



TUNA MANAGEMENT PLAN

(2025 – 2029)



FFA



SPC
Secretariat
of the Pacific
Community

Prepared with assistance from the Pacific Islands, Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the Pacific Community and the Government of Tuvalu

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Acronyms

BBNJ – Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction

CMMs – Conservation and Management Measures

EEZ – Exclusive Economic Zone

EM – Electronic Monitoring

ER – Electronic Reporting

EU – European Union

FAD – Fish Aggregating Device

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization

FFA – Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency

FSMA - Federated States of Micronesia Arrangement

F_{MSY} - Maximum Sustainable Yield

GoT – Government of Tuvalu

HMTCs – Harmonised Minimum Terms and Conditions

IUU – Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated

JICA - Japan International Cooperation Agency

LRP – Limit Reference Point

MARPOL - International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships

MCS - Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS)

MFAT - Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade

MP – Management procedures

MTCs - Minimum Terms and Conditions

NPOA – National Plan of Action

NTSA - Niue Treaty Subsidiary Agreement

OFCF - Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation of Japan

OFP – Oceanic Fisheries Programme

OFS – Oceanic Fisheries Section

OPOC – Office of the Pacific Ocean Commission

PAE – Party Allowable Effort

PICTS - Pacific Island countries and territories

PNA - Parties to the Nauru Agreement

PNAO - Parties to the Nauru Agreement Office

PPA - Parties to the Palau Arrangement

ROP - Regional Observer Programme

SPC – Secretariat of the Pacific Community

TAE – Total Allowable Effort

TFA – Tuvalu Fisheries Authority

TFD – Tuvalu Fisheries Department

TNOP - Tuvalu National Observer Program

UNCLOS – United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea

UNFSA – United Nations Fish Stock Agreement

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USTT - United States Tuna Treaty

VDS – Vessel Day Scheme

VMS - Vessel Monitoring System

WCPFC – Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

WCPO - Western Central Pacific Ocean

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Tuna are an essential natural resource for Tuvalu, providing substantial revenue to the government, employment opportunities, and food security for its people. Four key tuna species (skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye, and South Pacific albacore) are caught within Tuvalu's EEZ by both domestic and foreign fishing fleets using purse seine and longline vessels, and sporadically, pole-and-line. These fisheries not only support food security for local communities but also include the catch of tuna-like species such as wahoo and rainbow runner, which are locally processed into salted and smoked fish products.

Tuna fisheries contribute a wide range of economic benefits to Tuvalu. Between 2021 and 2023, they generated an average of US\$31 million annually in license and access fee revenue, supported employment for approximately 143 workers in tuna-related positions¹, and facilitated the unloading of 47,180 mt by purse seiners in port. Tuna exports² during this period were valued at US\$40 million. The average annual catch within Tuvalu's EEZ was 63,114 mt, valued at US\$106 million, which was all exported mainly via transshipment to major tuna processing hubs. There is a small scale commercial fishery using troll and handline fishing methods from 5-7 m open boats. The catches of a few hundred tonnes of skipjack and yellowfin tuna annually are consumed locally and make up about 60% of local fish production. Further details are presented in Chapter 2.

Given the strategic importance of tuna to Tuvalu's economy, food security, and national development, this Tuna Management Plan (TMP) has been developed to guide the conservation and sustainable management of tuna fisheries within Tuvalu's EEZ and the Convention Area of the WCPFC for the period 2025 to 2029. This TMP is primarily focused on the management of tuna resources within Tuvalu's jurisdiction, where it holds direct regulatory authority. The plan outlines national priorities, management tools, and licensing policies that apply to offshore, industrial and small-scale tuna fisheries operating between 12 and 200 nautical miles from shore. It also supports Tuvalu's strategic engagement in regional processes that influence access, sustainability, and economic returns without extending regulatory control beyond Tuvalu's EEZ.

This TMP is a high-level policy document that aligns with Tuvalu's national development priorities, and its sub-regional, regional and international obligations. While many management actions are implemented through regional and sub-regional processes, this plan supports Tuvalu's active role in negotiations and implementation to secure long-term, sustainable benefits from its tuna resources. A non-public implementation plan has been developed separately.

1.2. Purpose

The TMP 2025–2029 aims to guide the implementation of Tuvalu's domestic fisheries priorities and fulfill its sub-regional, regional and international obligations

¹ Includes harvest, processing and ancillary services sectors, observers and government employees (artisanal sector not included)

² These are to the key markets of Japan and Thailand valued at US\$1 million and US\$39 million, respectively.

The TMP sets out Tuvalu's strategic direction for sustainably managing tuna resources in its waters and guides Tuvalu's participation in sub-regional, regional, and international tuna fisheries arrangements.

The TMP contributes directly to Tuvalu's broader development goal:

“To increase the contribution of Fisheries to socio-economic development and quality of life.”

1.3 Plan Outline:

- National objectives and priorities for conserving and sustainably using tuna stocks;
- Strategies for engaging in key fisheries negotiations and implementing agreements, including:
 - The WCPFC Convention and Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs);
 - The development and implementation of Harvest Strategies and Target Reference Points under the WCPFC;
 - Participation in sub-regional/regional arrangements such as:
 - United States Tuna Treaty (USTT);
 - PNA;
 - Parties to the Palau Arrangement (PPA);
 - Federated States of Micronesia Arrangement (FSMA);

1.4 Strategic and Management Objectives

Two key strategic objectives under the TFA Corporate Plan provides for the guidance of the management of tuna fisheries. The strategic objectives are supported by a set of management objectives, which form the foundation of the TMP and guide its implementation, as set out below: -

Objective 2: Foster Sustainable Management of Oceanic Fisheries Resources

- Maintain all tuna stocks, especially skipjack and yellowfin, at sustainable levels while minimising bycatch.
- Adopt fisheries management best practices—emphasising precautionary and ecosystem-based approaches.
- Implement adaptive management measures to address and mitigate predicted climate change impacts.
- Strengthen management to support Tuvalu's reliance on FAD-based fishing, while balancing bycatch reduction and mitigating marine pollution.
- Promote purse-seine fisheries over longline operations to maintain/improve economic returns, while maintaining sustainable fish stocks.
- Develop and maintain the integrity of the Vessel Day Scheme (VDS) as a core management tool.
- Increase local fish consumption to bolster food security and ensure community well-being.

