

OPRT Business Plan for 2025 FY

I Current status of tuna stocks and tuna fishing and the challenges of the OPRT

1. Current standings of tuna RFMOs and their issues in 2025

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided, many meetings of regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), particularly technical ones, were still held in a hybrid style (both in-person and online) or online in 2024. This tendency will probably continue in 2025 as online participation saves travel time and cost although online participants must handle time difference.

The negative effects of a large amount of juvenile bigeye catch by purse seine FAD operations on longline fishing operations cannot be ignored yet. Reduction in the juvenile bigeye catch will increase the MSY level, which would enable the increase in TAC, benefiting not only longline fisheries but also all the other fisheries. Since the reduction in the juvenile bigeye catch is quite important for improvement of the longline business operation, the OPRT needs to promote it. Several RFMOs have taken measures such as the limitation on the number of FADs that one purse seiner can deploy at one time and introduction of FAD closure periods. And new measures were adopted by the IOTC and the ICCAT in 2024. Although the IOTC has strengthened regulations, the ICCAT has changed the FAD closure timing and shortened the closed periods based on scientific advice. The OPRT will closely monitor the effectiveness of these measures and will continue to introduce more effective management measures, such as reducing the number of FADs in each RFMO and limiting the number of FAD operations, in addition to introducing and extending the FAD closure period.

In recent years, in order to prevent the distribution of fishery products caught by IUU fishing, it has become necessary to improve the transparency of fishing operations, and as a means of achieving this, it has been required to expand the observer coverage and install electronic monitoring (EM) devices on board. Following the ICCAT and the IOTC in 2023, the IATTC and the WCPFC also adopted interim minimum standards for the specification of EM systems in 2024. Regarding the introduction and implementation of EM systems, it is necessary to share information among the OPRT members as a global issue.

As to fishing crew labor standards, the WCPFC established binding labor standards at the 2024 annual meeting as the first conservation and management measures of tuna RFMOs, and will come into effect in 2028. It is necessary to pay attention to the impact of these standards on discussions in other RFMOs.

The current status and issues to be discussed this year are explained below for each RFMO.

(1) WCPFC

The WCPFC adopted to increase the quota for Pacific bluefin tuna from 2025 onwards (from 4,725 tons to 5,125 tons for small tuna and from 7,609 tons to 11,869 tons for large tuna) at the 2024 annual meeting. It was also specified that the measure would be reviewed in 2026.

(While the OPRT Secretariat welcomes the significant increase in quota, it is concerned about the decline in producer prices of tuna, and we believe that our efforts are even more necessary to support prices by increasing purchases of wild and frozen tuna by consumers in Japan and overseas, while producers are in a severe business situation due to rising costs such as labor and fuel costs.)

The WCPFC adopted a new conservation and management measures (CMM) for tropical tunas at the 2023 annual meeting, and at last year's meeting, a candidate TRP (target management reference point) was agreed upon, which will be an important technical element in the management method for bigeye. The WCPFC is moving forward with agreeing to TRP for bigeye and yellowfin as part of the work to establish a management procedure (MP) for these species.

At last year's annual meeting, the interim minimum standards for the specification of EM systems were adopted. It is necessary to continue sharing information among OPRT members as a global issue.

The WCPFC adopted a binding CMM for crew labor standards at the 2024 annual meeting and will come into effect in January 2028. This is the first measure that WCPFC has introduced among tuna RFMOs, and its purpose is to ensure a safe working environment on ships and improve the welfare of seafarers.

The current CMM for sharks was reviewed at the 2024 annual meeting, and it was adopted to extend the measures of "prohibition of fin and body separation" and "alternative measures" for three years (2025-2027) under some conditions including strengthening of monitoring.

Regarding the strengthening of the regulations on at-sea transshipment, no agreement was reached at the 2024 annual meeting. The committee continues to work toward adopting a new CMM at this year's annual meeting.

The current CMM on seabirds was reviewed at the 2024 annual meeting, but no agreement was reached.

(2) ICCAT

As to tropical tunas, the TAC for bigeye from 2025 to 2027 was agreed at 2024 annual meeting, increasing the TAC from the current 62,000 tons to 73,011 tons. The increase in the TAC will mainly be reserved for countries without individual quotas. Although yellowfin catches have continued to exceed the TAC of 110,000 tons in recent years, the same level of TAC was maintained in 2025. The Scientific Committee has recommended that a catch quota be introduced to ensure that the total catch does not exceed the TAC.

Regarding FAD management measures, the timing of FAD fishing closure periods was changed and the previous 72-day closure was shortened to 45 days based on scientific advice at 2024 annual meeting, while the number of FADs used per vessel was reduced to 288 in 2026 and 2027, although it will remain at 300 in 2025. It is necessary to pay close attention to the impact of these measures on relatively stable trend of tropical tuna stocks.

