



SC14 Meeting Report Annex 23: Statements

a. Chile's opening statement

Mr. Chair, Dr. Ricardo Oliveros-Ramos, distinguished Heads of Delegation, esteemed scientific colleagues, and members of the Secretariat:

Chile opens its participation in the fourteenth meeting of the Scientific Committee of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation by reaffirming its firm commitment to the management of straddling fish stocks in the South Pacific, grounded in the best available scientific evidence and in strict adherence to the Convention. Our agenda in Tórshavn addresses technical challenges of principal importance for the governance of our resources:

1. Following the roadmap to finalize the Jack Mackerel (*Trachurus murphyi*) Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE), adopted by the Commission in Panama, and building upon the outcomes of the SC17 workshop that evaluated candidate management procedures, it is now incumbent upon us to resolve the outstanding issues and finalize the recommended procedure for consideration by the Commission at its upcoming meeting in Brussels (2027).
2. It is essential to consolidate progress on the stock assessment for Jumbo Flying Squid (*Dosidicus gigas*) to deliver a robust diagnosis following this meeting, thereby strengthening management measures and ensuring the long-term sustainability of this fishery.
3. We must advance the criteria for transitioning exploratory fisheries to established fisheries, validate protection indicators for Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs), and maintain continuity in the scientific characterization supporting the protection initiative for the Salas, Gómez and Nazca ridges.

However, the achievement of these objectives rests upon an indispensable pillar: multilateral scientific cooperation within a strictly technical forum such as this Committee. In this regard, irrespective of Chile's position regarding the war between Russia and Ukraine, as expressed in others international meetings, our delegation emphasizes that scientific cooperation must be safeguarded above geopolitical circumstances, ensuring the technical rigor of data and the full participation of all members and Cooperating Non-Contracting parties (CNCP). The non-participation of a member actively fishing in the Convention Area—and which provides core data and key assessment models for Jack Mackerel and other species—undermines the quality of technical deliberations and creates data gaps that compromise the robustness of the scientific advice this Committee is mandated to submit to the Commission. Consequently, Chile calls for a practical solution to be found for this situation and invites the European Union to extend its good offices to this end.

Thank you very much.



b. Chile's statement on the 2026 status of Jack Mackerel

Chile express its disagreement with the 2026 stock status presented to SC14, particularly regarding the substantial change in stock perception: moving from a resource considered fully recovered and located in the green zone of the Kobe plot, to one whose trajectory is now estimated to drop within the red or yellow zones of the Kobe plot, depending on the BRP used.

For more than 10 years, successive assessments indicated a sustained recovery of the jack mackerel stock, from the historically low levels observed during 2010–2012, eventually reaching a consolidated status within the green zone.

In Chile's view, this new perception arises primarily from modifications in key input information introduced during the 2026 benchmark process, during which substantial effort was also directed toward developing an operating model for the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE).

Given the limited time available and the intensity of the work undertaken during the 2026 Benchmark Workshop, additional review is required before such a drastic change in stock perception is consolidated. Consistent with best benchmark practices, it is advisable to incorporate independent external expert review to help resolve outstanding methodological questions, particularly those associated with shifts in input data, their relative weighting, and their influence on model fit and estimated stock status.

Specifically, further review should address:

The influence of the Peruvian abundance indices, including the transition from one standardized CPUE series to two separate nominal CPUE series for the artisanal and industrial fleets, and the consequences of these changes for model fit and stock trajectory.

The effect of the criterion used to introduce temporal variability through year blocks in the selectivity pattern of the northern Chile acoustic survey, and its subsequent influence on the historical and terminal biomass trajectories.

The appropriate balance among goodness-of-fit, model parsimony, stability, and biological plausibility, especially when alternative configurations lead to substantially different perceptions of stock status.

When a new model configuration produces a major revision of the historical biomass trajectory and substantially changes the estimated stock status, such a result warrants careful, comprehensive review before being adopted as the basis for management advice.

For these reasons, Chile recommends maintaining the stock status reported by SC13 for 2026, while undertaking a more comprehensive review of the stock status presented to SC14 and of the methodological changes driving the revised stock perception.



c. European Union's statement on the jack mackerel benchmark

Periodic benchmark review is a routine, necessary feature of stock assessment in every major international fisheries body: used precisely to ensure that model assumptions and data inputs reflect the best available science. Jack mackerel underwent exactly this process in 2026, in order to ensure the operating model defining population dynamics reflects current knowledge. This stock assessment is the basis on which the MSE and candidate MPs were tested for long-term management, with its associated risks and trade-offs properly characterized. A benchmark producing a materially different picture of the stock is evidence the process is working, not evidence that it should be discounted.

Revising input data is itself standard scientific practice. As methodologies improve, as our understanding of how data were collected deepens, and as reporting requirements change over time, historical data series are routinely revised, and this is true of every long-running stock assessment. This is not unique to jack mackerel: ICES benchmarks have produced comparably large revisions to stock status for other major stocks, including Northeast Atlantic mackerel, Western Baltic spring-spawning herring, and blue whiting underscoring that a revision of this scale, while significant, is a normal outcome of rigorous reassessment rather than a signal of a flawed process.

