

CMM 14a-2022

Conservation and Management Measure for Exploratory Fishing for Toothfish by New Zealand-Flagged Vessels in the SPRFMO Convention Area

(Supersedes CMM 14a-2019)

The Commission of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation;

RECALLING Article 22 of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of High Seas Fishery Resources in the South Pacific Ocean (the Convention) which provides that a fishery that has not been subject to fishing or has not been subject to fishing with a particular gear type or technique for ten years or more shall be opened as a fishery or opened to fishing with such gear type or technique only when the Commission has adopted cautious preliminary Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) in respect of that fishery and, as appropriate, non-target and associated or dependent species, and appropriate measures to protect the marine ecosystem in which that fishery occurs from adverse impacts of fishing activities;

RECOGNISING Articles 3(1)(a)(i) and (ii) of the Convention, which call on the Commission, in giving effect to the objectives of the Convention, to adopt CMMs that take account of international best practices and protect the marine ecosystem, particularly ecosystems with long recovery times following disturbance;

FURTHER RECOGNISING Articles 3(1)(b) and (2) of the Convention which call on the Commission to apply the precautionary approach and an ecosystem based approach to fishery resources under the mandate of the Convention;

NOTING the conservation value of relevant SPRFMO CMMs which will apply to activities anticipated to be undertaken pursuant to this measure, including, *inter alia*, CMM 13-2024 (Exploratory Fisheries) CMM 03-2023 (Bottom fishing) and 09-2017 (Seabirds);

AGREEING that new and exploratory fisheries should not be permitted to expand faster than the acquisition of information necessary to ensure that the fishery can and will be developed in accordance with the principles set out in Article 3 of the Convention;

RECOGNISING Article 22(2) of the Convention, which calls on the Commission to adopt preliminary measures that ensure that any new fishery resource is developed on a precautionary and gradual basis until sufficient information is acquired to enable the Commission to adopt appropriately detailed CMMs;

NOTING that at its fourth and seventh meetings the SPRFMO Commission approved New Zealand's proposals (CTC-03-09 and COMM4-WP09_rev4) and (COMM7-Prop13) to conduct exploratory bottom longline fishing from 2016 to 2021 inclusive.

FURTHER NOTING that at its ninth meeting, the Scientific Committee assessed New Zealand's updated proposal (SC9-DW01_rev1) to conduct additional exploratory bottom longline fishing during 2022, 2023, and 2024 for toothfish, limited to 240 tonnes greenweight retained annually. In its report, the Scientific Committee:



1. *Noted* New Zealand's proposal and its Fisheries Operation Plan to extend its exploratory demersal longline fishery for toothfish (limited at 240 tonnes greenweight retained annually);
2. *Recognised* the cautious, exploratory nature of the proposal;
3. *Recognised* the scientific benefits of the proposed data collection, especially for understanding the distribution, movement, spawning dynamics, and stock structure of toothfishes and supporting the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) stock assessment models for Antarctic toothfish;
4. *Agreed* that data and analyses from New Zealand's exploratory fishing continue to be shared in a timely manner with CCAMLR;
5. *Agreed* that a spatial stratification consistent with CCAMLR's should be adopted by SPRFMO to facilitate the collection and sharing of data;
6. *Approved* the Data Collection Plan included in the proposal;
7. *Advised* the Commission that the proposal is acceptable in terms of Articles 2 and 22 of the SPRFMO Convention, CMM 13-2021 (exploratory fisheries), CMM 03-2021 (bottom fisheries), and the Bottom Fishing Impact Assessment Standard.

ADOPTS the following CMM in accordance with Articles 8, 20 and 22 of the Convention:

Objectives

1. To provide for exploratory bottom longline fishing for toothfish in the Convention Area for the purpose of obtaining scientific data to support the following objectives:
 - a) Continue mapping the bathymetry of the fishable area (shallower than about 2,500 m) in mid-Pacific to the north of the SPRFMO-CCAMLR boundary;
 - b) Document the spatial distribution, catch rates, and relative abundance of Antarctic and Patagonian toothfish in likely suitable habitat to the north of the CAMLR Convention area by latitude, area, and depth;
 - c) Characterise the biology, life history and spawning dynamics of both species of toothfish in the area;
 - d) Tag sufficient numbers of toothfish to inform stock linkage and life history studies, and, for use in the multi-area CCAMLR stock assessment model;
 - e) Collect information on distribution, relative abundance, and life history of bycatch and other associated or dependent species;
 - f) Collect toothfish eggs using plankton net tows, if practical;
 - g) As feasible given the availability of equipment, conduct Continuous Plankton Recorder (CPR) tows for planktonic studies and potentially for fish eggs; and
 - h) Collect acoustic data using existing procedures as carried out within the CAMLR Convention Area.

