



Review of Sustainability and Management Measures for Southern Bluefin Tuna

Initial Position Paper

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Introduction

1. This Initial Position Paper (IPP) provides the initial views of the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) on management options for the southern bluefin tuna (STN 1) fishery for the 2013–14 and 2014-15 fishing years. These proposals aim to implement decisions made by the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT). CCSBT is the regional fisheries management organisation that manages southern bluefin tuna, which is a highly migratory species.
2. MPI has developed this IPP for the purpose of consultation as required under s12 of the Fisheries Act 1996 (the Act). MPI emphasises that the views and recommendations outlined in the paper are preliminary and are provided as a basis for consultation with stakeholders.
3. Following consultation, MPI will compile a Final Advice Paper (FAP) for the attached proposal. This document will summarise MPIs and stakeholders' views on the issues being reviewed, and provide final advice and recommendations to the Minister for Primary Industries. A copy of the FAP and subsequently the Minister's letter setting out his final decisions will be posted on MPIs website as soon as it becomes available, with hard copies available on request.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS

4. MPI welcomes written submissions on the proposals contained in the IPP. All written submissions on this consultation document must be received by MPI no later than 4pm on Friday, 29 November 2013.

Written submissions should be sent directly to:
Highly Migratory Species Team
Ministry for Primary Industries
P O Box 2526
Wellington 6140
or emailed to: FMsubmission@mpi.govt.nz

5. All submissions are subject to the Official Information Act and can be released, if requested, under the Act. If you have specific reasons for wanting to have your submission withheld, please set out your reasons in the submission. MPI will consider those reasons when making any assessment on the release of submissions if requested under the Official Information Act.

Management options for the southern bluefin tuna (STN 1) fishery for 2013–14 and 2014-15: Initial Position Paper

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

6. Southern bluefin tuna is a highly migratory species that is seasonally present in New Zealand waters, where it is valued by commercial and non-commercial fishers. New Zealand cooperates with other countries in the conservation and management of southern bluefin tuna because of its highly migratory nature. Since 1994, this cooperation has taken place through the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT). CCSBT's objective is to ensure, through appropriate management, the optimum utilisation of southern bluefin tuna.
7. CCSBT meets annually to agree on measures required to achieve this objective, including consideration of reports from its Scientific Committee (which includes an independent panel) and Compliance Committee. In 2011, CCSBT also adopted a management procedure designed to rebuild the stock and a range of measures to ensure the total global catch limit is not exceeded. At its latest meeting in October 2013, CCSBT agreed to confirm the global catch limit for 2014 at 12,449 tonnes and to set the TAC for 2015-17 at 14,647 tonnes in accordance with recommendations from its scientific committee. National allocations for members and cooperating non-members were also determined at that time
8. MPI proposes that the CCSBT decisions be implemented as follows:
 - a) By implementing an in-season increase in the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of southern bluefin tuna (STN 1) for the 2013-14 fishing year from the current level of 830 tonnes to 910 tonnes (the country allocation set by CCSBT for New Zealand). This in-season increase, if agreed to, will take effect once notified in the Gazette; and
 - b) Setting the 2014-15 TAC for STN 1 to 1,000 tonnes (the CCSBT allocation for New Zealand for that year), with effect from 1 October 2014.

THE ISSUES

STN 1 stock status

9. The global population of southern bluefin tuna has had high levels of fishing since the 1960s, and as a result the spawning biomass is currently at a low level.
10. The advice from CCSBT's Scientific Committee in 2011 was that spawning stock biomass for southern bluefin tuna was at a very low fraction of its original biomass as well as below the level that could produce maximum sustainable yield. The 2011 stock assessment is the most recent one available; CCSBT will be conducting a new stock assessment in 2014. There is a more positive outlook for the SBT stock based on the 2011 assessment, with current fishing mortality having been reduced below that associated with maximum sustainable yields (F_{msy}) and the stock is expected to increase at current and future catch levels determined by the management procedure.
11. In the absence of a full stock assessment, CCSBT's Scientific Committee annually considers the status of the stock based on a review of recruitment and catch per unit of effort indicators. There were both positive and neutral signals from the indicators in 2013:
 - a) Longline catch per unit of effort for the Japanese fleet (the standardised index used in stock assessments) has continued to increase since 2007.

