna Compliance Network (TCN), which brings together compliance officers from the five tuna RFMOs, to review monitoring processes for compliance in tuna RFMOs and to identify drivers of compliance rates and measures to improve compliance.

- ✓ **A comparative review of compliance assessment in the Tuna RFMOs** was developed to support contracting parties to better meet their obligations and improve the performance of RFMOs. The IMCS Network will host a **Global Fisheries Enforcement Training Workshop from 15 - 19 March 2027 in Bali, Indonesia**.

Enhance data interoperability between t-RFMOs.

Work on *ICCAT*'s Integrated Online Management System (IOMS) is advancing and enhancements are being made through the development of extensions for automatic data interoperability for the dissemination of information by t-RFMOs to the public.

Support establishing electronic monitoring (EM) and traceability systems

As of December 2024, four tuna RFMOs (IATTC, IOTC, ICCAT, and WCFPC) have adopted minimum standards for Electronic Monitoring and are poised to remedy the longstanding problem of subpar observer coverage in some fleets.

Project partner, *International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF)*, is convening two workshops involving relevant stakeholders from all tuna RFMOs to identify opportunities for EM standard technical harmonization (1st workshop) and implementation aspects (2nd workshop), to support the further development of regional standards for electronic monitoring systems to improve fisheries sustainability:

- ✓ The first workshop on EM minimum standards harmonization was held from 10–12 December 2024 in San Sebastian, Spain. The **Electronic Monitoring Minimum Standards Harmonization Workshop report** is publicly available and provides an overview of existing EM standards across tuna RFMO and the following key outcomes:
  - A **Comparison of Tuna RFMO Electronic Monitoring Standards, provided in annex 5 of the report**, highlighting similarities and differences in areas such as technical requirements, data standards, vessel monitoring plans (VMPs), and implementation approaches.
  - Recommendations to support harmonized and effective EM implementation, including the adoption of performance-based standards, improved consistency in EM terminology and definitions, clarification of roles and responsibilities, enhanced data management and sharing arrangements, and the development of harmonized audit and assurance processes.
  - Recognition of the need to ensure EM standards remain adaptable to emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, cloud-based systems and wireless technologies.

- ✓ The second workshop on Electronic Monitoring is planned for Q1 2027. The workshop will focus on reviewing progress in EM implementation and addressing key recommendations from the first workshop, including further work on implementation approaches, audit and compliance protocols, and harmonization of EM standards. The tuna RFMO EM Working Group Chairs have been engaged in the development of the workshop agenda to ensure that priority issues identified by RFMOs are addressed.

Project partner, *World Wildlife Fund (WWF-US)*, published a **Technical Source Document on the Governance of Electronic Monitoring (EM) Systems for Industrial Tuna Fisheries**. The findings were presented to stakeholders as an EM toolkit with two resources:

- ✓ **Implementing Electronic Monitoring Governance for RFMO managed fisheries**
- ✓ **The Governance of Electronic Monitoring Systems for Industrial Tuna Fisheries**

IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

Quantify, mitigate and reduce bycatch

Project partner, *ISSF*, continues efforts in bycatch mitigation, including a) develop and promote biodegradable/non-entangling FADs; b) holding skippers' workshops to adopt best practices in bycatch mitigation; c) develop acoustic technology to support selective fishing and bycatch avoidance, and d) produced and disseminated policy paper, ISSF 2024-04: Inputs for Comprehensive Bycatch Management Strategy Evaluation in Tuna Fisheries.

Enhance sustainable management of sharks and rays

A Global Blue Shark Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) Workshop was held in Rome, Italy, from 14–16 October 2025, co-hosted by *The Ocean Foundation* and The *Pew Charitable Trusts*, with support from the *FAO Common Oceans Program*, *Oceankind*, and the *Paul M. Angell Family Foundation*. The workshop convened 25

scientists from 10 countries, including leading blue shark experts from ICCAT, IOTC, IATTC, and WCPFC, to advance the development of science-based, precautionary harvest strategies for blue shark fisheries.

