



**Australian Government**

**Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

# **Southern Bluefin Tuna Management Advisory Committee SBTMAC 47 Teleconference**

## **Meeting Minutes**

**1 August 2023**

# Contents

1. Preliminaries/ Matters Arising.....	2
1.1 Welcome and Apologies.....	2
1.2 Adoption of agenda .....	2
1.3 Declarations of interest .....	2
1.4 Adoption of Minutes from SBTMAC 46 teleconference .....	3
2. Discussion Items .....	3
2.1 Proposed Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery 2024-25 research program and priorities (For Advice) .....	3
3. Other Business.....	6
4. Next Meeting .....	6
Attachment 1a .....	7
Attachment 1b .....	9

# 1. Preliminaries/ Matters Arising

## 1.1 Welcome and Apologies

1. The Chair opened the 47<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Southern Bluefin Tuna Management Advisory Committee (SBTMAC) and delivered an acknowledgement of country.
2. Apologies had been received prior to the meeting from recreational member Mr Brett Cleary and industry member Mr Phil Turner.
3. Participants on the SBTMAC 47 teleconference included:

Members	
Mr Max Kitchell	Chair.
Ms Selina Stoute	AFMA Member
Mr Andrew Wilkinson	Industry Member (Farm industry sector)
Mr Terry Romaro OAM	Industry Member (Longline)
Mr Marcus Stehr	Industry Member (Farm industry sector)
Mr Glenn Sant	Environment Member
Mr David Galeano	Scientific Member
Invited participants	
Mr Brian Jeffriess AM	Australian SBT Industry Association
Prof Gavin Begg	State Government
Mr David Ellis	Tuna Australia
Observers	
Mr Robert Wood	Executive Officer
Ms Ann Preece	Employee of CSIRO.
Dr Campbell Davies	Employee of CSIRO
Mr Jeremy Smith	AFMA

## 1.2 Adoption of agenda

4. SBTMAC adopted the agenda as circulated to members on 28 July 2023. The agenda is at **Attachment 1a**.

## 1.3 Declarations of interest

5. The Chair requested that members provide any updates to declaration of interests identified at SBTMAC 46. No updates were provided for the existing declarations. The new AFMA Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery (SBTF) Manager advised that he holds no conflicts of interest pecuniary or otherwise with the SBTF. The updated declarations of interest are at **Attachment 1b**.
6. The Chair noted that observers from CSIRO had an interest in research priorities to be discussed under Agenda Item 2 but noted that their input to the discussion is important part of SBTMAC's consideration of research priorities and they were invited to stay for that discussion.

## 1.4 Adoption of Minutes from SBTMAC 46 teleconference

7. SBTMAC noted the minutes from SBTMAC 46 (20 September 22) meeting as a true and accurate account of the discussions. Members noted that the comments received on the draft minutes circulated in December 2022 were incorporated.

## 2. Discussion Items

### 2.1 Proposed Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery 2024-25 research program and priorities (For Advice)

8. The paper for agenda item 2.1 noted that all Commonwealth managed fisheries are required to identify their research needs and prepare an Annual Research Statement for the 2024/25 cycle of research funding. SBTMAC was asked to consider three proposed research priorities and recommend any additional research priorities for consideration.

#### **SBT Inter-sessional science 2024/25-2026/27**

9. The CSIRO observer (Ms. Preece) presented an update to SBTMAC on SBT Inter-sessional science 2024/25-2026/27 as outlined in the agenda paper. In 2020, SBTMAC deemed the CSIRO SBT Inter-sessional science project as essential for providing ongoing scientific advice to AFMA. This support is to assist in the adequate monitoring, implementation, and success of management arrangements in the SBTF.
10. The ASBTIA invited participant (Mr Jeffriess) considers that the project delivers integral research that is essential to the fishery, but also triggers a whole range of other funding within CCSBT.
11. Mr Jeffriess raised a concern that there needed to more transparency on the distribution of Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) funding and sought guidance from AFMA on the process. The AFMA member advised that whilst AFMA collected the FRDC levy, it did not have a role in the management of those funds. That was a matter for FRDC. The AFMA member and Mr Jeffriess agreed for Mr Jeffriess to write to AFMA out-of-session so that his concerns could be better understood and therefore addressed.
12. Noting the importance of the intersessional work to inform effective management of the SBTF and to support the Australian contribution to CCSBT, the SBTMAC **recommended** the *SBT Inter-sessional science 2024/25-2026/27* as essential research for consideration by the AFMA Research Committee (ARC).