- b) Although there was a decline in the scientific aerial survey index of juvenile abundance in 2012, the index for 2013 increased and is the second highest over the last nine years.
12. The Scientific Committee's analysis is consistent with indications from the New Zealand fishery, where catch rates in both the domestic and charter fleets have increased in recent years.

Previous decisions adopted by CCSBT to address stock status of southern bluefin tuna

13. At its annual meeting in October 2009, CCSBT considered advice from its Scientific Committee that meaningful reductions in catch were required to reduce the risk of stock collapse for southern bluefin tuna.
14. As part of an overall package of measures, CCSBT agreed in 2009 to reduce global catches by an average of 20% (to 9,449t) in each of the next two fishing years. At the same time, CCSBT agreed members' allocations, including an increase in allocation for New Zealand. Other members' allocations were reduced further in order to achieve the 20% reduction in global catches whilst accommodating the changes to New Zealand's allocation. This was part of a long-standing agreement to implement a Memorandum of Understanding dating back to establishment of the CCSBT Convention in 1994.
15. The annual CCSBT meeting in October 2011 adopted a science-based management procedure that is designed to respond adaptively to information on stock status and recommend appropriate global catch limits that will allow the southern bluefin tuna spawning stock to rebuild to 20% of its unfished level by 2035 (with a 70% probability). Adopting this management procedure was a significant advance for CCSBT, as it set a clear timeframe for rebuilding the stock and ensures decisions on global catch limits are no longer ad hoc but are set according to an agreed and tested management procedure. The management procedure recommends appropriate global catch limits (in three year blocks) that are designed to achieve CCSBT's rebuilding target to the specified probability.

TAC and Allocation Decisions from Latest Commission Meeting

16. In 2011, CCSBT also reached agreement on allocating the global TAC between members for the 2012-14 period and on a provision to allow the carry-forward of under-fishing of up to 20% of the annual national allocation within three-year quota periods. The 2014 member allocations were confirmed during this year's meeting held in Adelaide, Australia on October 14-17 2013. The timing of the meeting is such that New Zealand is unable to reflect the decision in its setting of domestic TACs prior to the start of the 1 October fishing year and must now make the necessary changes using the in-season adjustment provisions found in section 13(7) of the Fisheries Act 1996 (the Act).
17. The 2015 member allocations were also agreed during the latest CCSBT meeting and can be recognised in the TAC setting for the 2014-15 New Zealand fishing year.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

2013-14 In-Season Increase

18. MPI proposes that the TAC for 2013-14 be set to the level of New Zealand's country allocation set by CCSBT for 2014, with allowances for non-commercial fishing and other sources of mortality, as outlined in table 1. No change is made to the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) when implementing an in-season TAC increase, rather an

additional 69 tonnes of Annual Catch Entitlement (ACE) would be generated to give effect to the decision.

Table 1: Proposed in-season TAC change for 2013-14 fishing year

Total Allowable Catch (TAC)	Māori Customary Allowance	Recreational Allowance	Other Sources of Fishing-Related Mortality	Total Allowable Commercial Catch	Additional in-season ACE
Current					
830	1	8	4	817	-
Proposed 2013-14 in-season change					
910	1	8	15	817	69

2014-15 TAC Change

19. MPI also proposes that the TAC for the 2014-15 fishing year is set at a level which reflects the recent decisions of the CCSBT. Proposed allowances for the 2014-15 year are included in table 2.

