

OPRT Business Plan for 2026 FY

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

1. Current standings of tuna RFMOs and important issues in 2026

In 2025, many RFMO meetings, especially technical meetings, were held in a hybrid format (combining in-person and online meetings) or online. This meeting style has become established since the COVID-19 pandemic.

While tuna resources are generally recovering, 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. While the IATTC adopted to shorten the closed fishing period in 2025, The OPRT will closely monitor the impact of this measure on tropical tuna resources 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.

From the perspective of sustainable use of tuna resources, we welcome the overall recovery trend in tuna resources and the increase in several TACs. We hope that each RFMO will accelerate the introduction and implementation of management strategies and procedures to ensure this good trend continues, and we will continue to manage the number of OPRT-registered fishing vessels to limit their numbers.

Furthermore, with tuna producer prices remaining sluggish or unstable, producers are facing difficult business conditions due to rising costs such as labor and fuel costs. Therefore, we will promote efforts to support prices by increasing purchases of wild and frozen tuna for consumers in Japan and overseas.

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

(1) WCPFC

At the 2024 annual meeting, the WCPFC adopted to increase the quotas for Pacific bluefin tuna from 2025 onward (from 4,725 tons to 5,125 tons for small fish and from 7,609 tons to 11,869 tons for large fish). These quotas will be reviewed at the 2026 annual meeting.

At the 2023 annual meeting, new conservation and management measures (CMMs) for tropical tuna from 2024 to 2026 were adopted, and at last year's annual meeting, discussions continued toward the introduction of management procedures (MPs) for bigeye tuna and yellowfin tuna. And a new MP for South Pacific albacore tuna was also agreed upon at last year's annual meeting.

At the 2024 annual meeting, the interim minimum standards for the specification of EM systems were adopted, and discussions will continue at working group meetings this year toward the utilization and promotion of the EM system. 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.

At last year's annual meeting, no changes were made to the current CMM for sharks, but amendments were made to the CMM for seabirds, including strengthening rules to avoid bycatch in certain high-risk areas of the Southern Hemisphere.

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

(2) ICCAT

At the 2025 annual meeting, the TACs for Atlantic bluefin tuna from 2026 to 2028 were decided, increasing the total catch in the eastern Atlantic from 40,570 tons to 48,403 tons and the total catch in the western Atlantic from 2,726 tons to 3,081.6 tons.

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 2026. The Scientific Committee has recommended that a catch quota be introduced to ensure that the total catch does not exceed the TAC, and conservation and management measures for yellowfin tuna are scheduled to be discussed at this year's annual meeting.

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 the 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 14,769 tons per year from 2025 to 2027 (13,200 tons in 2024). The TAC for South Atlantic swordfish is scheduled to be discussed at this year's Annual Meeting.

With regard to sharks, a proposal to ban the detachment of fins from the body at sea and alternative proposals were discussed at last year's Annual Meeting, but no agreement was reached and the matter will continue to be discussed. In addition, conservation and management measures have been strengthened for basking shark, great white shark, and South Atlantic shortfin mako shark. As to the catch documentation system(CDS), which currently only applies to Atlantic bluefin tuna, is an important measure toward eliminating IUU fishing, and OPRT will need to keep monitor on the design of the system for other species.

(3) IOTC

At the 2025 annual meeting, the TAC for bigeye tuna from 2026 to 2028 was decided in accordance with the management procedure, at 92,670 tons, a 15% increase.

Five countries have objected to the conservation and management measures for yellowfin tuna adopted in 2021, and a new resolution could not be adopted at last year's annual meeting. However, a review of the stock assessment of yellowfin tuna and the setting of the TAC from 2026 onwards are scheduled to take place at the 2026 annual meeting.

And, the last year's annual meeting also recommended that countries reduce their fishing capacity so as not to exceed the TAC for bigeye tuna and yellowfin tuna.

Regarding FAD management measures, the resolution was adopted in the 2024 annual meeting to limit the number of FADs 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 has reached on the closed period for purse seine fishing FAD operations. It is necessary to further strengthen FAD management measures and provisions, including fully implementing the related IOTC conservation measures.

Regarding sharks, at last year's annual meeting, agreement was reached on alternative measures in the event that fins are separated from bodies on board, as well as measures to be taken in the event that research on wire tracing is not promoted by the Scientific Committee meeting in 2027.

(4) IATTC

For tropical tuna, new conservation and management measures for the purse seine fishery were adopted at the 2025 annual meeting. Starting in 2026, the annual closed period was reduced from 72 days to 64 days (the closed periods were also adjusted based on each vessel's bigeye tuna catch). However, the number of FADs used per vessel remains limited to 340. The 2026 TAC for bigeye tuna for the longline fishery remains the same as the previous year.

Interim minimum standards for the EM system specifications were agreed upon at the 2024 annual meeting.

Regarding sharks, strengthening conservation and management measures for silky sharks was discussed at the 2025 annual meeting, but no agreement was reached.

(5) CCSBT

As southern bluefin tuna stocks has continued to recover, the TAC for 2024-2026 is 20,647 tons (17,647 tons for 2021-2023), and at the 2025 annual meeting, the TAC for 2027 and beyond was discussed. The Scientific Committee recommended an increase of 3,000 tons, but as no agreement because of national allocations matter, it will continue to be discussed at this year's annual meeting.

Regarding the issue of seabird bycatch, there is a lack of data regarding the review of conservation and management measures, so it was decided to strengthen information gathering. Discussion on this issue is expected to continue at this year's 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 2026 to the extent possible and provide related information to Members (see Attachment for the schedule of major RFMO meetings in 2026).

(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 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, in recent years, producer prices for frozen sashimi-grade tuna caught by large longline fishing vessels have been sluggish in the Japanese market, which has had a negative impact on tuna fishing business, making it necessary to strategically implement campaigns to increase consumption. Specifically, in addition to the traditional frozen wild tuna sashimi campaign centered around October, we will also promote consumption promotion campaigns using social media such as YouTube videos aimed primarily at younger generations, and continuing from last year, we will also promote activities such as creating and distributing posters and pamphlets in English and other foreign languages to increase inbound consumption (last year, in order to boost inbound consumption, posters were created in four languages: English, Chinese (simplified and traditional characters), and Korean, and were also displayed on digital signage at the Toyosu fishing market, Shijo-mae Station)

(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 23rd 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:

(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:
 - 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