#### **Otolith and tissue collection from SBT caught in ETBF longline sector.**

13. Ms. Preece presented to SBTMAC on a CSIRO proposal to collect otoliths and tissue from SBT caught in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF) longline sector. It was noted that otoliths are not currently collected from the ETBF and this research would complement otolith sampling already being done for SBT. Ms Preece noted that a 2019 scoping study, that outlined a proposed sampling design, had been circulated prior to the meeting.
14. Ms Preece advised the following:

- a. Ageing fish in the ETBF would fill gaps in SBT age data by targeting age classes (4-10 year olds) not typically observed in other fisheries where otoliths are already being collected (age 2-4 in Purse Seine and age 10+ adults in Indonesia).
  - b. Based off the 2019 scoping study, 300 samples would need to be collected due to the wide range of age classes encountered on the east coast. These samples would be collected onshore from landed fish.
  - c. The second part of the study would be collecting tissue samples for epigenetic ageing which is now considered to be feasible for SBT to determine age through DNA degradation. Using the otoliths as a calibration mechanism, epigenetic aging can be used alongside length measurements to potentially detect changes in SBT growth.
  - d. With regards to feasibility of otolith collection, otoliths from fish exported with head off could be easily obtained. For fish exported with heads on, techniques of drilling for otoliths have been used in the past and its considered that this method could be used in this study.
  - e. the epigenetic work would inform routine tissue sampling across all Longline fisheries and that this work could be presented to CCSBT to inform tissue sampling in other SBT fisheries.
15. The Chair noted that the project would cost approximately \$70,000 per annum for analytical work over 3 years and that AFMA would be responsible for the fieldwork component which has not been scoped in terms of resourcing requirements.
16. The Chair asked whether AFMA feels they would be unable to deliver the fieldwork and is ruling the project out on that basis. The AFMA member stated the uncertainty with resource requirements to deliver fieldwork presents a risk to the project if it was to commence in July 2024. Notwithstanding that risk, the AFMA member noted SBTMAC views are still being sought on the project in terms of where the project sits as a research priority for the SBTf.
17. Members raised concerns over preserving the integrity of otoliths during longline operations and coring the brain when processing the fish. CSIRO observer (Dr Campbell Davies) felt confident that the risk of damaging the otoliths is low and that coring should leave otoliths intact. The likelihood of damage may vary with the operational environment, including skills and technique of the crew conducting on board processing.
18. It was noted that the data collected from this research would contribute to meeting Australia's obligations to CCSBT provide catch at age data for the longline fishery, given its growth over recent years, and would feed into the regular stock assessment process.
19. Dr Davies noted that there was the potential for efficiencies in the otolith collection process at port, through coordination with a recently approved collaborative project between SPC and CSIRO, which aims to collect otoliths for the same purpose for tropical tuna.
20. Noting CCSBT's priority to collect catch-at-age data for all fisheries and the growing proportion of SBT catch from the ETBF longline sector, SBTMAC **recommended** the proposed project *Otolith and tissue collection from SBT caught in the ETBF longline sector* be included in the Annual Research Statement.
21. However, SBTMAC agreed, in terms of priority, the project sits below other essential research like the *SBT Inter-sessional science 2024/25-2026/27* and **recommended** a high priority ranking for the project, second to essential in ranking.

**SBT e-tagging program to determine changes in movement and migration, and monitoring of climate impacts**

22. Ms. Preece presented to SBTMAC on a CSIRO proposal for a large-scale e-tagging project to better understand movement patterns and inter-annual variation in the range of SBT. It has been proposed as a research priority for the SBTF.
23. CSIRO considers updated e-tagging data for SBT is a priority with the most recent studies conducted in the late 2000's and that an updated project will assist understanding of whether distribution and movement of SBT has changed due to climatic conditions or other drivers and how this compares with the distribution of fishing by the Australian and international fleets over time.
24. Ms Preece advised the following:
- a. Spatial concentration (range contraction) of Japanese longline effort is creating uncertainty in the SBT stock assessment due to the increased number of spatial grids with low to no fishing effort.
  - b. The extrapolation or inference of SBT abundance in these grids of low to no effort impacts significantly on the outputs of the generalised additive model used to standardise CPUE leading to uncertainty in the CPUE abundance index.
  - c. An e-tagging project would provide up to date data on SBT movement and assist to reduce this uncertainty.
  - d. Tagging studies would be expected to inform management of SBT in parallel with Convention on Biological Diversity initiatives proposing to expand marine protected areas globally, in particular on the high seas.
  - e. A project using pop-up satellite tags focussed on small-scale movement in the GAB is already underway in partnership between FRDC and ASBTIA with outcomes from recent deployments circulated to members prior to the MAC.
  - f. CCSBT has been reluctant in the past to commit funding to high-cost projects and has instead encouraged member countries to cooperate on projects where outcomes are mutually beneficial.
  - g. SBT e-tagging projects by multiple CCSBT members are already underway; however, results have been mixed due to opportunistic sampling (tag deployments), lack of coordinated analysis of tag recoveries and challenges of coordinating research across CCSBT members.
  - h. Project costs are difficult to estimate as specific research objectives and tag deployment regime (age cohort/s, mix of archive and pop-up tags) are yet to be determined.
25. SBTMAC noted that a full-scale e-tagging study would only be feasible with support shared across CCSBT members. One member noted that improved cooperation on existing projects may support further tagging research and/or assist to update our understanding of SBT movement patterns. It was also noted the current FRDC/ASBTIA funded e-tagging project is likely to produce outcomes relevant to the design of effective protocols for a larger scale e-

tagging project including, for example, informing physical limitations to tag deployments (size of fish) and tag deployment regimes.