Table 2: Proposed TAC change for 2014-15 fishing year

Total Allowable Catch (TAC)	Māori Customary Allowance	Recreational Allowance	Other Sources of Fishing-Related Mortality	Total Allowable Commercial Catch
Current				
830	1	8	4	817
Proposed for 2014-15				
1000	1	8	20	971

RATIONALE FOR MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

Total Allowable Catch

20. The TAC for southern bluefin tuna is able to be set under section 14 of the Act. This section provides for alternative TACs to be set for stocks specified in Schedule 3 (including southern bluefin tuna) if the Minister is satisfied that the purpose of the Act is better met in this way. In general, TACs are set in accordance with the provisions of s 13(2) of the Act (i.e. in a manner that would maintain, or move the stock towards, a biomass at or above the level that can support maximum sustainable yield – MSY). This is not possible for southern bluefin tuna since it is a highly migratory species and it would not be possible to calculate MSY for the portion of the stock found within New Zealand fisheries waters (s. 14(8)(b)(iv)). Setting a TAC under section 14 also recognises that a national allocation for New Zealand has been determined as part of an international agreement (s. 14(8)(b)(ii)).
21. MPI proposes that the TAC be set to the level of New Zealand’s national allocation as determined by CCSBT for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 fishing years, an approach followed since the introduction of the CCSBT management procedure in 2011. National allocations for CCSBT member countries are shown in the table below.

Table 3: CCSBT Country allocations for 2014 and 2015¹

2014 Member Allocations		2015 Member Allocations	
Japan	3,361t	Japan	4,737t
Australia	5,151t	Australia	5,665t
New Zealand	910t	New Zealand	1,000t
Korea	1,036t	Korea	1,140t
Taiwan	1,036t	Taiwan	1,140t
Indonesia	750t	Indonesia	750t
2014 Cooperating Non-Member Allocations		2015 Cooperating Non-Member Allocations	
South Africa	150t	South Africa	150t
Philippines	45t	Philippines	45t
European Union	10t	European Union	10t

2013-14 In-Season Increase

22. Section 14(6) of the Act provides that for any stock listed in Schedule 3 to the Act, the Minister may, after considering information about abundance during the current fishing year, increase the TAC for the stock after the commencement of a fishing year. Under the Act, the TAC shall revert to its previous level at the end of that fishing year (s. 14(7)) (noting that in this instance MPI is also reviewing the TAC for 2014-15 as part of this process).
23. The CCSBT has increased New Zealand's country allocation for 2014 based on advice from its scientific committee. MPI believes that the advice received at the recent meeting of the CCSBT represents the best available information on the current status of the stock and that New Zealand should adjust its domestic catch in the 2013-14 fishing season based on this advice.

2014-15 TAC Change

24. MPI is also proposing changes to the 2014-15 TAC as provided for under s. 14 of the Act. Setting a TAC under s. 14(1) of the Act requires consideration of how to best meet the purpose of the Act as outlined in s. 8 – that is, to provide for utilisation whilst ensuring sustainability. MPI considers the obligation to ensure sustainability is met by managing the New Zealand fishery for southern bluefin tuna in line with international agreements reached by CCSBT. In particular, CCSBT has adopted an adaptive management procedure, whereby new data is used to update the model and recommend new catch limits to respond to information from the fishery.
25. Setting the TAC to the country allocation set by CCSBT would increase the potential level of utilisation from the New Zealand fishery, which in turn will provide benefits for

¹ These allocations assume that South Africa accedes by 31 May 2014 and receives its full member allocation. South Africa is currently a cooperating non-member of CCSBT and will retain an allocation of 40t if it does not accede by that date.

fishers and fish processors. The TACC section below (see paragraphs 36-41) provides further detail on these potential benefits.