Objective 5: Increase the Value of Fishing Access Licenses in Tuvalu Waters.

- Enhance and stabilize revenue flows from fisheries to support national development goals.
- Maintain Tuvalu's attractiveness as a premier fisheries destination.
- Cooperate on revenue-generating initiatives to capitalise on shared opportunities.
- Maintain/maximise employment and socio-economic benefits for Tuvaluans in the fisheries sector.
- Develop a robust domestic Tuvalu fleet to increase local participation and economic returns.

1.5 Scope

The TMP applies to all offshore, industrial and small-scale tuna fisheries and associated services operating in:

- Waters between 12 and 200 nautical miles (nm) within Tuvalu's EEZ,
- Areas beyond Tuvalu's EEZ, including international waters (high seas) and the EEZs of other nations, where Tuvalu-flagged vessels are authorised to operate.

A map of Tuvalu's EEZ is provided in Figure 1.

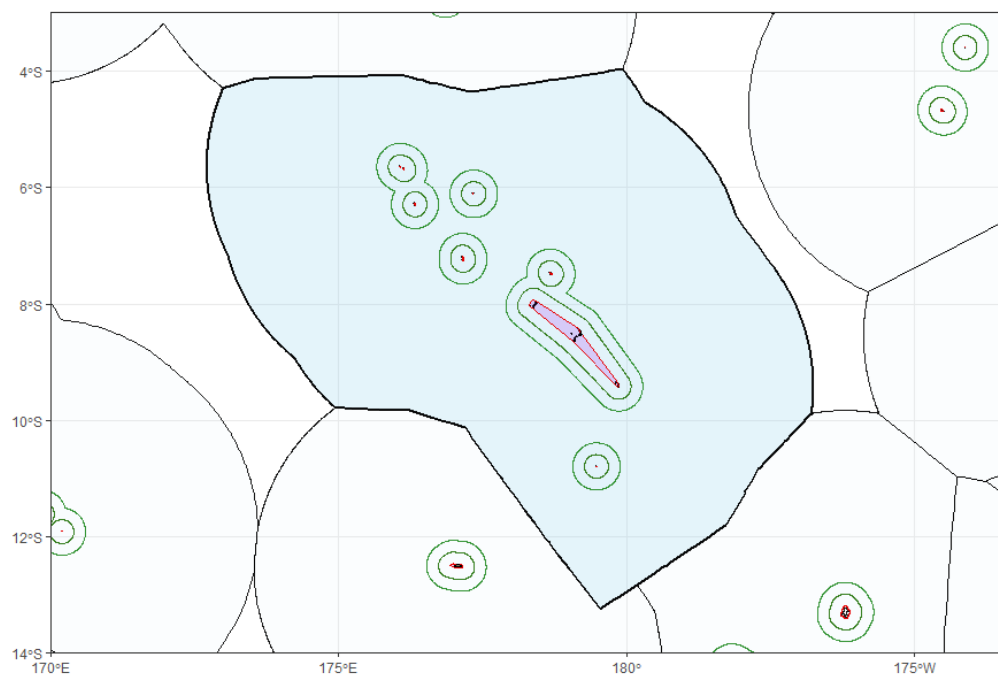


Figure 1: Map of Tuvalu's EEZ (blue), 24 and 12 nautical mile boundaries (green) and archipelagic waters (purple). Note: Waters within 12 nm are governed by the Falekaupule Act 1997 which grants traditional assemblies authority over coastal fisheries. Tuvalu's islands have developed their own coastal Fisheries Management plans.

The key tuna species covered under this plan include:

Skipjack tuna	<i>Katsuwonus pelamis</i>
Yellowfin tuna	<i>Thunnus albacares</i>
Bigeye tuna	<i>Thunnus obesus</i>

This TMP also covers other species incidentally captured during fishing operations that are retained, including tuna-like species (wahoo, rainbow runner and mahimahi), as well as species of special interest (e.g. sharks, sea turtles and seabirds) that are not retained.

The two primary fishing methods managed under this plan are:

- Purse seine; and
- Pelagic longlining.

1.6 Legislative and policy framework

Tuna Management Plan (TMP) 2025–2029 is anchored in the national development priorities outlined in *Te Kete* (Tuvalu's National Sustainable Development Strategy 2021–2030), particularly Goal 3: **“To increase the contribution of Fisheries to socio-economic development and quality of life.”**

The TMP has been prepared pursuant to Section 9 of the *Fisheries Management Act 2025* and aligns with the principles outlined in Sections 8(2), which emphasize sustainable, precautionary, and ecosystem-based management. It is supported by Regulations and other national legislation and policies, including:

- Maritime Zones Act (2012) and Declarations made thereunder;
- Marine Pollution Act (1992),
- Falekaupule Act (1997),
- Conservation Areas Act (1991),
- Environment Protection Act (2008),
- Tuvalu Fisheries Department Corporate Plan (2023-25) and the new TFA Corporate Plan (2026-28)
- Tuvalu's National Sustainable Development Strategy, *Te Kete* (2021-30),
- Tuvalu NPOA IUU (2014 updated 2018),
- The Fisheries Management Regulations (2025),
- Access Agreements and Licensing Conditions.