Definitions

2. For the purposes of this measure:
 - a) "toothfish" means both Patagonian toothfish (*Dissostichus eleginoides*) and Antarctic toothfish (*Dissostichus mawsoni*);
 - b) "bottom longline" means standardised integrated weight bottom longline gear as specified in the [CCAMLR Gear Library](#);
 - c) "observer" means any observer from a national observer programme or service provider accredited according to the provisions of CMM 16-2024 (Observer Programme).



Application

3. This measure applies to exploratory fishing for toothfish as described in SC9-DW01_rev1_“Proposal for exploratory bottom longlining for toothfish by New Zealand vessels, 2022-2024: Fisheries Operation Plan, suggested Data Collection Plan, and impact assessments”.
4. None of the obligations in this measure exempt a Member or CNCP from complying with any Convention obligation or any other CMMs adopted by the Commission.

Details and Specification of Exploratory Fishing Activities

5. Fishing for toothfish, using the bottom longline method, may be conducted in the exploratory fishing research blocks identified in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Corner positions for the eight exploratory fishing research blocks

Exploratory fishing research block	Latitude	Longitude
L	56° 00.0' S	155° 00.0' W
	56° 00.0' S	150° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	150° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	155° 00.0' W
M	56° 00.0' S	145° 00.0' W
	56° 00.0' S	150° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	145° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	150° 00.0' W
N	52° 00.0' S	140° 00.0' W
	52° 00.0' S	145° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	140° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	145° 00.0' W
O	52° 00.0' S	135° 00.0' W
	52° 00.0' S	140° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	135° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	140° 00.0' W
P	52° 00.0' S	135° 00.0' W
	52° 00.0' S	130° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	130° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	135° 00.0' W
Q	52° 00.0' S	130° 00.0' W
	52° 00.0' S	125° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	125° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	130° 00.0' W
R	52° 00.0' S	125° 00.0' W
	52° 00.0' S	120° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	120° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	125° 00.0' W
S	52° 00.0' S	120° 00.0' W
	52° 00.0' S	115° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	115° 00.0' W
	60° 00.0' S	120° 00.0' W

6. The first exploratory trip each year may occur any time in 2022, 2023, and 2024, with a maximum of four trips each year, with some of the trips between August and October each year to characterize post-spawning dynamics. The remainder of the trips between March and October will provide additional information on spawning dynamics, distribution, and movement patterns.



7. The Scientific Committee will review results each year at its annual meeting and advise the Commission on progress, including whether any stock indicators show sustainability concerns and what, if any, additional measures might be required to manage bycatch of deepwater sharks or other non-target species.