The ICCAT adopted to increase the quota for North Atlantic swordfish, according to the management procedure, and the TAC was increased to 14,700 tons per year from 2025 to 2027 (13,200 tons in 2024).

With regard to sharks, a proposal to ban the separation of fins from the bodies at sea was made at last year's annual meeting and supported by a majority of members. However, discussions will continue on the condition that Japan will submit a proposal to this year's annual meeting based on the discussions and results of the WCPFC.

As to the catch documentation scheme (CDS), which currently covers only Atlantic bluefin tuna, establishment of a new working group was agreed at the 2023 annual meeting to discuss establishment of a scheme for other species. This is an important measure to eliminate IUU fishing and the OPRT should promote it.

(3) IOTC

Since the conservation and management measures on yellowfin tuna adopted in 2021 was objected by 6 Members, the IOTC was unable to adopt a new resolution at last year's annual meeting. On the other hand, yellowfin stock status has been evaluated as being overfished for many years, but the Scientific Committee in December last year changed their assessment to healthy (the stock assessment will be reviewed in 2026). A new and more conservative measure for yellowfin is expected.

Regarding FAD management measures, a new resolution was adopted to limit the number of DFADs that each purse seine fishing vessel can use at one time from the current 300 to 250 from January 1, 2026 and 225 from January 1, 2028 (small-scale fisheries operators and coastal developing countries have set other specific numbers). No agreement was reached on the closed period for purse seine fishing DFAD operations. It is necessary to further strengthen FAD management measures and provisions, including fully implementing the related IOTC conservation measures.

Regarding sharks, prohibition of both wire trace and shark lines as well as prohibition of separating fins from bodies at sea with alternative measures to those of the WCPFC were proposed and discussed at the 2024 annual meeting, but no agreement was reached. It is highly likely that a similar proposal will be submitted at the 2025 annual meeting.

(4) IATTC

The IATTC newly adopted conservation and management measures of purse seine fishery for tropical tunas in 2021, which include: (i) the individual vessel limit on the catch of bigeye tuna for purse seiners (the FAD closure period will be extended if the vessel caught more than 1,200 metric tons of bigeye tuna); and the gradual reduction in the number of FADs used at one time by the size of the vessel. At 2024 annual meeting, a review of the purse seine fishing measures was discussed based on the results of a new stock assessment, but no agreement was reached, and measures were adopted based on a two-year extension of the current purse seine measures and the annual catch limit for bigeye tuna until 2026.

Regarding the specification of EM systems, provisional minimum standards were agreed upon at 2024 annual meeting.

(5) CCSBT

At 2024 annual meeting, the CCSBT adopted a TAC for southern bluefin tuna, whose stock

continue to recover, was decided to be 20,647 tons from 2024 to 2026 (currently 17,647 tons), and it was agreed to maintain the current national allocation. The new national allocation will be discussed at 2025 annual meeting.

Regarding the issue of seabird bycatch, the identification of high-risk waters and expansion of observer coverage were proposed at last year's annual meeting, but no agreement was reached. It is expected that discussions on this issue will continue at 2025 annual meeting.

2. Suggested responses of the OPRT to those issues at tuna RFMOs

Taking into account the issues above, the OPRT will conduct the following activities.

(1) The Secretariat will continue to monitor meetings of tuna RFMOs in 2025 to the extent possible and provide related information to Members (see Attachment for the schedule of major RFMO meetings in 2025). To save the cost, however, the Secretariat will not attend RFMO meetings if they are held only in-person.

(2) The Secretariat and Members should pay attention to issue which may affect longline fisheries such as management of FAD operations, management of transshipment, observer coverage (including electronic monitoring), CDS, and labor standards. The Members should, if necessary, communicate their views to their authorities. In particular, with regard to the use of electronic monitoring, as it is likely to increase in the next few years. The OPRT secretariat will promote information sharing among members, taking into account the availability of the necessary budget. In addition, with regard to crew labor issues, OPRT secretariat will pay attention to discussions at other RFMOs following the agreement of the WCPFC.(3) Since the bycatch of sharks, sea turtles and seabirds may undermine the continuation of longline fishing unless properly addressed, the OPRT will follow discussion at RFMOs and revise its bycatch policy, as appropriate.

3. Suggested responses of the OPRT to other issues

(1) Overcapacity

For sustainable utilization of tuna resources, the OPRT, based on the agreement among its Members at the World Conference of Tuna Longline Fisheries in 2003, needs to continue its efforts to control the total number of large-scale longliners. At the same time, in order to carry on the effects of OPRT's efforts over the past years, discussion should take place among the Members about introduction of more effective measures as necessary.

In case any overseas longline tuna fisheries organizations express intention to acquire OPRT membership with a view to preventing and eliminating IUU fisheries and controlling fishing capacity, appropriate steps should be taken to examine the qualifications of such organizations based on the advice of appropriate authorities and related bodies of those countries.