This Plan is implemented in conjunction with the TMP Implementation Plan which provide operational detail, performance indicators, and timelines for achieving the TMP's strategic objectives.

1.6.1 Regional management framework and obligations

Tuvalu shares responsibility for managing the four key Western Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) tuna fisheries with other Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) under sub-regional, regional and international frameworks. These include:

- UNCLOS;
- UNFSA;
- WCPFC Convention;
- Nauru Agreement;
- Palau Arrangement;
- Niue Treaty Subsidiary Agreement (NTSA);

- Federated States of Micronesia Arrangement (FSMA);
- United States Multilateral Treaty (US Treaty);
- Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)
- FAO Port State Measures Agreement;
- International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL).

Tuvalu is also a party to the following regional organisations, including:

- WCPFC;
- PNA;
- FFA;
- Oceanic Fisheries Programme (OFP) of SPC;
- Food and Agriculture Organisation (Fisheries and Aquaculture Division); and
- Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC)

This TMP is aligned with obligations under these frameworks.

1.6.2 Strategic Alignment and Legal Integration

Tuvalu's Tuna Management Plan (TMP) 2025–2029 is anchored in the national development priorities outlined in Te Kete (Tuvalu's National Sustainable Development Strategy 2021–2030), particularly Goal 3: "To increase the contribution of Fisheries to socio-economic development and quality of life." The TMP operationalizes key provisions of the Fisheries Management Act 2025, including Section 9 (Management Plans) and Section 8(2) (Principles of Sustainable Management), and aligns with supporting legislation such as the Marine Pollution Act 1992, Falekaupule Act 1997, and Environment Protection Act 2008.

This Plan is implemented in conjunction with the TMP Implementation Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, which provide operational detail, performance indicators, and timelines for achieving the TMP's strategic objectives. The specific actions, targets, and reporting mechanisms, are included in the TMP Implementation Plan.

1.7 Governance and administration

1.7.1 Authorities and roles

The TFA is responsible for implementing this TMP, working in close coordination with other government agencies and external partners.

Offshore fisheries management is led by the Oceanic Fisheries Section (OFS) of the TFA, comprising:

- Observer Program Unit,
- Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) and VDS Unit,
- Enforcement and Compliance Unit, and
- Licensing Units (Purse seine and Longline).

The Maritime Police Department supports surveillance and enforcement operations.

Key regional and development partners include: FFA Secretariat, SPC, PNAO, WCPFC Secretariat, JICA, OFCF, MFAT, Ausaid, USAID, EU, and the Governments of Taiwan and Korea.

1.8 Review, Evaluation & Reporting

The TMP will remain in effect from 2025 to 2029. The MD will evaluate and report annually on its implementation as part of the TFA Annual Report.

A mid-term review will be conducted to reflect:

- Policy changes,
- New data or science,
- Developments in sub-regional, regional or international management.

The TMP will be updated every four years (by June 30), or as directed by the TFA Board.

Reviews will assess progress toward achieving the TMP's strategic and management objectives. Implementation is supported by:

- An internal Implementation Plan (a living document) & Monitoring and Evaluation Plan,
- Associated strategic documents and policies, including:
 - PNA Strategic Plan and Implementing Arrangements
 - WCPFC CMMs
 - Tuvalu NPOA-IUU (to be updated)
 - FAD Management Plan
 - Port State Measures SOP
 - Distant Water Fleet Management Policy

2 PRESENT STATE OF THE FISHERY

2.1 Regional context

Tuna fisheries in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) range from small-scale, artisanal operations in coastal waters to large-scale, industrial purse seine and longline operations across EEZs and high seas.

In 2023, the total catch in the WCPFC Statistical Area (WCPFC-CA) was provisionally estimated at 2,623,966 mt, accounting for 53% of the global tuna catch (4,997,242 mt). This represented a 1.3% decline from 2022, and an 11.8% decline from the record high of 2,974,314 mt in 2019. Purse seine fisheries contributed 1,837,030 mt (70% of the total catch), while longline fisheries contributed 227,646 mt (9%).

The species composition of the 2023 catch in the WCPFC-CA was:

- Skipjack tuna (62%),
- Yellowfin tuna (28%),
- Bigeye tuna (6%), and
- Albacore tuna (4%)
 - South of the equator: 66,334 mt
 - North of the equator: 31,295 mt

2.2 Status of WCPO tuna stocks

The four major target species (skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye and South Pacific albacore) are highly migratory, and stock assessments are conducted for the WCPO as a whole, not individual EEZs.

As shown in Figure 2, all four tuna stocks remain within the “green zone”, indicating healthy stock status. Each is estimated to be higher than the Limit Reference Point (LRP - representing 20% of unfished spawning potential), and below the level of fishing mortality that would exceed Maximum Sustainable Yield (F_{MSY}).