Total Allowable Catch

8. The annual toothfish total allowable catch shall not exceed 240 tonnes (greenweight) in each of 2022, 2023, and 2024 unless the Scientific Committee at its 2022 or 2023 meetings advises a lower TAC. Fish that are tagged and returned alive to the sea shall not be counted against this limit. The annual catch limit of 240 tonnes will allow the collection of a significant amount of scientific information, will also allow for an adequate number of tagged fish to be returned to the sea. This catch limit is based on the individual research block catch limits (40 tonnes) and the ability to survey a maximum of 6 research blocks per year. This is a precautionary approach. The risks of interactions with seabirds and marine mammals are also incorporated in the programme design and protocols.
9. The catch limit was determined based on an effort spreading approach designed to minimise the chance of localised depletion with the following considerations:
 - a) Clusters will be no more than 5 sets, with a maximum of 6,900 hooks for any set, and no more than 17,250 hooks per cluster;
 - b) Clusters will be separated by at least 10 nm (calculated as the minimum distance between any part of any set in any two clusters) and will not be set within 10 nm of a cluster already set within a voyage or fishing season (pre- and post-spawning);
 - c) Aim to conduct at least 3 clusters for each research block (within the constraints of fishable ground, sea ice, and operating conditions);
 - d) Some sets will be toward the deeper end of the expected depth range for toothfish (deeper than 2,200 m), contingent on ice and other operating conditions and the risk of the backbone line snagging the bottom;
 - e) A minimum of three research blocks should be surveyed, with a maximum catch limit of 40 t per research block to ensure geographic spread if catch rates are high in one or more research block;
 - f) A maximum combined catch limit of 240 tonnes greenweight;
 - g) To the extent practical, similar locations to be fished pre- and post-spawning to facilitate separation of spatial and seasonal trends; and
 - h) No more than 50% of the total catch limit to be taken outside the post-spawning period August to October.
10. Catch and effort shall be monitored on a set-by-set basis and fishing operations will cease in that year or that research block once any of the limits in paragraphs 8 and 9 have been caught.
11. The companies and crews of the proposed vessels shall have experience working to restrictive catch limits and use intensive monitoring of catch retained. As the catch limit of 240 tonnes is approached, any or a combination of the following measures to constrain the retained catch within the relevant limit(s) shall be considered:
 - a) shorter sets;
 - b) a seawater tank will be maintained on board such that live fish in good condition can be retained in case they need to be tagged and returned to meet the catch limit;
 - c) the tagging rate will be progressively increased.
12. Fishing activity undertaken pursuant to this measure will not be considered to be a precedent for future allocation decisions.



Authorised Vessels

13. The fishing vessels *San Aspiring*, and *Janas* shall be authorised to undertake fishing pursuant to this measure. In the event that either the *San Aspiring* or *Janas* are unavailable, an alternate vessel of similar capability and capacity shall be authorised to undertake fishing pursuant to this measure only after the vessel has been notified by New Zealand to the Executive Secretary.
14. In determining the suitability of an alternate vessel New Zealand shall consider, *inter alia*:
- the vessel's ability to conduct the exploratory fishing proposed in paper SC9-DW01_rev1;
 - the master and crew's history and track record in comparable research or exploratory fishing;
 - the ability of the vessel to provide suitable accommodation, facilities, and operating support for an observer;
 - the ability of the vessel to maintain rigorous mitigation of risks to seabirds and marine mammals;
 - any history of Illegal, Unreported or Unregulated (IUU) fishing by the vessel. A vessel on the SPRFMO IUU list or the IUU list of another competent regional fisheries management organisation shall not be accepted as an alternate vessel.

Management Measures

15. Fishing pursuant to this measure shall only take place in accordance with SC9-DW01_rev1 "Proposal for exploratory bottom longlining for toothfish by New Zealand vessels, 2022-2024: Fisheries Operation Plan, suggested Data Collection Plan, and impact assessments".
16. Because of the likelihood of shared stocks of toothfish, fishing pursuant to this measure shall, as far as possible, be conducted consistent with relevant measures in force in the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) Area, including the following:
- CCAMLR's protocol for research longline fishing on small, isolated features (see [CM 41-10](#), 2014). Consistent with CCAMLR surveys in adjacent areas, the following rules shall apply:
 - clusters of bottom longline sets are allowed, with no rules for minimum separation between sets;
 - no more than 5 sets per cluster;
 - no more than 6,900 hooks shall be in a set;
 - no more than 17,250 hooks shall be in a cluster;
 - clusters of sets will not be within 10 nm of a cluster already set within a voyage or a fishing season (pre- and post-spawning). This will be calculated as the minimum distance between any part of any set in any two clusters.
 - A minimum tagging rate of three fish of each *Dissostichus* species per greenweight (live weight) tonne of retained catch shall be implemented. The rules applied by CCAMLR in the immediately adjacent CCAMLR SSRUs 'north region', where tagged fish were released starting in early 2015, shall be applied ([CM 41-01 Annex C](#)). These rules require a minimum tagging size overlap statistic (a comparison between the observed length frequency from vessel biological information and the size composition of fish returned alive with tags, see [CCAMLR's calculator](#)) of at least 60% once 30 or more *Dissostichus* of a species have been successfully released with tags.
17. Standardised integrated weight bottom longline gear (IWL, see the [CCAMLR gear library](#)) shall be used for all fishing pursuant to this measure.
18. If 250kg or more of deepwater sharks (all species in class Chondrichthyes combined on all sets within the cluster) are caught in a cluster of sets, then no further clusters will be set within 10 nm of the location of that cluster until the information from that voyage has been reviewed by the Scientific Committee.