On the numbers themselves. The benchmark revised the terminal-year(-comparable) spawning stock biomass downward by 60%: from approximately 15.2 million tonnes in the SC13-adopted assessment to approximately 6.0 million tonnes in this year's model, compared at the same reference year. Of that total revision, roughly 91% originates in the benchmark itself and only about 9% (–803 kt) from this year's routine SC14 update cycle, which includes the addition of the 2026 data year exactly as has been done in every previous cycle.

Within the benchmark, the changes were not uniformly downward, and their individual scale. The downward revision came from three data sources, mainly data drive from data provided from Peru and Chile, in total 10.4 million tonnes. The remaining benchmark steps, taken together, added back roughly 2.1 million tonnes.

We would also highlight that the fisheries independent survey used in this assessment, the Chile Acoustic-North survey's showed in the SC13 model diagnostics that was the main driver for the increase in biomass. This survey is limited in time and space and, as the current assessment diagnostics show, has tracked different components of the population inconsistently across years; its treatment deserves continued attention, but that is an argument for refining it further, not for disregarding the benchmark that identified the issue or stopping a valuable independent survey.

It is very important that the scientific process must not be prejudged by a preferred outcome. Selecting or rejecting a model configuration based on which stock status it implies, would compromise the integrity of the assessment process. It is also difficult to reconcile accepting the SC14 model as the best available representation of stock dynamics in the MSE, while simultaneously declining to use it as the basis for management advice to the Commission. A model cannot simultaneously be the best available science and not fit for the purpose that science exists to serve.



The EU agrees that independent external review is valuable and should be a routine feature of the benchmark process. We note, however, that ample opportunity existed to request it, from the benchmark workshop in May 2025 through to the present SC meeting, and no such request was made during that window. The EU would have supported it. We would welcome building a standing external review step into future benchmarks, but that is a procedural improvement for next time, not grounds for setting aside the results of this one.



d. Ecuador's statement on jack mackerel *status quo*

Ecuador supports the continuation of the current management framework for jack mackerel during the next annual cycle, 2027. This position involves provisionally maintaining the quantitative parameters and allocation key of CMM 01-2026 (TAC), pending the implementation of the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) plan, which should provide the recommendation for 2028. We must consider the performance of the current year, 2026, in which we began with low catches; however, from the second half of the year onward, catches increased significantly.



e. Ecuador's statement on precautionary measures for jumbo flying squid

Considering that the Scientific Committee has not formulated explicit recommendations on precautionary measures applicable to the jumbo flying squid (*Dosidicus gigas*) fishery in the South Pacific; that the Working Group examined different management options and requested Members to submit duly substantiated proposals; and that, in response to that request, Ecuador submitted two proposals for precautionary measures to be applied in 2027, which have not been reflected in the report, the Delegation of Ecuador requests that the following measures suggested to the Scientific Committee be placed on record:

- Precautionary catch limit. Ecuador proposed recommending that the Commission consider establishing a precautionary catch limit for jumbo flying squid in the high seas portion of the Convention Area. The initial limit would be based on the maximum annual catch recorded in that area during the ten-year period from 2016 to 2025, covering all fishing gear types and expressed in live weight, which amounts to 520,407 tonnes.
- This level is proposed as an initial available ceiling of a provisional, precautionary and reviewable nature, intended to prevent uncontrolled growth in catches.
- Precautionary regulation of fishing effort. As a second option, Ecuador proposed establishing the catch limit together with a regulation of fishing effort. Under this measure, fishing days would be reduced to 70% of the average annual number of fishing days per operational vessel recorded during the preceding five years.

Both proposals should apply specifically to fishing activities conducted in the high seas portion of the Convention Area and without prejudice to the sovereign rights of coastal States over the resources within areas under their national jurisdiction.

Ecuador considers that maintaining the status quo does not constitute a sufficient precautionary response, as it allows catches and fishing effort to continue increasing without effective limits. Existing scientific uncertainty should not be used as a basis for postponing the adoption of measures intended to contain the growth of the fishery and reduce risks to the sustainability of the resource.

The Delegation of Ecuador requests that this statement and the proposed measures be included as an annex to the report of the Scientific Committee so that they may be formally transmitted to the Commission for its consideration.



f. China's statement on precautionary management advice for jumbo flying squid

China deems it appropriate to note the following:

China prefers to maintain the status quo rather than introduce additional measures, such as catch or effort limits, in the precautionary management advice on jumbo flying squid to be submitted to the Commission for consideration. China considers that the main participants in the jumbo flying squid fishery, including both coastal and high-seas Members, have already implemented a range of precautionary management measures, including catch limits¹ and seasonal closures, to support the long-term sustainable utilization of jumbo flying squid in the Southeast Pacific.