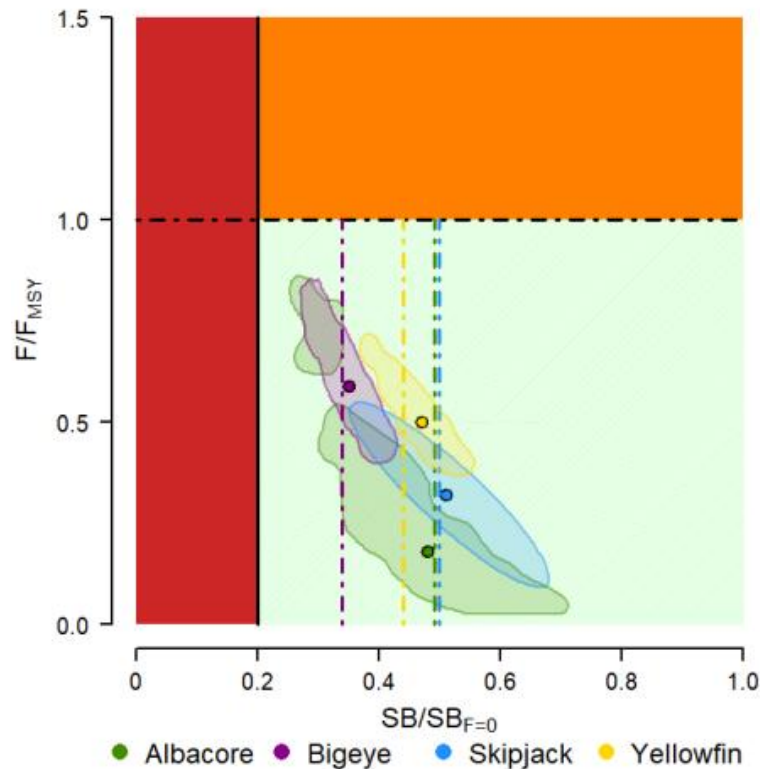


Figure 2: Majuro plot of the four key tuna species caught in the WCPO in 2023. The lines that are iTRPs or average values used in the TTM (BET and YFT).

2.3 Status of the tuna fishery in Tuvalu

Tuvalu tuna fishery is structured into three main sectors:

- Subsistence fishing, critical for nutrition and food security;
- Small-scale commercial (artisanal) fishing; and
- Industrial-scale commercial fishing, including purse seine and longline operations.

Most subsistence and artisanal fishing occurs within 12 nm, using small boats. These sectors are important for local food supply and income, though their combined catch is relatively small.

Tuvalu's commercial tuna fishery is dominated by purse seine and longline vessels operating under access agreements. A growing number of Tuvalu-flagged purse seine vessels now operate under various access arrangements, including multilateral arrangements (e.g. FSMA).

Skipjack tuna makes up approximately 85% of the catch, with transshipment at Funafuti increasing in recent years. Industrial fishing is not permitted within 12 nm to minimise conflict with artisanal fishers.

2.4 Catch Information

The combined tuna catch of the subsistence and artisanal sectors in Tuvalu is not precisely known, but estimated at around 350 mt per year. Most of this catch is sold on the local market and is small compared to the industrial catch. The industrial purse seine and longline sectors have together harvested an average of ~71,000 mt since 2019. Tuvalu-flagged vessels, mainly operating in the high seas and other EEZs have caught an additional ~24,000 mt per year on average since 2019.

The total annual catch from both Tuvalu waters and Tuvalu-flagged vessels outside Tuvalu's EEZ represents ~3.8% of WCPO-wide tuna catch since 2019, and is not expected to have a significant impact on regional tuna stock health.

Purse seine vessels typically target skipjack tuna, whereas longline fishing vessels predominately target South Pacific albacore tuna south of 10° S latitude and bigeye and yellowfin tuna further north.

Full details of the total catch and breakdown of catch by gear type can be found below and in the annual Part 1 reports of the Regular Sessions of the Scientific Committee in the WCPFC website (<https://meetings.wcpfc.int/index.php/meetings/type/11>).

2.4.1 Purse seine fishery

In 2023, Tuvalu licensed 96 purse seine vessels, including bilateral partners (Korea, China and Chinese Taipei), the FSMA fleet (86 vessels dominated by FSM and Nauru), the US fleet (12 vessels operating under the Tuvalu/Tokelau pooling arrangement), and the Tuvalu-flagged fleet (6 vessels).

Fishing effort in Tuvalu's EEZ has gradually increased over time, particularly from around 2010. Before then, an average of around 840 days were fished annually, increasing to an average of 2,095 over the period 2010-23. Catches peaked in 2016 at 124,000mt. By comparison, purse seine vessels caught about 48,600 mt in 2023, the lowest since 2009. This catch was dominated by skipjack (87%), followed by yellowfin (9%) and bigeye tuna (4%).

Most purse seine vessels operating in Tuvalu's EEZ are highly reliant on FADs. Tuvalu-flagged vessels predominantly fish on the high seas and in other EEZs under multilateral access agreements.

2.4.2 Longline fishery

In 2023, 9 longline vessels operated in Tuvalu's EEZ: China (6), Fiji (2) and Kiribati (1).

Longline effort peaked in 2016 at about 16.7 million hooks, and again in 2020 at 19.3 million hooks, but has since declined to an average of around 2.5 million over the last three years (2021-23). In 2019, peak tuna catch was 6,092 mt, with 46% yellowfin, 26% South Pacific albacore and 28% bigeye tuna. In 2023, catch was reduced to just over 738 mt and still dominated by yellowfin tuna (59% of the total).

2.5 Economic Contribution

Tuna fisheries are a major contributor to Tuvalu's economy. In 2023, the sector contributed US\$29.2 million in license and access fees; supported employment of 305 workers in the tuna fishery sector³; and recorded 66,594 mt of purse seine transshipment in Funafuti port. Tuna exports⁴ to key markets were valued at US\$2.9 million to Japan⁵ and US\$43.7 million to Thailand⁶.

Tuvalu's main source of VDS license and access fee revenue comes from its domestic and bilateral arrangements and the USTT. While annual revenue levels may fluctuate due to market dynamics and environmental conditions (e.g. El Niño/La Niña), the FSMA and USTT have provided a stable and increasing source of revenue since their implementation.

Tuvalu's annual national revenue target for the tuna fisheries sector is set at AU\$40 million and is primarily dependent on access fees.

The two main economic priorities for the tuna fisheries sector are: (i) to generate income from fishing rights, which represents an important source of revenue for the GoT; and, (ii) to increase the number of Tuvalu-flagged purse seine vessels. In addition, Tuvalu aims to expand the presence of longline vessels operating within its EEZ, following the departure of many vessels after the implementation of the longline VDS, working with bilateral partners that accept this management scheme. Transshipment activity in Funafuti continues to grow in economic significance, and Tuvalu is pursuing measures to incentivise increased utilisation of its port by fishing vessels for transshipment and other associated activities. Other priorities aimed at maximising socio-economic benefits and opportunities remain fundamental to the implementation of this plan.