26. Although setting the TAC at 910t would be in line with the measures adopted by CCSBT, some stakeholders have in the past suggested that New Zealand should take unilateral action to not fish its full allowable national allocation because of the low southern bluefin tuna stock status. MPI considers this approach would lead to New Zealand forgoing reasonable benefits from the fishery while only providing a small benefit to the global stock. The management procedure provides a sound basis for setting the global catch limit for southern bluefin tuna and further unilateral action is not considered by MPI to be necessary.
27. Section 11(2A) of the Act outlines factors for the Minister for Primary Industries to take into account before setting or varying sustainability measures (including TACs), including any relevant fisheries plans. The then Minister of Fisheries approved a National Fisheries Plan for Highly Migratory Species under section 11A of the Act in September 2010. The fisheries plan outlines various management objectives for highly migratory species (HMS), along with strategies for achieving the objectives, including:
 - a) Maintaining a sustainable fishery for HMS within environmental standards, including encouraging management of HMS at specified target reference points. CCSBT has adopted an interim rebuilding target, and confirmed that the biomass that can produce maximum sustainable yields remains the longer term target. The New Zealand allocations set by CCSBT are consistent with these biomass targets.
 - b) Promoting a viable and profitable tuna fishery, including through negotiating favourable country allocations for New Zealand fishers. Implementation strategies include reviewing management arrangements including catch limits as required to take into account international agreements. The current review is in line with this strategy.
 - c) The fisheries plan outlines objectives for non-commercial use of HMS fisheries, including maintaining/enhancing recreational catch rates for HMS gamefisheries, and ensuring abundant HMS for customary use. Provision is made for non-commercial fishers as part of the proposed TAC and allowances.
28. A Harvest Strategy Standard was adopted for New Zealand fisheries in October 2008. The harvest strategy standard outlines classifications of stocks based on their status in relation to target and limit reference points. For HMS (including southern bluefin tuna), the standard outlines that MPI will generally rely on international organisations in which New Zealand participates to determine the status of the species in question – in this instance CCSBT. MPI is satisfied that the advice from CCSBT's Scientific Committee (including an independent panel) represents the best available information to inform management decisions.
29. In addition, the standard outlines that officials will seek adoption of rebuilding strategies that meet or exceed the harvest strategy standard. MPI considers that the low stock status of southern bluefin tuna is addressed through the overall management strategy agreed by CCSBT, including its adoption of a management procedure to assist with its rebuilding strategy, and its focus on strict compliance with agreed quotas.
30. The key feature of the management procedure is that it responds adaptively to a range of signals from the fishery; when information indicates fish are more abundant, it allows more catch to be taken, but when signals from the fishery are poor, the procedure is precautionary and acts to limit catches.

TACC and allowances

Recreational and customary allowances

31. Southern bluefin tuna has historically been an occasional target of recreational game fisheries, with fairly limited catches. More recently, a recreational gamefishery for Pacific bluefin tuna has developed off the west coast of the South Island. This fishery also has a bycatch of southern bluefin tuna from time to time, particularly early in the season.
32. Compulsory charter boat reporting covering this fishery was introduced from 1 November 2010. Only six southern bluefin tuna were reported by the recreational charter fleet in the 2011-12 fishing year, of which 2 were returned alive. A single southern bluefin tuna was reported in the 2010-11 year. Prior to the introduction of charter boat reporting, MPI monitored catches in this fishery through a voluntary reporting arrangement with the recreational charter vessels involved.
33. Catches are variable, and are affected by the timing of the season as well as other factors. Reported landings in 2007 were slightly over the allowance at that time of 4t, while landings since 2008 have been well below this level. Vessel numbers and trips since 2009 were possibly reduced from earlier levels because of financial factors. MPI considers that, based on the nature of the recreational fishery, the current limit of 8 tonnes is unlikely to be exceeded. No increase in allowance is proposed under a higher TAC.
34. Information on Māori customary catch is uncertain. Most if not all non-commercial catch is likely taken under the amateur regulations. For this reason, only a nominal customary allowance has been set and it is not proposed to increase this allowance even under a higher TAC.

