



SPRFMO
South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation

14TH MEETING OF THE SPRFMO COMMISSION

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Statement to the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
14th Meeting of the Commission

Pew Charitable Trusts



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The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer of the 14th Meeting of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) Commission. We appreciate the work of the Chair, Members, and Secretariat to convene this meeting. Pew urges Members to hasten the adoption of approaches that would provide greater resilience and stability to the region's fisheries and carefully consider the recommendations of the independent panel that conducted the 2nd performance review of SPRFMO, several of which are highlighted below:

Adopt proposals to meaningfully improve the management of jumbo flying squid

Jumbo flying squid harvested in the SPRFMO Convention Area is part of the world's largest cephalopod fishery. We agree with the 2nd performance review that it is inadequately managed and are concerned by the lack of a stock assessment to generate advice on sustainable levels of catch. Management procedures, also known as harvest strategies, offer the best possible chance to maintain healthy stocks despite uncertainties in the stock's biology, fishery, and ecosystem. **Pew urges members to set a clear goal to establish a management procedure for jumbo flying squid and devote resources needed to complete the scientific workplan for the stock.** Both actions are recommendations of the performance review. Improvements to data collection, monitoring and control of this fishery also are needed urgently to develop a coherent and effective management system. Important steps can be taken this year, such as through the adoption of electronic monitoring standards (see below). But more should be done. **The Commission should recognize the opportunity this meeting provides and take additional steps that offer meaningful improvements in the squid fishery by:**

- **Agreeing to develop hard limits for squid fishing** such as a total allowable catch envisioned in [Proposal 14](#), which would establish a mechanism that could implement a future management procedure;
- **Noting this work could take time, agree to an immediate reduction in fishing within the terms of CMM 18-2025 on squid**, reducing the number of vessels and total gross tonnage of vessels permitted to fish, as specified in [Proposal 15](#); and
- **Establishing a squid no-take buffer zone adjacent to coastal State EEZs**, drawing from options presented in [Proposal 14](#) and [Proposal 16](#), which would enhance enforcement and prevent unintended incursions.

We also urge Members to provide real-time catch reporting, ensure squid fisheries data from across the range of the stock are shared for scientific analyses, and consider the provision of additional data (such as oceanographic, biological, etc.) that may strategically reduce key scientific uncertainties.

Modernize the conduct of other SPRFMO fisheries by advancing management procedures

The Commission also is charged with managing valuable stocks of small pelagic fishes and bottom species and has commendable experience in developing a harvest control rule for jack mackerel. To further achieve progress, **the Commission should follow the recommendation of the 2nd performance review and agree to establish a harvest strategy approach for all SPRFMO fisheries.** Such a move would capitalize on the work already underway for jack mackerel, support aspirations for jumbo flying squid, and allow the Commission to prioritize precautionary approaches for its other fisheries, depending on the resources and data available for each. As steps in that direction, the Commission should:

- **Adopt management objectives for jack mackerel by including them in any amendments to CMM 01-2025** and recommit itself via a clear and resourced workplan to adopt a new management procedure for that stock in 2027. CMM 01-2025 calls for MP adoption this year, but the scientific work is incomplete. Having specific goals and tasking from managers would help to enable adoption next year without further delay; and
- **Establish a workplan to prioritize other fisheries for the management procedure approach.**

Importantly, the Commission should heed the advice from the majority of Members at the Scientific Committee and set the total allowable catch (TAC) of jack mackerel throughout its range at 1,642 kt, which would be a 15 percent increase from the 2025 catch advice (the maximum permitted by Annex K), and which is reflected in [Proposal 2](#) and [Proposal 3](#).

Amend the port State inspection measure to reflect effective practices

Effective port State measures (PSMs) are cost-effective ways to minimize the risk of IUU-caught fish entering international markets. Members have been leading the way by designating ports and inspecting a high rate of foreign vessels wishing to enter their ports carrying SPRFMO managed species. **To close the gaps, the Commission should adopt [Proposal 10](#) to amend CMM 07-2025 on port inspections** to fully align it with the *United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA)*. Fourteen of the 17 SPRFMO Members and one of the two Cooperating non-Contracting Parties have ratified or acceded to the PSMA. Key amendments would improve the efficiency of information sharing and/or support the use of the FAO's Global Information Exchange System (GIES), provide greater details and clarity on the circumstances regarding when port use can be denied, clarify the actions that a port State should take following inspection and in cases where evidence of IUU fishing is found, and provide guidelines to ensure authorized inspectors are properly trained.