2.6 Food Security

The GoT continues to support small-scale fisheries due to their contribution to food supply and alternative income for local communities. Plans are underway to expand inshore/nearshore anchored FAD (aFAD) deployment to improve access to tuna and other pelagic/semi-pelagic species.

Increasing local landing of commercial tuna catches during purse seine transshipments is also being cautiously encouraged to address domestic supply gaps. Support for small-scale fisheries is addressed through the TFA's Corporate Plan, while this TMP focuses on industrial and commercial fisheries.

2.7 Climate Change

Recent modelling predicts significant changes to the distribution and abundance of tuna due to climate change. Under warming scenarios exceeding 1.5°C, biomass of skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye tuna is expected to shift from the WCPO toward the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO), and from areas under national jurisdiction to the high seas. Modelling also predicts a decrease

³ Includes harvest, processing and ancillary services sectors, observers and government employees. Based on data collected as part of the FFA data collection project.

⁴ This includes catches by national fleet vessels (domestically flagged and locally-based foreign charters) that may not have been landed onshore.

⁵ Japan Customs (<https://www.customs.go.jp/toukei/info/index.htm>) (excludes frozen whole tuna).

⁶ Thai customs (<http://customs.go.th/index.php?view=normal>)

in tuna biomass within the equatorial WCPO by 2050 and an increase in abundance in the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean and in some subtropical regions.

This shift is projected to be most significant for skipjack tuna, with similar patterns expected for yellowfin and bigeye tuna. Climate change may also impact the availability of bycatch species, which are important for food security in Tuvalu and across the region.

3 MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Tuvalu's tuna fisheries are central to national development, but this reliance is at risk of deterioration in stock abundance and the increasing impacts of climate change. Ensuring that the tuna fishery remains both ecologically sustainable and economically viable is a key goal of this TMP.

The TMP sets out the management tools and regulatory mechanisms that Tuvalu will use to achieve its strategic and management objectives. These tools are designed to:

- Maintain key tuna stocks at sustainable levels;
- Safeguard marine ecosystems and mitigate the impacts of fishing on bycatch species;
- Maximise socio-economic returns from the tuna fisheries sector; and
- Ensure compliance with national, sub-regional, regional, and international obligations.

This section outlines the measures Tuvalu will apply to manage the tuna fisheries in its EEZ and in adjacent areas, consistent with the country's rights and responsibilities as a coastal State and flag State.

3.1 Management tools

To achieve the objectives of this TMP, a range of management tools are applied across Tuvalu's tuna fisheries. These tools vary depending on gear type, operational zone, and licensing arrangement, but all are underpinned by a commitment to responsible and adaptive management.

The following subsections describe in detail the suite of management tools and mechanisms that will be used throughout the 2025–2029 period to guide and regulate tuna fisheries within Tuvalu's jurisdiction and under Tuvalu's flag.

3.2 Vessel Day Scheme

The VDS is a zone-based fisheries management framework developed and implemented by the PNA to control fishing effort in the EEZs of member countries. The scheme was first introduced for purse seine fisheries in 2007 and later extended to longline fisheries through the longline VDS (LL VDS) in 2017.

Tuvalu is a full participant in both schemes and applies effort-based limits to its tuna fisheries in line with its allocated shares of Total Allowable Effort (TAE), referred to as the Party Allowable Effort (PAE). The PAE under each scheme determines the number of fishing days Tuvalu may authorise annually in its EEZ for purse seine and longline vessels, respectively. These vessel days are part of a regional system of tradable effort, allowing days to be transferred between PNA Parties or sold to authorised operators through public tender.

As a PNA member and signatory to the Palau Arrangement, Tuvalu enforces zone-based management measures established through collective regional processes. These schemes are critical to Tuvalu's fisheries management approach, ensuring alignment with regional sustainability goals while generating substantial economic returns.

Under the VDS framework, Fishing Companies and Associations may purchase vessel days to fish in Tuvalu's EEZ through a fixed price process.

3.2.1 Purse seine fishery

Fishing days allocated under Tuvalu's PAE expire at the end of each calendar year. There is no expectation of automatic renewal; operators must negotiate for days prior to the start of each fishing year. Priority is given to Tuvalu flag vessels and then foreign vessels with a history of compliance and fishing activity within Tuvalu's EEZ. Vessel day pricing is based on either the PNA minimum benchmark rate (for Tuvalu flag) or a higher price for foreign vessels through a negotiation process.

Purse seine effort in Tuvalu's EEZ is capped at the annual PAE. A portion of the purse seine VDS revenue is reserved for Tuvalu's eight island communities (AUD\$200,000 each) under the "community VDS" scheme, which seeks to promote equitable participation in the fisheries sector.

When allocating access, the GoT gives priority to operators that deliver additional economic or development benefits, such as domestic investment, transshipment, employment opportunities, or capacity-building contributions. Further consideration is given to operators with established partnerships through joint ventures, Tuvalu registered vessels and foreign locally-based vessels (chartering arrangements).

Although Tuvalu does not currently have a formal reallocation policy for its PAE, access is granted using a transparent hierarchical framework that prioritises:

- Tuvalu-flagged vessels;
- Chartering arrangements;
- Bilateral access partners.

Vessel days may also be allocated under the USTT and pooling arrangements such as the Tuvalu–Tokelau (TK/TV) Pool and the FSMA. These mechanisms support the full utilisation of Tuvalu's PAE for increased VDS revenue while strengthening regional cooperation and shared management.