Allowance for other sources of fishing related mortality

35. The current allowance of 4t for other sources of fishing related mortality was set based on observer data for what was at the time a low level of predation and discards within the southern bluefin tuna fishery. The higher abundance and increased effort in the fishery have increased the risk of additional fishing related mortality from returns made under the provisions of Schedule 6 of the Act and from unlawful discards. MPI therefore proposes the following increased allowances for other sources of fishing related mortality:
 - a) 2013/14: 15 tonnes
 - b) 2014/15: 20 tonnes

TACC and ACE

2013-14 In-Season Increase

36. MPI proposes that an additional 69t of ACE be generated for the 2013–14 fishing season. The proposed amount is reached by subtracting the allowances for non-commercial fishing and for other sources of fishing related mortality from the TAC of 910t, in line with the provisions of sections 20 and 21 of the Act.
37. A further 57t of unfished ACE carried forward from the 2012-13 fishing year in accordance with s. 67A of the Act is also available to the fishery. Total commercial catch for the 2013-14 fishing year could reach 943t if ACE is fully caught. MPI will notify the CCSBT Secretariat of its intention to carry forward unfished allocation in accordance with the CCSBT resolution on carry forward.

38. The southern bluefin tuna fishery is a relatively high value fishery for a premium tuna product exported primarily to Japan for consumption as sashimi. The additional 68 tonnes of ACE proposed for the 2013-14 fishing year has a value in the order of NZ\$ 2 million.
39. There is considered to be additional capacity within the New Zealand industry to respond to an increase in TAC/ACE, and this is reinforced by catches in 2012-13, where total catches were 759 tonnes out of an available 817t. However, actual catches tend to be variable and would not be expected to meet the TACC fully every year.

2014-15 TAC Change

40. MPI proposes that the TACC for the 2014-15 fishing year be increased to 971 tonnes. The proposed amount is reached by subtracting the allowances for non-commercial fishing and for other sources of fishing related mortality from the TAC of 1,000t, in line with the provisions of sections 20 and 21 of the Act.
41. This is an increase of 154 tonnes from the current level and would realise in the order of an additional NZ\$4.5 million for the fishery.

OTHER MANAGEMENT ISSUES

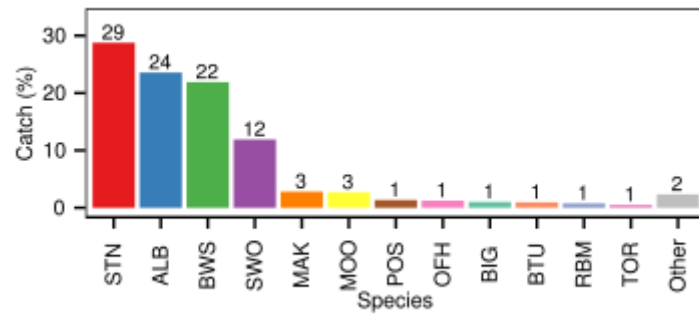
Future country allocations

42. CCSBT's adoption of a management procedure with 3-year quota blocks generally has provided much greater certainty on what New Zealand's allocation will be in advance of the fishing year. However, the decision to modify the outcomes of the management procedure to operate more conservatively for the first years of its operation led to some uncertainty about the global catch limit and country allocations for 2013–14, and the decision to confirm allocations for this final year was deferred to the 2013 meeting of the CCSBT, subject to additional advice from CCSBT's Scientific and Compliance Committees.
43. Similarly, confirmation of the 2016 and 2017 allocations for the next 3-year quota block has been deferred to the 2014 meeting of the CCSBT, based on uncertainty surrounding the level of extraction in the fishery. New Zealand's allocation is currently agreed to be 1,000t across all three years of the next quota block.
44. If following the 2014 meetings the New Zealand allocation for either the 2016 or 2017 years is lower than 1,000t, MPI will seek to change the TAC to reflect these decisions. Such changes would take effect on 1 October 2015.