26. SBTMAC members sought to clarify whether the proposal being put forward is for the implementation of an e-tagging project or a scoping and design project to inform an e-tagging project. CSIRO confirmed that the proposal is for an e-tagging scoping study only, with a view to providing more accurate cost-benefit analyses for specific alternative questions, and simulation of sample sizes required to detect changes in migration since the 2000s.
27. CSIRO informed SBTMAC progressing a high-cost project like an e-tagging study for SBT is likely to be a step-by-step process but stressed the need to maintain awareness of the importance of better understanding SBT movement patterns to address stock assessment uncertainty.
28. SBTMAC agreed designing a well-structured e-tagging project with understood research objectives will provide a strong justification for a fully costed e-tagging project funded by all CCSBT beneficiaries.
29. The SBTMAC agreed a scoping study would be a good first step and, if supported, would provide the opportunity for Australia to demonstrate leadership in CCSBT, and promote implementation of a full-scale SBT e-tagging project. On this basis SBTMAC **recommended** a scoping project be included in the SBT annual research statement as a priority to be considered for FRDC/ComRAC funding.

### 3. Other Business

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30. The SBTMAC did not identify any other business for the meeting.

### 4. Next Meeting

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31. SBTMAC agreed that the next SBTMAC meeting should be held via teleconference on 08 September 2023.
32. The meeting was closed at 2:06pm.

## Attachment 1a

### Member, invited participant and observer's declarations of interest as advised to date.

Name	Declared Interests
Mr Max Kitchell	Employed as the SBTMAC Chair. No pecuniary interest in the SBT Fishery.
Ms Selina Stoute	Employee of AFMA, no pecuniary interest in SBT Fishery
Mr Andrew Wilkinson	Public Officer of company that owns and operates a tuna farm/catching business. Consultant to various SFRMs.
Mr Terry Romaro OAM	Director of a company that owns SBT, ETBF & WTBF quota SFR's & a Fish Processing factory & a factory that recycles SBT waste in Pt Lincoln. Mr Romaro further advised he is also a member of Squid Resource Assessment Group and Tropical Tuna Management Advisory Committee (TTMAC) and an invited participant on the Tropical Tuna Resource Assessment Group (TTRAG). Mr Romaro attends Indian Ocean Tuna Commission & CCSBT meetings representing Industry & is a Director of Tuna Australia P/L.
Mr Marcus Stehr	Board member of Clean Seas, Board member of Australian Maritime and Fisheries Academy and Board member of Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association. Mr Stehr is also an SBT quota holder.
Mr Phil Turner	Public Officer of company that owns and operates a tuna farm/catching business.
Mr Brett Cleary	Trustee International Game Fishing Association and Life Member of Game Fishing Association of Australia [GFAA]*. Mr Cleary has no pecuniary interest in SBT Fishery. *Have or are funding research into SBT.
Mr Glenn Sant	Employee of Traffic Oceania, which has a collaboration agreement with the University of Wollongong, no pecuniary interest in SBT Fishery.
Mr David Galeano	Employee of ABARES, no pecuniary interest in SBT fishery, noting that ABARES conducts research on a range of fisheries issues.
<b>Invited participants</b>	
Mr Brian Jeffriess AM	Chief Executive Officer of Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association.
Prof Gavin Begg	Executive Director, Fisheries and Aquaculture, PIRSA. No pecuniary interest in SBT fishery.
Mr David Ellis	CEO of Tuna Australia (industry association).
<b>Observers</b>	
Mr Robert Wood	Employee of AFMA, no pecuniary interest in SBT Fishery
Ms Ann Preece	Employee of CSIRO, no pecuniary interest in SBT Fishery. Noting that CSIRO conducts research on range of fisheries issues.



Name	Declared Interests
Dr Campbell Davies	Employee of CSIRO, no pecuniary interest in SBT Fishery. Noting that CSIRO conducts research on range of fisheries issues.
Mr Jeremy Smith	Employee of AFMA, no pecuniary interests in the Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery.

Southern Bluefin Tuna Management Advisory Committee

Meeting

1 August 2023

**Southern Bluefin Tuna  
Management Advisory Committee  
(SBTMAC) 47 Meeting**

Tuesday 01 August 2023 (Teleconference)

1:00pm to 2:00pm (AEST)

**AGENDA**

- 1. Preliminaries/Matters Arising**
  - 1.1. Welcome (including acknowledgement of Country) and apologies
  - 1.2. Adoption of agenda
  - 1.3. Declaration of interests
  - 1.4. Adoption of Minutes from SBTMAC 46 teleconference
- 2. Discussion Items**
  - 2.1. Proposed Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery 2024-25 research program and priorities (For Advice)
- 3. Other business**
  - 3.1. Other business
- 4. Date and venue for next meeting**