Data Collection

19. In undertaking fishing pursuant to this measure the vessel shall, to the extent possible, collect all the data as set out in the paper submitted to the Scientific Committee (SC9-DW01_rev1) and any further data requested by the Scientific Committee for its annual evaluation and assessment.
20. Any vessel authorised to undertake fishing pursuant to this measure shall be fully capable of complying with SPRFMO data standards and reporting as required under CMM 02-2022 (Data Standards) and CMM 03-2023 (Bottom Fishing), and CCAMLR [CM 22-07 \(2013\)](#) related to encounters with potential VMEs. New Zealand will submit all data using the CCAMLR C2 catch and effort form for longline to at least the standard required by CMM 02-2022 (Data Standards). In addition, the observer aboard each vessel shall complete, in full, CCAMLR eLongline forms.

Marine Mammals, Seabirds, Turtles, and other Species of Concern

21. A vessel fishing pursuant to this measure shall use the following mitigation methods:
 - a) the vessel shall use integrated weight line as described in the [CCAMLR gear library](#) with a weighting of 50 g of lead per metre of backbone line;
 - b) tori (streamer) lines shall be deployed above the lines being set;
 - c) all lines shall be set in accordance with CMM 09-2017 (Seabirds);
 - d) there shall be no dumping of offal while lines are being set or while lines being hauled;
 - e) any offal or discards shall be macerated by machine prior to discarding;
 - f) discarding shall take place only at the end of a haul or while steaming; and no biological material shall be discarded for at least 30 minutes before the start of any set or during any set;
 - g) discarding may only take place from the opposite side of the vessel from the hauling position;
 - h) a bird exclusion device (BED) shall be used to prevent birds entering the hauling area, to the extent allowed by sea ice and prevailing weather;
 - i) other methods such as water spray, movement, et cetera, shall be used as appropriate to deter aggressive feeders from approaching the line.
22. The following information shall be collected for marine mammals, seabirds, turtles, and other species of concern:
 - a) standardised seabird and marine mammal abundance counts should be undertaken by observers during the setting and hauling of each line;
 - b) other opportunistic observations, photography and identification of marine mammals shall be undertaken in collaboration with crew;
 - c) the observer shall have a target of observing at least 10% of hooks hauled for marine mammal, seabird and turtle captures;
 - d) multi-camera EM systems recording both set and haul operations shall be in use;
 - e) all marine mammals, seabirds, turtles, and other species of concern captured shall be identified, and photographs taken of all live birds released and any birds colliding with the ship that can be recovered;
 - f) all dead birds shall be retained for formal identification and necropsy.



23. All information specified in CMM 03-2023 (Bottom Fishing) relating to bottom fisheries and all data necessary to assess potential encounters with VMEs shall be collected to enable assessment and monitoring of the distribution of marine ecosystem in the areas fished.

Monitoring

24. A vessel undertaking fishing pursuant to this measure shall carry an observer, as well as a dedicated assistant experienced in at-sea scientific data collection to assist the observer with biological measurement and data collection. Observer data shall be collected in accordance with SPRFMO data standards (CMM 02-2022) and shall include gear deployment and retrieval data, catch and effort information, biological data collection, and information on marine mammals, seabirds, reptiles and other species of concern.

25. In addition to carrying an observer, a vessel undertaking fishing pursuant to this measure shall be equipped with a video monitoring and recording system to be located over the hauling position to ensure that all hauled lines and hooks are observed or recorded on video. All recorded footage must be provided to the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries at the end of the voyage.

26. The vessel shall also be equipped with at least two tamperproof Automatic Location Communicators that meet SPRFMO standards for VMS reporting (as per CMM 06-2023, at least once every hour) and can respond to polling at any rate if required.

Review

27. This CMM shall expire following the regular meeting of the Commission in 2025.

28. The exploratory fishery in 2024 will mark the ninth year of this exploratory fishery. Pursuant to CMM 13-2024 (Exploratory Fisheries), any further fishing in this fishery shall be undertaken only in accordance with a CMM adopted by the Commission to manage the fishery as an established fishery.