Bycatch and seabird interactions

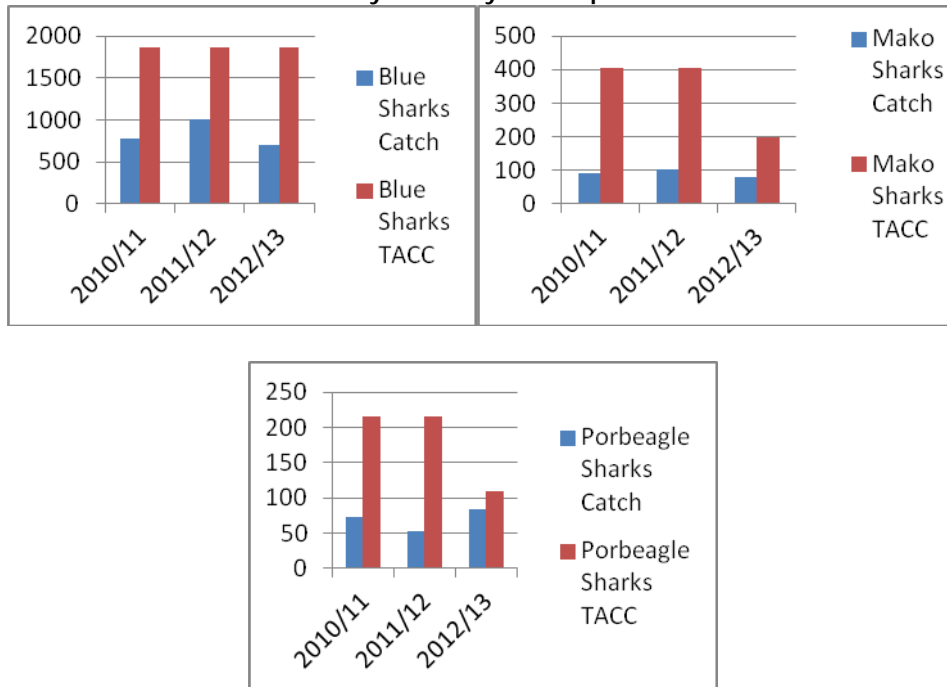
45. Southern bluefin tuna is primarily caught using surface longlining which is a method that is known to pose a risk of interactions with seabirds. The surface longline fishery is also known to have a reasonable level of shark bycatch; primarily blue sharks, mako sharks and porbeagle sharks. MPI recognises that the proposed higher catch limits may result in increased effort in the fishery (depending on trends in catch per unit of effort) and therefore a higher risk of seabird interactions and bycatch of other species. Figure 1 provides the breakdown of species caught by vessels targeting southern bluefin tuna.

Figure 1: Species composition in southern bluefin tuna fleet (ALB: albacore, BWS: blue shark, SWO: swordfish, MAK; mako shark, MOO: moonfish, POS: porbeagle shark).



46. The likely shark species caught as bycatch are currently well below their respective allowable commercial catch levels and any increased effort associated with the increased southern bluefin tuna limits proposed is considered to be unlikely to put significant pressure on the TACCs for these species. The TAC/TACCs for both porbeagle sharks and mako sharks were lowered significantly last year to more closely reflect recent catches in the fishery but despite this MPI does not consider that there is a risk that the reduced TACCs will be exceeded. Figure 2 provides recent shark catches against their respective TACCs.

Figure 2: Catches versus TACC for likely shark bycatch species of southern bluefin tuna fishery



47. MPI is also currently consulting on a revised National Plan of Action (NPOA) for the management and conservation of sharks. The proposed purpose of the NPOA-Sharks 2013 is to maintain the biodiversity and the long-term viability of all New Zealand shark populations by recognising their role in marine ecosystems, ensuring that any utilisation of sharks is sustainable, and that New Zealand receives positive recognition internationally for its efforts in shark conservation and management.

48. Seabird captures can occur in longline fisheries when seabirds are attracted to fishing activity and interact with fishing gear. Seabirds are particularly prone to capture when they dive around lines being set in the water, and pursue baited hooks.
49. Seabird mitigation is currently mandatory in the surface longline fishery and a voluntary code is in place to encourage additional mitigation measures. In this context a number of mitigation trials are underway with a view to improving spatially based seabird mitigation arrangements in the surface longline fishery.
50. New Zealand has recently reviewed its NPOA for seabirds which sets out long term objectives, supporting high level subsidiary objectives and objectives to be met within the next five years. One of these five year objectives is that capture rates in all New Zealand fisheries are reducing in accordance with reduction targets in relevant planning documents. Measures to give effect to the NPOA will be implemented through the fisheries management planning process for highly migratory species.