With regard to catch limits, China noted that catch limit advice is generally based on stock assessment results, with robust scientific evidence providing the basis for management advice. The SC is making significant progress in advancing the stock assessment work, China considers that it would be appropriate to allow the ongoing scientific work to further develop before considering a specific catch limit.

With regard to reducing fishing effort, China noted that the Commission adopted CMM 18-2026 last year, resulting in a 15% reduction in the number of registered vessels. China considers that the implementation and effects of this measure should be duly taken into account when considering any further effort-related measures. In this context, it is also important to take into account differences among Members in terms of fleet capacity and actual fishing activity, including the circumstances of Members with relatively few registered vessels and limited fishing days.

China noted that considerable uncertainty remains regarding the future development and strength of El Niño conditions into 2027. Moreover, preliminary analysis of the relationship between CPUEs and the Niño 1+2 index does not provide consistent evidence of a general decline in jumbo flying squid abundance associated with stronger El Niño conditions.

In this regard, China considers that any additional precautionary measures should be based on the best available scientific evidence, taking into account the measures already in place and the uncertainties surrounding future environmental conditions.

¹ Chile and Peru have implemented catch limits in their respective national jurisdictional waters for many years. China launched a pilot implementation of catch limits in the high seas of the Southeast Pacific on 1 April 2026. A catch quota of 281,000 tonnes was established for the period from April to September. For the period from October to December, the catch quota will be adjusted, taking due consideration of quota uptake, stock status, and environmental conditions.



g. Chile's statement on compatibility of measures for straddling jack mackerel – Minimum size and implementation in SPRFMO

Reports submitted to the SPRFMO Scientific Committee indicate additional challenges: some Members' fleets have been fishing on high seas areas adjacent to areas well-known as recurring juvenile jack mackerel grounds at sizes well below the minimum legal limits enforced by adjacent coastal states, Chile and Peru, in their jurisdictional waters. A similar situation has been documented in high seas areas near the Chilean oceanic islands known as "La Bota".

Under this scenario, significant catches of the juvenile fraction of the jack mackerel stock occur on the high seas without any minimum size requirement. This creates a severe regulatory asymmetry, as minimum sizes are strictly required in the jurisdictional waters of Chile and Peru, directly compromising resource sustainability, recruitment, and productivity while driving growth overfishing.

Regulatory asymmetry is relevant to this Scientific Committee because the disparity of measures within and beyond national jurisdictions, when catches below minimum sizes occur, creates distortions in the fishing mortality and recruitment projections and leads to growth overfishing, while it undermines national scientific and conservation efforts made by coastal countries.

Such disparity contradicts the foundational principles agreed upon by SPRFMO members. The 2012 SPRFMO Convention reaffirms in its Article 4 the Principle of Compatibility, which is also expressed in the Article 7 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA), or simply the New York Agreement of 1995. Under such principle, SPRFMO Commission must avoid undermining existing coastal state measures, and ensure that the measures adopted by the Organization do not have a harmful effect on living marine resources in the SPRFMO area.

To prevent the ecological and economic damages, most global fisheries legislation, enforce complementary measures, such as minimum legal catch sizes and tolerance percentages. Biologically, these measures aim to:

Ensuring reproduction by allowing individuals of a species to reach sexual maturity. This involves capturing only specimens that have reached a size, in average, that guarantees the fish has reproduced at least once before being caught, thus allowing them to produce offspring.

Avoiding growth overfishing by limiting the capture of too many immature individuals, which prevents rapid population depletion by maintaining enough adults to complete the biological cycle and preserve the food chain balance. Growth overfishing drastically reduces both total reproductive biomass and fishery economic viability.

Securing the future of fishing by protecting the life cycle of fish, allowing populations to recover, safeguarding the recruitment of new generations for future seasons, thus ensuring long-term work and food for coastal communities.

Coastal SPRFMO members like Chile and Peru have long enforced standards on minimum size of jack mackerel and their respective tolerances.



In Chile, Decree No. 458 of 1981, issued by the Ministry of Economy, established a minimum catch size for the Chilean jack mackerel resource of 26 cm fork length (FL), reaffirmed in 2012, with a tolerance margin modified in 2020 to 25% per month, based on the critical size that maximizes weight yield. In Peru, Ministerial resolution No. 209-2001-PE set the minimum capture size at 31 cm total length (TL) with a maximum tolerance of 30%. According to SPRFMO conversion standards, 31 cm TL is roughly equivalent to 26 cm FL, meaning both regulations impose similar minimum requirements, differing only in their tolerance percentages.

While Chile implements good fishing practices protocols with “move on” rules, juvenile avoidance, and voluntary fleet moratoria to protect the stock, the lack of compatible measures with similar standards in high-seas areas heavily undermines such efforts.

Consequently, it is strongly recommended that the SPRFMO Scientific Committee analyze and establishes a minimum catch size and tolerance percentage for jack mackerel in the high seas that fully aligns with those enforced in the jurisdictional waters of coastal states, thereby controlling growth overfishing and contributing to restore true compatibility in the fishing activity.