(2) Measures against IUU fishing

It is important for the Members to exclude IUU tuna products from the Japanese market as the world's largest market of sashimi tuna. For this purpose, under Japan's prior confirmation system for frozen tuna import, the OPRT will properly carry out part of the work including compilation of information submitted and monitoring of tuna import cleared by customs in an expeditious and accurate manner. Particularly, tuna laundering (including falsified reports on the catch species and

fishing ground and misrepresentation of the vessel name) by RFMO-registered fishing vessels diminishes the effectiveness of the resource management measures. Collection of information by utilizing vessel's unique identifier (the International Maritime Organization (IMO) number), analyses of imported tuna data, and implementation of DNA identification will be conducted in a comprehensive manner.

It is important that quicker feedbacks about the tuna exports from OPRT member country vessels to Japan should be given to the members and other related parties to ensure effective control and management.

(3) Promotion of wild sashimi tuna consumption

Promotion of sustainable utilization of tunas caught under appropriate stock management schemes is one of OPRT's stated missions. In Japan, fish consumption tends to decrease amid intensifying competition between seafood and other food commodities. Under this circumstance, efforts should be continued to appeal to consumers the positive characteristics of sashimi tuna (Not only in terms of sustainable use of resources, but also as ingredients with excellent freshness and quality) produced by large-scale tuna longline fishing vessels.

In particular, Japanese tuna market in 2024, producer prices of frozen sashimi tuna caught by large longline fishing vessels were sluggish, which had a negative impact on tuna industry, so it is necessary to strategically implement a campaign to increase consumption. Specifically, in addition to implementing the annual frozen wild sashimi tuna campaign, the OPRT secretariat will promote consumption promotion using SNS such as YouTube videos, mainly aimed at younger generations (Generation Z, etc.), and will promote new activities such as distributing posters and pamphlets in foreign languages for inbound (foreign tourist) consumption.

(4) FOC vessel scrapping project

The FOC vessel scrapping project is that the fund provided by the Japanese government was used to scrap FOC fishing vessels and full repayment of the fund shall be made using fees levied from the duly registered vessels of Japan, Taiwan and legitimized vessels of Vanuatu and Seychelles. The repayment is planned to be completed by the end of 2031 FY. The collection of the fees will continue in the same framework this year and repayment will be made to the Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation, the current loan provider.

II Business plan

Taking into account the above situation as well as its strained financial circumstances, the OPRT will carry out the following activities, with a view to reinforcing conservation and management of tuna resources and contributing to the sustainable development of tuna fisheries and stable supply of tunas to the markets.

Remote administrative processes and web-based meetings, which have been utilized during the coronavirus pandemic, will continue to be utilized to the extent that they can improve operational efficiency.

(1) Monitoring and analysis of the state of tuna resources and the trend of international stock management

(i) Monitoring, analysis and dissemination of information related to RFMOs

- (ii) Monitoring, analysis and dissemination of information related to environmental NGOs
- (2) Promotion of effective resources management
 - (i) Prevention and elimination of IUU fishing activities
 - Monitoring of tunas imported to Japan
 - Monitoring of Positive Lists of RFMOs
 - Implementation of part of work related to the prior confirmation system for tuna import
 - DNA inspection
 - (ii) Promotion of fishing capacity control
 - (iii) Management of OPRT-registered fishing vessels (including maintenance and management of the registered vessel list and its system modification)
 - (iv) Monitoring of the international transactions of second-hand tuna longline fishing vessels and investigation on the status of exported second-hand vessels
 - (v) Measures to mitigate bycatch and collection of related information
- (3) Promotion of responsible tuna fisheries through promotion of sustainable use of tuna resources
 - (i) implementing the 22nd wild sashimi tuna campaigns
 - (ii) Promoting increased consumption using SNS and promotional activities for foreign tourists.
 - (iii) Collecting information on markets outside Japan (including inbound consumption)
- (4) Research and studies on management, trade and market of tuna resources
 - (i) Monitoring of distribution of tunas imported to Japan's sashimi market
 - (ii) Survey on international distribution of tunas
- (5) Promotion of international exchanges and cooperation among fishers for conservation and management of tuna resources
 - (i) Holding of meeting to exchange views and information on topics such as:
 - Capacity management
 - Establishment of clear rules on trade of second-hand tuna longline vessels
 - (ii) Provision of related information
- (6) Promotion and education of the concept of responsible tuna fisheries
 - (i) Publication and distribution of OPRT Newsletters
 - (ii) Provision of information to the public through OPRT website (English and Japanese)
 - (iii) Holding of OPRT seminars on topics such as:
 - Electronic monitoring
 - Tuna market situation
 - Study session on wild and sashimi tuna for general public
 - (iv) Recruiting new OPRT Supporting Members
 - (v) Promotion of OPRT activities through cooperation with friendly organizations
- (7) Management of the fund for FOC vessel scrapping project
 - (i) Smooth collection of fees
 - (ii) Repayment to the Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation