



CCSBT-ERS/2406/07

Draft Ecologically Related Species and Bycatch Action Plan (ERSWG Agenda Item 6.1)

1. Introduction

In 2023, the Sixth Meeting of the Strategy and Fisheries Management Working Group (SFMWG 6) conducted a review of the CCSBT Strategic Plan. This review was guided by the outcomes of the [2021 Independent Performance Review](#).

As part of this review, SFMWG 6 developed an Action Plan¹ that identified and prioritised actions aimed at meeting the objectives of the Strategic Plan. One of the activities that was accorded a high priority and immediate delivery timeline was the development of an Ecologically Related Species Bycatch Action Plan (Bycatch Plan) based on the recommendations from the Performance Review.

SFMWG 6 also recognised that this Action Plan should focus on Ecologically Related Species (ERS) other than seabirds, as seabird work is already addressed within the adopted CCSBT Multi-Year Seabird Strategy. SFMWG 6 further agreed that the Secretariat would develop an initial draft of this plan to be presented at ERSWG 15.

Based on advice from SFMWG 6, the Extended Commission (EC) adopted the CCSBT Strategic Plan for 2023-2028, including its Action Plan.

2. Background

In its recommendation to the EC, SFMWG 6 stated that the Bycatch Plan should include the following Recommendations from the Performance Review:

- PR2021-03: Amend the CCSBT Convention to clarify the role and mandate of CCSBT with regards to non-target species.
- PR2021-04: Encourage the development of strengthened CMMs on ERS.
- PR2021-05: Increase the attention and focus on ERS through annual meetings of ERSWG.
- PR2021-06: Consider the feasibility of a collaborative programme (between RFMOs and institutions with competency in biodiversity conservation) to forecast the likely impacts of climate change on tuna ecosystems, Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT), ERS, and their productivity, distribution, and resilience.
- PR2021-20: Establish a clear and concise bycatch policy and management strategy.

¹ See **Attachment A** of the [Report of the Sixth Meeting of the Strategy and Fisheries Management Working Group](#)

- PR2021-27: Strengthen the implementation of current measures to reduce bycatch, particularly of seabirds, and explore the potential for an incentivized mechanism to combat an increase in bycatch and address the impact of fisheries on living marine resources and the ecosystem.
- PR2021-69: Continue the laudable work undertaken by the CCSBT for SBT and establish a similar effort for non-target species.

Recommendation PR2021-05 from this list has already been addressed through a previous decision² to alternate between physical ERSWG and virtual meetings each year.

As part of ERSWG 13, Members were asked to consider what shark species should be seen as “CCSBT relevant” and the degree of monitoring that these species should be subject to³. Members considered the inclusion of twelve shark species deemed to be significant to CCSBT by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). There was no agreement at the time to expand the list of shark species already captured in the ERSWG Data Exchange (EDE) reporting template (i.e. blue, porbeagle, shortfin mako, and “other sharks”).

At its most recent meetings, the ERSWG confirmed its previously agreed advice for all shark species caught in SBT fisheries, that there were currently no specific concerns about shark bycatch that warranted additional mitigation requirements.

Although there is a standing agenda item at ERSWG for “Other ERS”, discussions under this item have often been limited and there is no standing advice from the group on this topic.

3. Actions for Consideration

The Secretariat has developed the draft ERS Bycatch Action Plan for consideration by Members in **Attachment A**. The plan uses a similar format to that which was used as part of the CCSBT Strategic Plan and asks that Members assign responsibility, priority, and specific timing for delivery of the individual actions.

The actions in the plan have been categorised based on whether their primary aim is to improve ERS information, governance, or effectiveness of measures. Some of the actions are directly related to Performance Review recommendations and in those cases the specific recommendation has been referenced.

Prepared by the Secretariat

² See paragraph 111 of [Report of the Twenty Ninth Annual Meeting of the Commission](#).

³ *Shark Species of Relevance to the CCSBT*, [CCSBT-ERS/1905/06](#)

Ecologically Related Species Bycatch Strategy

1. Introduction

CCSBT adopted the “[Strategic Plan for the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna 2023 – 2028](#)” (hereinafter “Strategic Plan”), which includes an implementation plan of recommendations from the [2021 CCSBT Performance Review](#).

The Strategic Plan specifies “*Addressing the impact of SBT fisheries on non-target species that belong to the same ecosystem, in particular seabirds*” as one of the key challenges of CCSBT, and also specifies “*strategies concerning stock rebuilding, allocation and ecologically related species*” as one of the items under “Management of SBT” that is a part of the Vision and Goals of the Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan, in its Action Plan, also specifies that “*Noting the Multi-year Seabird Strategy adopted at ERSWG 14, develop an **Ecologically Related Species and Bycatch Action Plan** based on the recommendations from the Performance Review.*”

2. Current Monitoring and Reporting of ERS (non-seabird)

The main ERS data that Members are required to provide to the CCSBT are the data specified in the annual [ERSWG Data Exchange](#) (EDE), which must be provided by 31 July each year. Compliance with EDE requirements is monitored and reported on annually as part of the Secretariat paper to the Compliance Committee on *Members’ implementation of ERS measures and performance with respect to ERS*⁴. The Secretariat paper also includes a raised mortality estimate for each of the species groups defined in the EDE broken down by individual Member.

Members’ annual reports to the Compliance Committee and the Extended Commission (Annual CC/EC Report) are also required to include information on:

Whether the IPOA-seabirds⁵, IPOA-sharks⁶ and the FAO Guidelines to reduce sea turtle mortality have been implemented;

- Whether all current binding and recommendatory measures of ICCAT, IOTC and WCPFC aimed at the protection of ERS from fishing are being complied with;
- Whether data is being collected and reported on ERS in accordance with the requirements of ICCAT, IOTC and WCPFC; and
- The methods used to monitor compliance with bycatch mitigation measures, including the level of coverage and the type of information collected.

The Secretariat also reports on whether Members have provided this information as part of its *Members’ implementation of ERS measures and performance with respect to ERS* paper to the Compliance Committee.

⁴ The latest available report is [CCSBT-CC/2310/05](#).

⁵ International Plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catches of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries.

⁶ International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks.

3. Current Measures Relating to ERS (Non-Seabird)

Binding Measures

At its 25th Annual Meeting in October 2018, the CCSBT adopted the “[Resolution to Align CCSBT Ecologically Related Species measures with those of other tuna RFMOs](#)” (the “ERS Resolution”). In accordance paragraph 2 of the ERS Resolution, each Member and Cooperating Non-Member shall ensure that such vessels flying its flag and fishing for SBT in IOTC⁷, WCPFC⁸ and ICCAT⁹'s Area of Competence comply with all ERS Measures in force in that Area of Competence (whether or not the Member or Cooperating Non-Member is a Member of the tuna RFMO in which the ERS Measures were adopted).

To ensure SBT vessels comply with the latest ERS measures, paragraph 6 of the ERS Resolution tasks the Secretariat to annually update the list of ERS Measures contained in Annex I of the Resolution before the annual EC meeting according to any decisions taken on ERS at the annual meetings of the ICCAT, IOTC, and WCPFC.

Voluntary Measures

In accordance with CCSBT's [Recommendation to Mitigate the Impact on Ecologically Related Species of Fishing for Southern Bluefin Tuna](#), Members will, to the extent possible, implement the International Plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catches of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (IPOA-Seabirds), the International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (IPOA-Sharks), and the FAO Guidelines to reduce sea turtle mortality in fishing operations (FAO-Sea turtles), if they have not already done so.

This recommendation also states that the EC and/or its subsidiary bodies as appropriate will undertake an assessment of the risks to ERS posed by fishing for SBT. The EC will consider how these risks are mitigated by the adoption of the “[Resolution to Align CCSBT Ecologically Related Species measures with those of other tuna RFMOs](#)”, and will consider whether any additional measures to mitigate risk are required. The Seabird Strategy includes a component to assess the risk to seabirds, however, there is no planned review to look at non-seabird ERS risks.

4. Current Status of (Non-Seabird) ERS

ERS catch information collected as part of the EDE represents only a subset of the total captures of those species and therefore cannot be used in isolation to determine the overall status of the stock or species. CCSBT's ERS bycatch information can potentially highlight year to year trends from individual Member fleets but even this level of analysis is problematic given the recent gaps in observer data that arose during the pandemic.

CCSBT typically relies on the stock status assessments of third parties (e.g. other tuna RFMOs, ACAP, ABNJ, etc) for ERS. This approach is not unique to CCSBT. For example, the IOTC provides its Members with the IUCN threat status for marine turtles given that it has not undertaken its own assessment.

⁷ Indian Ocean Tuna Commission

⁸ Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean

⁹ International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas

Overall objective

This Bycatch Action Plan's overall objective is to reduce or eliminate bycatch of ERS, such that SBT fisheries do not impose a significant adverse impact on these species.

Specific objectives

To achieve the overall objective, the following specific objectives have been developed:

Objective 1: Information objective

CCSBT's assessment of the impacts of SBT fisheries on ERS is based on the best available information, includes assessment of uncertainty, and highlights information gaps.

Objective 2: Governance objective

CCSBT's governance arrangements allow it to effectively manage the impacts of SBT fisheries on ERS.

Objective 3: Effectiveness objective

Measures adopted in SBT fisheries effectively reduce the risk to ERS.

Actions to achieve the specific objectives

The following actions will be undertaken against each of the specific objectives.

Actions to Achieve the Specific Objectives of the Plan

		Responsibility	Priority	Short Term		Medium Term		Long Term	NOTES for discussion
				2024	2025	2026	2027	2028++	
(A) Information Objective									
1 Data collection and Information Sharing									
i.	Confirm species/species groups relevant to Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) fisheries to be covered by this Bycatch Action Plan.	ERSWG 15		●					This is essential as the starting point. The Secretariat suggests utilising the current species/species group list specified in EDE template.
ii.	Continue and improve ERSWG Data Exchange reporting.	Members			Ongoing				This action includes achieving agreed scientific observer coverage levels and optimised reporting for EDE purpose
iii.	Secretariat continues to submit its annual report on Members' implementation of ERS measures and performance with respect to ERS	Secretariat			Ongoing				ERSWG 15 in 2024 will consider the methodology used to determine representativeness of scientific observer coverage, and this discussion may affect reporting elements.
iv.	Secretariat to provide recent assessments of relevant bycatch species as information papers at future ERSWG meetings.	Secretariat				●		●	This would include stock assessments conducted by other RFMOs that were concluded since the last ERSWG meeting. This activity includes the Secretariat getting approval from other tRFMOs to submit/refer to their paper to ERSWG meeting.
v.	Have a standing agenda item at ERSWG on Climate Change.	ERSWG				●		●	Members will be encouraged to submit papers related to this theme.

		Responsibility	Priority	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	NOTES for discussion	
2 Collaboration								
i	Collaborate with other RFMOs on their activities related to the forecasting of the likely impacts of climate change on tuna ecosystems, SBT, ERS, and their productivity, distribution, and resilience. (PR2021-06)	Secretariat		Ongoing				
ii	Secretariat to share the Summary of Key Points from ERSWG meetings with other tRFMOs following on the agreed template (PR2021-06)	Secretariat		●		●	●	This template was recommended by ERSWG 14 in 2022. ERSWG may wish to consider revision to the template for optimising non-seabird ERS information sharing with other tRFMOs
(B) Governance Objective								
3 Commission Instruments								
i	Periodic review of this Action Plan to ensure effectiveness. (PR2021-20)	ERSWG					●	Suggest review takes place in alternating ERSWG starting at 2028 meeting.
ii	Assess whether Convention should be amended to clarify the role and mandate of CCSBT with regards to non-target species. (PR2021-03)	EC					●	The CCSBT Strategic Plan currently suggests that this be a long term (2028+) action.
iii								
(C) Effectiveness Objective								
4 Review of Existing Measures								
i	Advocate for strengthened CMMs on ERS at IOTC, ICCAT, and WCPFC. (PR2021-04)	Members		Ongoing				

		Responsibility	Priority	Short Term		Medium Term		Long Term	NOTES for discussion
ii.	ERSWG to consider whether the risks to ERS are sufficiently mitigated by the adoption of the “Resolution to Align CCSBT Ecologically Related Species measures with those of other tuna RFMOs”, and provide advice to EC on whether any additional actions are required.	ERSWG		●		●		●	The aim of this action is for ERSWG to make a determination on other ERS in the same way that it has provided the EC with advice on sharks.
5	Implementation								
i	Explore the potential for an incentivised mechanism to combat an increase in bycatch and address the impact of fisheries on living marine resources and the ecosystem. (PR2021-27)								Although recommendation was primarily aimed at incentivising a reduction in seabird bycatch, this could also be considered in the context of other ERS (e.g. turtles).