3.2.2 Federated States of Micronesia Arrangement (FSMA)

The FSMA is a regional access mechanism under the PNA designed to promote domestic development through the shared use of fishing access rights among member states. Tuvalu's participation in the FSMA serves as a strategic management tool to increase the sales of Tuvalu's remaining VDS days from its PAE limit by enabling multi-zone access for Tuvalu-flagged and chartered vessels to capitalise on other lucrative fishing grounds during years when fishing conditions are unfavourable in-zone.

Under this arrangement, fishing effort by Tuvalu-registered vessels is supported by the VDS allocation of Tuvalu with a premium paid to the EEZ in which fishing occurs, except in the case

of days fished in their home waters. Tuvalu, as the “home Party,” authorises eligible vessels and ensures they meet the FSMA’s strict eligibility requirements. These include registration on the FFA Vessel Register, domestic licensing, and demonstrable economic linkages to Tuvalu such as flag, national ownership, and employment of Tuvaluan crew, revenue or investments in domestic fisheries infrastructure.

The FSMA supports Tuvalu’s long-term objective of transitioning from a foreign access model to a domestically driven tuna sector. By encouraging local vessel registration and control, the FSMA strengthens national participation in the regional purse seine fishery, enhances value retention, and contributes to broader goals of economic development and resource sustainability. As such, it forms an integral part of Tuvalu’s tuna management framework.

3.2.3 Longline fishery

Although less economically significant than purse seine operations, Tuvalu’s longline fishery is regulated under the LL VDS. However, several challenges continue to affect the implementation and national value of the scheme:

- The low market price of longline vessel days, partly due to the absence of a minimum benchmark price enforced amongst Parties;
- The ease with which fishing effort can be shifted to adjacent high seas areas, where access is free of cost;
- The relatively high costs and administrative burden associated with MCS measures such as electronic reporting (ER) and electronic monitoring (EM), which are not consistently implemented across all PNA Parties;
- An oversupply of longline days among PNA members, reducing scarcity and thereby limiting potential revenue.

These challenges are compounded by broader industry conditions, where high operating costs and declining catch rates are increasingly undermining the viability of longline operations and constraining fleets’ ability to generate returns in-zone.

In response, Tuvalu is open to exploring complementary measures to enhance the effectiveness and value of the LL VDS. There is also growing interest in assessing whether small-scale operations, including those fishing closer to shore or within coastal areas, could improve catch rates and increase returns for a small scale locally-based longline fishery.

3.3 Restricted Fisheries Management Areas and Conditions

In accordance with Section 11. 1(c) of the Marine Resources Act, fishing is prohibited in designated Restricted Management Areas. These restrictions apply to all fishing vessels—including authorised foreign, domestically based, and Tuvalu-flagged vessels—but do not apply to local fishing vessels engaged in artisanal or subsistence fishing under the Tuvalu Marine Resources Regulations.

Within Tuvalu’s EEZ, purse seine vessels (whether foreign-licensed, domestically based, or Tuvalu-flagged) are prohibited from:

- Fishing on FADs during FAD closure periods under the latest WCPFC Tropical Tuna Measure, except where domestic vessels operate in line with Tuvalu’s FAD Management Plan;

- Operating in areas declared closed under current or future PNA or WCPFC Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs), as applicable.

3.4 Buffer Zone for Inshore & Nearshore Fisheries

To safeguard food security and minimise competition and depletion of tuna schools in coastal waters, Tuvalu has established a buffer zone in:

- The 12 nm territorial sea; and
- The waters within 12 nm of Tuvalu's archipelagic baseline (Figure 1).

All industrial-scale fishing is prohibited within this zone, including foreign vessels (e.g. under the USTT) and all domestic industrial vessels, whether Tuvalu-flagged or chartered.

3.5 High Seas Fishing

Tuvalu-flagged vessels may operate in areas of the high seas that are not closed under applicable regional measures. These vessels are prohibited from:

- Fishing in high seas areas closed under the PNA Third Implementing Arrangement;
- Fishing on FADs during closure periods defined under WCPFC or other relevant CMMs.

Access to certain areas, such as the eastern high seas adjacent to Tuvalu's EEZ, may be authorised via a specific licence.

All Tuvalu-flagged vessels operating on the high seas must be formally authorised and must comply with their licence conditions and all WCPFC regulations. Tuvalu currently does not apply additional domestic management or technical limits on these operations beyond regional requirements.

3.6 Licensing Policy

The right to access and fish for tuna resources within Tuvalu's fisheries waters, particularly within its EEZ, is regulated through fishing licences issued by the GoT. The TFA is responsible for issuing fishing licences to purse seine, longline and pole and line vessels operating under various arrangements, including joint ventures, charter agreements, and regional arrangements such as the FSMA and the USTT.

Licence applications are processed through the Tuvalu Electronic Licensing Registration (ELR) system, with assessments conducted via the PNA FIMS portal. Licensing serves as the principal mechanism for implementing the strategic policies and management measures set out in this TMP, particularly those requiring legal authority.

Fishing licences are typically issued for a 12 month period (or valid from the time of issue until the end of the calendar year for purse seine and longline vessels).

All licensed operations must comply with Tuvalu's national laws and regulatory framework, including licence terms and conditions that reflect obligations under regional and international instruments. These include CMMs adopted by the WCPFC, PNA Implementing Arrangements, and Tuvalu's national conservation regulations. The terms and conditions of licences are subject to routine review to ensure their continued relevance, enforceability, and alignment with best practices.

The most up-to-date version of Tuvalu's licence terms and conditions can be obtained from the Tuvalu Fisheries Department or downloaded from the official website: www.tuvalufisheries.tv.

3.7 Transhipment Policy

Funafuti is not a major transhipment hub for vessels fishing in the WCPO, but transhipment activity has increased since 2014. Transhipment offers both financial and strategic benefits to Tuvalu and forms a complementary component of its broader tuna management strategy.

