Report from the WPB on the data situation for billfish

Existing problem areas

The Third Meeting of the WPB identified a number of problem areas in the data situation for billfish. These included:

- Poor knowledge of the catches, effort and size-frequency from fresh tuna and deep-freezing longline vessels, especially from non-reporting fleets.
- Lack of accurate catch, effort and size-frequency data for the Indonesian longline fishery in recent years.
- Poor knowledge of the catches, effort and size-frequency data for gillnet and other artisanal fisheries, especially the gillnet/longline fishery in Sri Lanka.

Improvements since last meeting

Improvements have taken place in a number of areas. These include:

A better level of reporting: New NC, CE and SF datasets have been obtained from several countries as for South Africa and Seychelles longline fisheries.

Revision of the IOTC databases: Several revisions have been conducted during the last year on the IOTC databases. This has led to new datasets being input, especially regarding CE and SF statistics (Indonesia, Sri Lanka) and to new series of NC data for some countries.

An improved Vessel Record: More information has been obtained on the number and type of vessels operating under flags of non-reporting parties. This information comes mostly from various licensing schemes in the Indian Ocean and has become an important element in the estimation of the catches of non reporting fleets.

Improved estimation of catches of non-reporting fleets: The collection of historical and current information on the landings of small fresh tuna longliners in ports in the Indian Ocean has improved the accuracy of earlier estimates. The more complete Vessel Record also permitted the estimation by flag of the catches of deep-freezing longliners.

IOTC/OFCF sampling programmes: The collection of information on the activities of fresh tuna longliners landing in Phuket, Penang and Indonesia has continued during 2002 and 2003. This has led to more complete and accurate estimates of catches of these fleets. Other valuable data collected in the scope of these programmes refer to length frequencies which will allow length-length, length-weight and weight-length relationships to be established.

Plan of Action in Indonesia: A large scale operation involving several local and foreign institutions was initiated in April 2002 in Indonesia. The primary objective of this multi-lateral cooperation is building the necessary capabilities in the country, so as to allow Indonesia to generate good quality statistics in the near future. Sampling of landings of fresh tuna longliners operating in this country started in June 2002 , with more than 2,500 sampling conducted (200,000 fish monitored) between June 2002 and June 2003, with coverage levels ranging from 30% to 40% of the catches unloaded by longliners in Indonesia.

Japan NC and CE: New estimates of catches of Japanese longline vessels for 1950-1969 were conducted during 2002 on the basis of new information reported by Japan. New CE data was also submitted for 1950-2001 to replace previous estimates that did not consider the IOTC boundaries but the FAO ones.

Indonesia NC: The NC for 1975-2001 was replaced by new estimates that took into account the IOTC boundaries in the East.

Taiwan,China NC: The catches of Taiwanese longliners were updated during 2002 with new catches added for the period 1954-1965 and 1966-1978 catches updated.

The magnitude of the data collection quality problems facing the IOTC was emphasized, during the last meeting of the WPB, particularly with regard to trying to determine catches by the very large scale artisanal fisheries . While identifying the problems associated with this is relatively easy, coming up with resources to tackle these problems is a major barrier. The support provided by the IOTC-OFCF project will continue to improve the catch estimation, through separation of unidentified billfish catches into separate species.