

September 2021



REGIONAL FISHERIES COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

**WORKING GROUP ON FISHERIES MANAGEMENT
TWELFTH MEETING**

**4-5 October 2021
VIRTUAL**

Implementation of the RECOFI Recommendation on Kingfish Stock

Executive Summary

The Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) approved the “RECOFI Recommendation (RECOFI/X/2019/1) on the Assessment and Management of Kingfish (*Scomberomorus commerson*) stocks in the RECOFI Area”, at its tenth session in Rome, Italy in July 2019. (The Recommendation is attached below in Appendix 1.) This document give some background to the adoption of the Recommendation in order to discuss its current implementation and needs moving forward.

The WGFM is invited to:

- consider and comment on the implementation of the RECOFI Recommendation (RECOFI/X/2019/1) on the Assessment and Management of Kingfish (*Scomberomorus commerson*) stocks in the RECOFI Area
- provide feedback on the request for 10 years of historical data on length frequency and catch and effort, if not yet submitted
- Outline any challenges in implementation and activities to assist in the coming inter-sessional period

Introduction

1. The Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) approved the “RECOFI Recommendation (RECOFI/X/2019/1) on the Assessment and Management of Kingfish (*Scomberomorus commerson*) stocks in the RECOFI Area”, at its tenth session in Rome, Italy in July 2019. (The Recommendation is attached below in Appendix 1.) This document give some background to the adoption of the Recommendation in order to discuss its current implementation and needs moving forward.

Background

2. The 7th Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (May 2013) acknowledged that the joint assessment bringing together GCC work on narrow-barred Spanish mackerel and that of the other RECOFI members such as Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Iraq, and possibly also Pakistan and Yemen would be the first essential step toward establishing effective management for the stock of this species in the RECOFI region and adjacent areas, with a special emphasis on the importance of good communication and information sharing prior to the workshop. The Commission underlined the joint assessment of kingfish will require by all members full commitment in submitting relevant data and

information in a timely manner. The Commission reaffirmed the request made at the sixth session of RECOFI for the Secretariat to invite Pakistan and Yemen to this regional meeting. The Commission ranked the implementation of the kingfish stock assessment as the first priority in the 2013-2014 intersession workplan and acknowledged the kind offer of the Sultanate of Oman to host the meeting. In accordance with the previous request of the Commission, an invitation was sent to Pakistan and Yemen via respective FAO Country Offices.

3. The Workshop on the Regional Joint Assessment of Kingfish (*Scomberomorus commerson*) was held in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman on 17-18 February 2019. It was attended by six participants from the following RECOFI member countries: Iran (IR), Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in addition to the FAO Secretariat. The primary objectives of the regional stock assessment were:

- To provide fishery scientists, managers and decision-makers of the RECOFI countries with an opportunity to meet and discuss the common issues related to narrow-barred Spanish mackerel fisheries from data collection, research, management strategy and regulations;
- To provide a platform for scientists to work together on real narrow-barred Spanish mackerel data, conduct stock assessment and develop science-based management strategy for the long term sustainability of the fishery and the social and economic benefits of the region;
- To discuss and develop a cost-effective and practical institutional arrangement and a regional plan for cooperation and collaboration in the sustainable management of the shared narrow-barred Spanish mackerel resource.

4. A first attempt to assess the status of kingfish stock in the RECOFI region was based on the application of a production model to calculate Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) using catch data and resilience of the species and is known as CMSY (Froese et al., 2017). A pseudo-cohort analysis was also carried out as a way to start accounting for the length/age structure of the landings of different member countries and fishing gears. Data used in the analyses were the following: official FAO annual landings of RECOFI countries for the period 1986-2015, revised and integrated with 2016- 2017 landings data provided by workshops participants; length frequency data of the landings by country and gear for the period 2013-2018.

5. CMSY is a method for data-poor stock assessment based on the Schaefer production model. CMSY is a method for data-poor stock assessment based on the Schaefer production model. CMSY estimates biomass, exploitation rate, MSY and related fisheries reference points from catch data and resilience of the species. Probable ranges for the maximum intrinsic rate of population increase (r) and for unexploited population size or carrying capacity (k) are filtered with a Monte Carlo approach to detect 'viable' r-k pairs. The r and k parameters estimated by CMSY summarize these life-history traits in a certain marine area, given the species' interactions in that specific environment. Thus, the CMSY estimates indirectly involve natural mortality caused by predation and somatic growth depending on available food resources, and recruitment conditioned by environmental conditions and by parental egg production. One general criticism of surplus production models is that they do not account for size and age structure. The effect of this assumption is a typical tendency to overestimate sustainable productivity, especially in stocks where overfishing has truncated the age structure, reduced regeneration time and age at maturity, reduced competition for food, and consequently increased somatic growth. Differently from most of the surplus models, CMSY tries to account for this effect by explicitly reducing recruitment at small stock sizes and simulating depletion and stock collapse at low biomass levels (Froese et al., 2017).