Fishing vessels transshipping in Funafuti are charged US\$5 per tonne for cannery-grade fish and US\$12 per tonne for sashimi-grade fish. Additional charges include US\$16 per hour for Customs officials onboard, and applicable port fees under local regulations. Vessels that do not have a fishing licence for the Tuvalu's EEZ may not tranship and are only allowed in port for humanitarian reasons.

Beyond direct revenue, transhipment operations deliver indirect benefits. These include enhanced monitoring oversight of fishing activity, greater opportunities to place Tuvaluan fisheries observers onboard vessels, increased opportunities for employment of Tuvaluan crew, and reinforcement of Tuvalu's flag and port State control obligations.

While the benefits are clear, several challenges must be addressed. These include waste disposal by vessels into the lagoon, dumping of unwanted fish, limited capacity of the Department of Environment to monitor or deal with pollution incidents, and gaps in cost recovery for services provided by Fisheries Officers. Fees must remain regionally competitive against other transhipment ports, and collaboration among agencies such as Fisheries, Customs, Environment, Health, and Quarantine must be improved.

3.8 Regional Management Obligations

As a signatory to multiple regional and international fisheries agreements, Tuvalu applies a comprehensive set of national, sub-regional, and regional CMMs to support the sustainable management of tuna stocks in the WCPO. The majority of these obligations stem from the WCPFC Convention and are implemented through domestic licensing and monitoring frameworks.

3.8.1 WCPFC Convention

To meet its responsibilities under the WCPFC Convention, Tuvalu adopts and implements all binding CMMs and relevant non-binding resolutions passed by the Commission. These cover:

- The collection and reporting of catch and effort data;
- Observer requirements and operational Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) coverage;
- Gear and species-specific measures for target and non-target species;
- Compliance reporting obligations (e.g., Part 1 and Part 2 reports);
- Technical and operational standards for authorised fishing activities.

Tuvalu integrates these obligations into its national regulations and Minimum Terms and Conditions (MTCs) for fishing licences, which are reviewed regularly to ensure they reflect the most up-to-date Commission decisions. A list of the current CMMs and Resolutions of the WCPFC is provided at the website: <https://cmm.wcpfc.int/>.

3.8.2 Harvest Strategy and Future Management Procedures

One of the most significant obligations under the WCPFC is the phased implementation of harvest strategies for key tuna stocks through CMM 2022-03. This measure supports long-term sustainability by requiring science-based management procedures (MP) for each of the four major tuna species. An interim MP for WCPO skipjack tuna (CMM 2022-01) has already been adopted, and MPs for South Pacific albacore, and bigeye tuna are being developed and are expected to be adopted before this TMP expires in 2029.

As new harvest strategies are implemented, they may affect allowable catches or effort levels within Tuvalu's EEZ. This TMP must therefore remain adaptive and allow for integration of any future changes stemming from WCPFC-level decisions.

3.8.3 FAD Management

Tuvalu's purse seine fisheries are highly dependent on FADs. As such, Tuvalu is committed to responsible FAD use and has adopted all relevant WCPFC measures, including:

- CMM 2023-01 for tropical tunas, which includes measures to manage FAD set management, non-entangling FADs, instrumented buoys, FAD closure periods, and reporting obligations; and
- CMM 2009-02 for FADs deployed on the high seas.

Tuvalu is also implementing the Fourth Implementing Arrangement (4IA) of the Nauru Agreement, which introduces strict FAD tracking and buoy registration requirements across all PNA EEZs and adjacent high seas.

A National FAD Management Plan is in place. This plan applies to Tuvalu's EEZ and Tuvalu-flagged vessels on the high seas and includes:

- FAD tracking and centralised buoy registration;
- Limits on FAD sets during the closure period for Tuvalu flagged and chartered vessels with additional reporting requirements for sets during the closure;
- Requirements to use a FAD logsheet for reporting;
- A policy statement that drifting FADs are not owned by the person deploying them;
- Compliance with non-entangling FAD requirements from WCPFC and encouragement to move towards bio-degradable FADs as soon as practicable.

Tuvalu has recently started a pilot project to collect, re-use and re-cycle electronic FAD buoys that are washed up on the islands in the group. This is believed to be the first such initiative in the region and, as well as environmental benefits, is expected to improve the collection of data on FAD beaching through a reward scheme.

There is also an inshore FAD policy covering the use of anchored FADs for artisanal fishing.

3.8.4 Marine environment

Tuvalu recognises the ecological risks posed by abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear—including FADs and pelagic longlines—which can damage marine habitats, entangle marine life, spread invasive species, and obstruct navigation.

To mitigate these risks, Tuvalu follows a suite of international and regional obligations:

- MARPOL Annex V prohibits the disposal of plastics and fishing gear at sea;
- WCPFC CMM 2017-04 and Article 5 of the WCPFC Convention ban the discharge of non-biodegradable or hazardous materials from fishing vessels.

These obligations are reflected in Tuvalu's domestic environmental laws and licensing conditions. National standards restrict the use and discharge of harmful substances such as R22 refrigerants, petroleum waste, and synthetic debris—particularly while vessels are in port for provisioning, repairs, or transshipment.

Tuvalu is also actively engaged in global efforts to reduce marine pollution and is contributing to the development of a legally binding UN treaty on marine plastics.

Monitoring and enforcement of these measures are led by the TFA, working in collaboration with the Department of Environment, Kaupule (island councils), and other relevant stakeholders.

