The First Small Scientific Working Group
on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs)
for the North Pacific Fisheries Commission

Tokyo, Japan
4-5 August 2014
Hakuyo Hall, Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology

Meeting Report

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Japan provided opening remarks.   A list of participants is provided as Attachment 1.

2. Appointment of Chair and Rapporteur

Dr. Loh-Lee Low (USA) was selected as the Chair and Mr. Michael Clark (USA) was selected as the Rapporteur.

3. Adoption of Agenda

The draft agenda was reviewed and adopted without changes (Attachment 2).

4. Report of the Final FAO Workshop on the Global Database for Vulnerable Ecosystems (May 7-9 2014, Rome)

Dr. Masashi Kiyota of Japan provided a report of the Workshop that is attached as Attachment 3.   Additional discussion regarding data to be submitted by the Interim Secretariat was made under agenda item 5.

5. Review of Current Interim and Voluntary Measures of NPFC

The Interim Secretariat provided a presentation on current interim and voluntary measures for the purpose of providing FAO VME-Data Base that is included as Attachment 4.   The NPFC submission will be circulated via email for all NPFC Participants to provide comment before the submission deadline.   NPFC Participants are invited to review and identify areas for further discussion and approve up-load of the information.   FAO needs

the data to populate the data base by Sept. 1.

6. Discussion on VME Encounter Protocols

There were three major presentations made:

1. Overview of the of VMEs management process in NPFC and other RFMO/As. This presentation was made by Dr. Kiyota (SSWG-VME1/WP4/J and Attachment 5). His presentation compared VME decision making process for various RFMO/As (NAFO, NEAFC, SEAFO, CCAMLR and GFCM). The SSWG endorsed the VME process described for NPFC. This is a necessary and logical process to follow to make decisions on identification and protection of VMEs. Participants discussed existing interim measures for encounter protocols for NPFC and identified relevant data gaps and potential next steps to help address some of these gaps and better refine the interim measures. Japan provided a draft proposal in Attachment 5 that all participants agreed upon in principle with the understanding that additional data is key. Japan continues to conduct research regarding indicator species, VMEs, and potential SAIs on seamounts. Data from research surveys and commercial operations is essential to better refining the interim measures.

2. Encounters of VME indicators in commercial fishing and scientific research. This presentation was given by Dr. Takeshi Hayashibara of Japan. Data on coral encounter rates were reviewed from Japanese commercial fishing vessels from 2010 to 2012 (Attachment 6). Details of coral encounter rates by fine geographic details were presented but participants agreed to block out detailed geographic locations because they reveal confidentiality details of fishing locations of the Japanese fishing vessels. In general, the fishing and research vessel data shows (a) low encounter rates of corals in the existing fishing areas over the tops of specific seamounts, and (b) some higher coral encounter rates in some adjacent non-fished areas that were surveyed by research vessels. Catch rates of indicator species, both in commercial trawls and research beam trawls, are so low that a threshold level triggering the move on requirement will be difficult to discern.

3. NMFS Workgroup report on encounter protocol on VMEs in the NPFC area. This presentation was made by Dr. Low. The report addresses the five specific tasks from the 9th Multilateral Meeting of the Parties in September 2010 (SSWG-VME1/Ref.4/US).

   i. Determine the distribution of encounters in fishing and survey operation with the 4 orders of corals: Alcyonacea, Antipatharia, Gorgonacea, and Scleractinia. The NMFS workgroup did not have sufficient information on the distributions and rates of encounter of the fisheries. These type of data were provided for the Japanese fishing and research vessels in Dr. Hayashibara's presentation (Attachment 6) above.

ii. Estimate catch rates of corals brought up by the fishing gear.   These types of data were provided for the Japanese fishing vessels in Dr. Hayashibara's presentation (Attachment 6) above.

iii. Estimate catch rates encountered but not brought up by the fishing gear.   There was insufficient data to make these estimates.

iv. Estimate catch rates encountered in directed fisheries on corals and catch rates of encounters not brought up by the fishing gear.   There was insufficient data to make these estimates.   In any case, these were historical fisheries that are no longer conducted in the Emperor Seamounts area.

v. Compare catch rates with those of other RFMOs.   Different catch rates and encounter trigger rules of some other RFMOs (NAFO, CCAMLR) were noted.

7. Other Matters

Participants discussed opportunities for further collaborative research, including participation in ongoing and future surveys.   The SSWG also took the opportunity to discuss the need to develop a database collection format.

8. Planning of the Next SSWG VME Meeting (if appropriate)

Not recommending another meeting at this time.   The SWG/SC may have additional guidance on whether or not an additional meeting is necessary.

9. Adoption of the Record of the Meeting and Report to the SWG

The report was adopted by participants.

10. Closing of the Meeting