Establish minimum standards for electronic monitoring to fulfil Commission requirements

Low levels of observer coverage of SPRMO fisheries limit the collection of independent catch and operational data for key stocks, reducing the accuracy of stock assessments and the effectiveness of CMMs. For example, as noted during the Scientific Committee meeting in 2023, observer coverage in the jumbo flying squid fishery in the Convention Area was less than 1 percent of fishing days.

A working group has developed a set of draft standards for the operation of electronic monitoring (EM) systems and provision of EM data, with the first priority being its application to the squid fishery to meet requirements for greater observer coverage starting in 2029. **The Commission should adopt a new CMM that establishes minimum requirements for EM programs, systems, and data and creates a process to audit and verify the EM data submitted by Members.** This would allow vessels to use EM to satisfy scientific and compliance data requirements while ensuring every vessel collects the same information in a similar way, helping to confirm data is consistent and useful.

Strengthen monitoring and reporting of at-sea transshipment activities

Strong monitoring and control of at-sea transshipment activities within the Convention Area is vital in detecting and deterring IUU fishing and transfer of SPRFMO's valuable fishery resources. By implementing the standards and practices set forth in the 2022 FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment, Members can help ensure that at-sea transshipment is carried out in a legal and sustainable way. **The Commission should revise CMM 12-2024 to require an onboard observer for fishing vessels that are transshipping at sea and to strengthen reporting on non-fish transfers, including the transfer of crew and other goods.**

Develop a plan to improve the compliance process

The work of the Compliance and Technical Committee (CTC) is key in making sure that the Commission's rules are followed and that non-compliance can be detected and deterred. Last year, the CTC reviewed the findings of the 2nd performance review, including the need for the "annual approval of a fully costed and funded work programme, with a three-year planning horizon". There was wide support from Members for this recommendation. The CTC recommended that the Commission establish a working group to create the work plan. **To carry out that recommendation, the Commission should create an intersessional working group to draft a CTC workplan and identify co-chairs to lead the work.** This would allow the CTC to prioritize its work, identify areas to strengthen compliance monitoring and review, and add efficiency and predictability to its processes and outcomes.

Strengthen fisheries transparency through beneficial ownership and catch documentation

SPRFMO's monitoring and enforcement efforts can be strengthened through enhanced transparency on vessel ownership. A major loophole in global fisheries governance is the ability of individuals profiting from IUU fishing to hide behind opaque corporate structures and flags of non-compliance. Without visibility into who ultimately controls fishing operations, enforcement disproportionately targets operators and crew, while the real beneficiaries are not held to account. **The Commission should explore a series of options for advancing beneficial ownership (BO) transparency,** including initiating a discussion on definitions and harmonization, BO data reporting and information sharing, better integration with the compliance process, and capacity building. To support the discussion at SPRFMO, Pew and other organizations have submitted a white paper on beneficial ownership and recommended actions SPRFMO can take.

Well-designed catch documentation schemes (CDS) play a crucial role in enhancing seafood traceability and verifying the legality of fish catches through complex international supply chains.

Aligning CDS across all RFMOs is key to combat IUU fishing and coordinate with other regional fisheries bodies, such as CCAMLR, IATTC, ICCAT and WCPFC, as well as major market states with similar schemes. Clear guidance on the format, use, and key data elements to be included are detailed in a report titled “[Aligning RFMO Catch Documentation Schemes](#)” and should inform the discussions of the technical working group. Other supporting documents available include FAO’s [Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes](#), FAO’s [Guide on Understanding and Implementing Catch Documentation Schemes](#), and FAO’s guidance document on [Advancing End-To-End Traceability](#).

Agree to assess the strategic direction of SPRFMO

Proactively tackling emerging threats such as climate change and interacting with other international processes – such as the World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) – may require new approaches. **We urge Members to adopt the recommendation of the 2nd performance review and prioritize an annual strategic discussion on where the Commission envisions itself in five to 10 years and how it plans to address these and other emerging issues.**

Advance the agenda for biodiversity protections of Salas y Gomez and Nazca Ridge

In addition to the above recommendations, we call attention to the ongoing work to assess the Salas y Gomez and Nazca Ridge. We urge Members to use the opportunity of meeting in person to advance the work of producing recommendations to the Scientific Committee in 2026 and the Commission in 2027. This area of 100 underwater mountains, stretching across 3,000 kilometers, is home to at least 82 threatened or endangered species and has been recognized by Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity as an Ecologically or Biologically Significant Area (EBSA). SPRFMO should close the Salas y Gómez and Nazca Ridges to fishing, which would ensure more robust ecosystem health.