6. Results of the analysis at the workshop indicated a MSY value of 27 300 tonnes; lower than the annual landings in the RECOFI area based on production data at the time of the workshop 36 293 tonnes in 2017. The stock biomass showed a decreasing trend in the ten years prior to the workshop, with the biomass very close to biomass at MSY (BMSY): B/ BMSY =1.06(1.0-1.31). The estimated F/FMSY is 1.21 (1.01 -1.32) indicating that the current fishing mortality (F) exceeded the F required to exploit the stock at MSY.

7. The workshop made a number of recommendations which were then presented at the 11th meeting of the RECOFI Working Group on Fisheries Management, including the following:

- Each Member State, starting in 2019 and for each subsequent year shall provide to the RECOFI Secretariat, prior to 1st July, previous year national data on catch, effort and length frequency information on kingfish,
- The quality of data submitted pursuant to this recommendation shall be regularly analyzed, with stock assessment methodology every year with a view to ensuring the formulation of scientific advice for the Commission.
- In order to facilitate the standardized collection of data for stock assessment purposes and socio-economic aspects of kingfish fishery, the RECOFI Secretariat shall develop a standard protocol for the collection of kingfish data. The rationale behind the design of the data collection protocol is to focus the data requirements for stock assessment and fishery management purposes and encompass them into a single, simple and easy-to-understand manual, providing Member States with the necessary indications for the collection and transmission of data related to fisheries to the RECOFI Secretariat. Moreover, the information gathered should be sufficient and reliable enough to review the status of the stock, to assess the economic and social dimensions of the fleets and to provide scientific advice on the status of the resources, as well as to allow the Commission to develop recommendations to manage this resource. The main characteristics of the protocol should include:
 - clear identification of the main thematic areas of the data collection (defined as “tasks”) together with the definition of their purposes
 - detailed description of all the data variables;
 - simplified level of data aggregation for requested variables; a fleet segmentation scheme;
 - simple measures of fishing effort;
 - well-defined data collection practices;
 - online data transmission procedure.
- Establish a permanent RECOFI Working Group on Stock Assessment under the WGFM in order to assess the kingfish stock on a regular basis.

8. Following a technical discussions, the WS on kingfish stock assessment in RECOFI area agreed on key recommendations for the consideration of the WGFM:

- Considering that, the preliminary stock assessment showed that the stock is exploited above MSY, with an estimate (F/F_{msy}) ratio of 1.25 the fishing mortality has to be reduced by 20% as minimum, the workshop recommends among the other likely management and conservation measures, to introduce a closed season on an annual basis.
- Seeing that there is already an annual closed season for kingfish fishery in some RECOFI Member countries, an option could be to have the closed season during the same period, which is from the 15th of August to the 15th of October, for all the fishing gears exploiting the stock.
- Accordingly, the group recommends the annual closed season in the RECOFI Area for kingfish fishery should be between 45 and 60 days.
- These measures shall apply to all the fleets including commercial and recreational fishing.
- These measures shall be reviewed annually and may be amended by the Commission based on the results of the stock assessment.

Eleventh meeting of the WGFM

9. The WGFM, at its eleventh meeting, adopted the proposed recommendations with certain modifications. The RECOFI Secretariat was asked to submit these recommendations to the tenth Session of the Commission, in RECOFI Recommendation format for its adaptation consideration by the Commission in conformity with the provision of paragraph 1 (b) and (h) of Article III and Article V of RECOFI Agreement.

Tenth Session of RECOFI

10. The Commission discussed the WGFM recommendation for the establishment of a permanent RECOFI Working Group on Stock Assessment under the WGFM in order to assess the Kingfish stock on a regular basis, but decided that the Kingfish stock assessment tasks are within the responsibilities of the WGFM.

11. The Commission approved the “RECOFI Recommendation (RECOFI/X/2019/1) on the Assessment and Management of Kingfish (*Scomberomorus commerson*) stocks in the RECOFI Area” as attached below in Appendix 1.