Key outcomes included a shared Management Procedure (MP) framework for the five global blue shark stocks, initiation of cross-RFMO coordination on blue sharks MSE model development, MPs testing, and performance metrics, and hands-on evaluation of prototype MSE simulations to assess candidate harvest strategies. The workshop established a pathway for the first MSE-tested MP for a shark species, providing a foundation for data-driven, harmonized, and adaptive management of blue shark populations across all major ocean basins. **Download the report**.

Seabird Project - Study gives fresh impetus to reduce seabird bycatch in Southern Hemisphere fisheries

A new assessment, ***Spatially Explicit Fisheries Risk Assessment (SEFRA) to seabirds from pelagic longline fishing in the southern hemisphere***, helps address longstanding information gaps and provides fisheries managers and their fleets fresh impetus to help reduce seabird bycatch in the Southern Hemisphere.

The assessment was built upon the existing CCSBT technical process and expanded participation by engaging non-Member data holders to improve the spatial representativeness and scientific robustness of the assessment. It provides quantitative evidence that seabird bycatch in southern hemisphere pelagic longline fisheries remains a significant and persistent conservation challenge, with estimated mortality of at least 30,000 birds annually. According to the assessment, bycatch impacts are unevenly distributed among species, fleets and regions, with geographically concentrated hotspots that can help guide the prioritization of mitigation measures and monitoring efforts.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming is “a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated”.

The Tuna project and its partners are actively working to improve gender equality and support balanced participation and equitable benefits across genders within the fisheries sector. This work is being led by the FAO Fisheries Gender Team and follows a structured three-phase approach, including a stocktaking study to analyze gender roles and gender-based constraints, followed by development of a toolkit to support capacity development efforts, coupled with awareness-raising efforts. The validation phase of the stocktaking study was completed in March 2025. The main output of this process is a draft work plan for the development of a gender toolkit and capacity-building activities.

The first workshop on “Operationalizing Gender in ABNJ Fisheries Organizations” was held on 1 June 2026, providing participants with an introduction to key gender concepts and strengthening their capacity to integrate gender-responsive approaches into their work, with particular emphasis on gender-responsive event planning and communications. The second workshop, focusing on “Technical Skills for Gender Mainstreaming in ABNJ Fisheries” will be held on 1 December 2026. It will aim to strengthen participants’ practical skills and technical capacity to integrate gender considerations into ABNJ fisheries science, management, and compliance processes, thereby promoting more inclusive, equitable, and gender-responsive approaches across fisheries governance.

Successes from Common Oceans Tuna Project phase I

From 2014 until 2021, in collaboration with the five tuna RFMOs and partners, including intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector - the Common Oceans Tuna Project phase I supported:

- **Enhanced international cooperation to improve the management and environmental performance of tuna fisheries.**
- **Better decision making in fisheries management and the adoption of harvest strategies for tuna stocks.**
- **Strengthening MCS systems and showcased the benefits of electronic monitoring and reporting systems.**
- **Reducing bycatch in tuna fisheries.**

These achievements paved the way for future cooperation and knowledge sharing to ensure a positive and lasting impact on the world's tuna fisheries.

The Common Oceans Program is a global partnership funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), promoting sustainable fisheries and biodiversity conservation in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) with a particular focus on tuna and deep-sea fisheries, the Sargasso Sea and cross-sectoral cooperation. Led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Program brings together the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), regional fisheries management organizations, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, civil society and academia.



FACTS & FIGURES

25 partners

5 Tuna RFMOs

US$15M
Project budget

US$200M
Project co-financing

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IN COLLABORATION WITH: Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), BirdLife International (BLI), Conservation International (CI), INFOPESCA, International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF/ISSA), International MCS Network (IMCSN), International Pole and Line Foundation (IPNLF), International Whaling Commission (IWC), Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), PEW Charitable Trusts, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Ocean Foundation (TOF), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).



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