3.8.5 Bycatch management

3.8.5.1 Species of Special Interest (SSIs)

A range of SSIs are incidentally caught by Tuvalu vessels and foreign vessels operating in Tuvalu's waters, including oceanic whitetip and silky sharks—both of which are overfished in the WCPO—as well as whale sharks, marine mammals and sea turtles, which hold cultural significance. Tuvalu enforces all WCPFC CMMs relating to SSIs and in most cases exceeds the requirements, both in the EEZ and for Tuvalu registered vessels operating more widely, as summarized below.

Sharks: Tuvalu prohibits all shark finning and the retention of sharks by commercial vessels operating in its EEZ or under Tuvalu's flag, including beyond the EEZ. Sharks are taken only as bycatch in low volumes and are released or discarded. A NPOA-Sharks is being developed based on regional MTCs, the IPOA-Sharks, and WCPFC CMM 2022-04. The FFA HMTCS banning wire trace are also in effect. TFA will establish a vessel inspection and monitoring programme and will continue to collect and report shark interaction data through the WCPFC Part 1 Annual Report.

Turtles: Vessels must comply with WCPFC CMM 2008-03 and FAO guidelines for sea turtle mitigation, including safe release using de-hooking equipment. These requirements are reflected in MTCs.

Whale Sharks and Cetaceans: Vessels must comply with relevant WCPFC CMMs and implement WCPFC guidelines for the safe release of cetaceans and whale sharks.

3.8.5.2 Other Non-Target Resources

The GoT monitors the capture of non-target species such as mahimahi in both purse seine and longline fisheries within the EEZ and by Tuvalu-flagged vessels fishing elsewhere, including the high seas. Data are collected through observer programmes, port sampling, and transshipment monitoring.

Species initially taken as bycatch may become target species if market value or availability increases. Licence conditions will be adapted as needed.

Bycatch landed in Tuvalu's ports—if fit for human consumption—can provide a critical source of protein. However, the Customs Act currently prohibits landings from non-Tuvalu-flagged vessels. TFA and the Attorney General's Office are reviewing options to address this and develop proper mechanisms to allow bycatch discharge for local use.

Key non-target species landed will be recorded and reported through Tuvalu's WCPFC Part 1 Report submissions.

4 MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Management services underpin effective fisheries governance. These include data collection, research, policy development, compliance, planning, and maintenance of operational registries. Together, they provide the evidence base and administrative infrastructure needed to establish and enforce sustainable fisheries rules. Wherever feasible, the costs associated with these services should be recovered under a user-pays principle.

4.1 Data Collection and Management

To inform evidence-based fisheries management and meet Tuvalu's regional and international reporting obligations, a national data collection system has been established. This system includes logbook reporting, observer data, and a centralised database for storing and analysing fisheries data. The national system supports and complements the regional logbook program coordinated by the SPC.

4.2 Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS)

Effective Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) is essential to ensuring compliance with Tuvalu's fisheries laws and regional obligations. Tuvalu's MCS framework includes:

- Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) and Observer Program managed by the TFA Oceanic Fisheries Section;
- Electronic Reporting (ER) and Electronic Monitoring (EM) systems for data accuracy and transparency;
- Port State Measures and Enforcement Protocols supported by the Maritime Police Department;
- Risk-based surveillance, prioritizing high-risk zones, gear types, and vessel categories.

This section is guided by Tuvalu's National Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing (NPOA-IUU). The detailed procedures, risk assessments, and enforcement strategies are in the MCS Implementation Plan and NPOA-IUU.

4.3 Observer Policy

The Tuvalu National Observer Program (TNOP) is an authorised provider under the WCPFC Regional Observer Programme (ROP). Observers are primarily deployed for scientific data collection, but also serve as a compliance tool. Observer data are used to verify catches, monitor gear usage, record bycatch, and detect misreporting.

Observer coverage on the purse seine fleet is maintained at 100%. Observer contracts are issued on a per-trip basis, typically for up to three trips. A levy is charged per observer as part of the licensing process, which meets the cost of observer fees for observers placed under the national programme.

To strengthen observer effectiveness, Tuvalu will increase observer training and debriefing capacity. Tuvalu aims to achieve 100% electronic reporting by observers in the purse seine fishery and achieved around 80% in 2024. Coverage of longliners in the EEZ will be increased whenever feasible.

4.4 Communications and Consultation Policy

Fisheries governance requires active coordination among stakeholders and government departments. Transparent and timely communication ensures stakeholder understanding and buy-in, while cross-agency cooperation supports whole-of-government responses to fisheries issues.

Tuvalu currently lacks a formal inter-agency consultative framework. Experience suggests that inter-agency committees do not function well in Tuvalu, and that it is better to arrange meetings with interested stakeholders to address issues as they come up. Governance of the Fisheries sector improved in mid-2025 when the Fisheries Authority was established. Its Board of Directors, chaired by the Minister, includes members from three key Ministries as well as three independent members. The Board has the responsibility of approving national Fisheries Management Plans and will be the main body monitoring their implementation.

Additionally, Tuvalu will continue to maintain a dedicated fisheries website to disseminate key documents such as legislation, management plans, licensing procedures, and relevant policies. This will improve stakeholder access to timely and accurate information and support broader engagement in the sustainable management of Tuvalu's tuna resources.

4.5 Summary of Key Services

Tuvalu's MCS system integrates vessel tracking, observer coverage, electronic reporting, and enforcement to ensure compliance with national and regional fisheries rules. These efforts are guided by the NPOA-IUU and supported by regional partnerships. For detailed procedures and risk-based strategies, refer to the MCS Implementation Annex and NPOA-IUU.

Tuvalu's Fisheries Development priorities are mainly addressed in the TFA Corporate plan, but in summary Tuvalu is committed to increasing domestic participation in the tuna sector through expanding the domestic fleet, employment of observers and crew, and enhancing port-based services to support transshipment. Development priorities include expanding the Tuvalu-flagged purse-seine fleet and enhancing transshipment infrastructure. Further details are included in the Implementation Plan.