12. The Commission agreed upon a RECOFI-wide annual closed season for Kingfish to take place from the 15th of August to the 15th of October, to ensure that it will be during the same period for all countries and for all the fishing gears, except hook and line, exploiting the stock.

13. The Commission agreed a Programme of Work and Budget, which included holding a workshop on the regional joint stock assessment of the Kingfish as its first priority.

Inter-sessional Activity of the RECOFI Secretariat

14. The RECOFI Secretariat, through the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, sent a communication to relevant Ministries of RECOFI Member Countries, reminding them of the importance of compliance with this Recommendation, and requesting the submission of length frequency data and catch and effort data for the previous 10 years. To date, only two years of data were submitted by a limited number of countries. The status of submissions should be presented by each Member Country at this meeting.

15. In August 2021, Iran (Islamic Republic of) submitted a report on the Kingfish for 2019, which is circulated to participants.

Appendix 1: RECOFI Recommendation (RECOFI/X/2019/1) on the Assessment and Management of Kingfish (*Scomberomorus commerson*) stock in the RECOFI Area

The Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI).

RECALLING that the purpose of RECOFI is, inter alia, to promote the development, conservation, rational management and best utilization of living marine resources,

ACKNOWLEDGING the need to strengthen management of shared fish stocks in the RECOFI area,

MINDFUL that effective conservation and management measures require the application of the precautionary approach and the best scientific information available,

CONSIDERING that the preliminary stock assessment made at the Workshop on Regional Joint Assessment of Kingfish (*Scomberomorus commerson*), which was held in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman on 17-18 February 2019, showed that the Kingfish stock is exploited above MSY, with an estimate (F/Fmsy) ratio of 1.25, the fishing mortality has to be reduced by 20% as minimum,

RECALLING that the 11th meeting of RECOFI's Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) (Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. 19-21 February 2019 agreed that reduction of current catches should be agreed to end overfishing and, whenever possible, to enable the stocks to rebuild,

REAFFIRMING the strong desire of RECOFI Members to promote closer international cooperation and harmonization in fisheries of mutual interest;

NOTING that temporal restrictions and the other technical conservation and management measures are considered to have a beneficial effect on kingfish fishery in the RECOFI Area,

AWARE that minimum data reporting requirements for the RECOFI Area are fundamental to promoting long-term sustainable fisheries of shared fish stocks;

ADOPTS in conformity with the provision of paragraph 1 (b) and (h) of Article III and Article V of RECOFI Agreement that:

1) Each Member State, starting in 2019 and for each subsequent year would provide to the RECOFI Secretariat, prior to 1st July, previous year national data on catch, effort and length frequency information on kingfish,

2) The quality of data submitted pursuant to this recommendation shall be regularly analysed, with stock assessment methodology every year with a view to ensuring the formulation of scientific advice for the Commission.

3) In order to facilitate the standardized collection of data for stock assessment purposes and economic aspects of kingfish fishery, the RECOFI Secretariat shall develop a standard protocol for the collection of kingfish data. The rationale behind the design of the data collection protocol is to focus the data requirements for stock assessment and fishery management purposes and encompass them into a single, simple and easy-to-understand manual, providing Member States with the necessary indications for the collection and transmission of data related to fisheries to the RECOFI Secretariat. Moreover, the information gathered should be sufficient and reliable enough to review the status of the stock, to assess the economic and social dimensions of the fleets and to provide scientific advice on the status of the resources, as well as to allow the Commission to develop recommendations to manage this resource. The main characteristics of the protocol should include:

- clear identification of the main thematic areas of the data collection (defined as “tasks”) together with the definition of their purposes,
- detailed description of all the data variables,
- simplified level of data aggregation for requested variables,

- a fleet segmentation scheme,
- simple measures of fishing effort,
- well-defined data collection practices, and
- online data transmission procedure.

4) Among the other likely management and conservation measures, Each Member State shall impose a closed season to reduce fishing effort for Kingfish fishery on an annual basis:

- Seeing that there is already an annual closed season for Kingfish fishery in some RECOFI Member countries, an option could be to have the closed season during the same period, which is from the 15th of August to the 15th of October, for all gill net fishing gears exploiting the Kingfish stock.
- Annual closed season in the RECOFI Area for Kingfish fishery shall be between 45 and 60 days.
- These measures shall apply to all the Kingfish fleets.
- These measures shall be reviewed annually and may be amended by the Commission based on the results of the stock assessment.