



North Pacific Fisheries Commission

NPFC-2026-SWG MSE PS07-Final Report

**7th Meeting of the Joint SC-TCC-COM Small Working Group on Management
Strategy Evaluation for Pacific Saury (SWG MSE PS)
REPORT**

3–4 February 2026

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North Pacific Fisheries Commission
7th Meeting of the Joint SC-TCC-COM Small Working Group on Management Strategy
Evaluation for Pacific Saury (SWG MSE PS)

3–4 February 2026

WebEx

REPORT

Agenda Item 1. Introductory items

1.1 Opening of the Meeting

1. The 7th meeting of the joint SC-TCC-COM Small Working Group on Management Strategy Evaluation for Pacific Saury (SWG MSE PS) was held online via WebEx on 3–4 February 2026. The meeting was attended by Members from Canada, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Chinese Taipei, and the United States of America. The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew) attended as an observer. Dr. Quang Huynh participated as an invited expert. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Derek Mahoney (Canada) and Dr. Toshihide Kitakado (Japan), the co-Chairs of the SWG MSE PS.
2. Dr. Kitakado (hereafter “co-Chair”) opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.
3. Mr. Alex Meyer was selected as rapporteur.

1.2 Adoption of agenda

4. The SWG MSE PS agreed to amend the title of Agenda Item 3 to “Review of the adopted HCR and its results,” amend the title of Agenda Item 3.2 to “HCR-generated catch level for 2026,” and to add “Review of the adopted HCR” as a new Agenda item 3.3.
5. The agenda was adopted as revised (Annex A). The List of Documents and List of Participants are attached (Annexes B, C).

1.3 Meeting logistics

6. The Science Manager, Dr. Aleksandr Zavolokin, outlined the meeting arrangements.

Agenda Item 2. Overview of the outcomes of previous NPFC meetings

2.1 SWG MSE PS06

7. The co-Chair presented the outcomes and recommendations from the SWG MSE PS06 meeting (NPFC-2026-SWG MSE PS07-IP01).

2.2 COM09

8. The Science Manager presented the relevant outcomes from the 9th Commission meeting. He highlighted the adoption of Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) 2025-08 for Pacific Saury, including:
 - (a) Revision of the annual catch limit for the entire area, with a 10% reduction in accordance with the interim harvest control rule (HCR) and the limiting of the total allowable catch (TAC) for the Convention Area to 60% (121,500 MT) of the annual catch limit in the entire area (202,500 MT);
 - (b) Revision of individual Members' TACs and the requirement to ensure that discards of Pacific saury count against these catch limits;
 - (c) Addition of an exemption from the requirements stipulated in Paragraph 10 (b) for any Member committed to reducing its annual total catch 65.5% from its reported catch in 2018;
 - (d) Addition of a requirement to ensure that catches, including incidental catches of other NPFC species, and any discards are recorded and reported; and
 - (e) Addition of a requirement for Members to annually report the catch limit that they diverted, if they have diverted part of their catch limit for areas under their jurisdiction to their own catch in the Convention Area in accordance with Paragraph 13.

2.3 SSC PS15 and 16

9. The co-Chair presented the outcomes and recommendations from the 15th and 16th meetings of the Small Scientific Committee on Pacific Saury (SSC PS; NPFC-2026-SWG MSE PS07-IP03).
10. Chinese Taipei highlighted its concerns with the current Pacific saury stock assessment using the Bayesian state-space surplus production model (BSSPM). Chinese Taipei pointed out the mismatch between the stock assessment results and fisheries observation, noting improvements in fishery indicators, such as higher catch and larger fish in 2025, and the fact that the latest assessment does not include fisheries data from the latest fishing season (2025) due to the current SSC PS meeting timing. Chinese Taipei also raised concerns about the retrospective pattern and scaling instability in the stock assessment results. It also suggested that the stationary productivity assumption may be inappropriate. Furthermore, Chinese Taipei suggested that the CPUE may be biased due to potential hyperstability or hyperdepletion and changing fleet behavior. It also raised concern about the lack of consensus among Members on how to treat the assessment results. Lastly, Chinese Taipei pointed out that the estimated annual catch level derived from the stock assessment is subject to significant uncertainty and should be interpreted with caution.
11. The co-Chair explained that the Scientific Committee (SC) has proposed a modified meeting schedule that would enable the SSC PS to include not only the most up-to-date fisheries-

independent data but also the most up-to-date fisheries-dependent data from the latest fishing season in each future stock assessment. He suggested that the SSC PS could also conduct preliminary work to update Members' CPUEs with data from the 2025 fishing season and test whether this would significantly impact the previous stock assessment results. Regarding the retrospective patterns, the co-Chair pointed out that these have been smaller than the past and that they may be a separate issue from the scaling issues, and that the reason for the retrospective patterns may not be due only to the model, but also the fact that some datasets used in the assessment are changed each year. The co-Chair also noted the need to pay careful attention to the nature of Members' CPUE estimations, taking into account changes in fishery operations such as time, space, gear configuration, and resource-selectivity, and the need to consider how to make greater use of fisheries-independent information.

12. China echoed the concerns raised by Chinese Taipei regarding the stock assessment model specification, assumption, and input data, as well as the plausibility of the stock assessment results. China pointed out that fisheries observations suggest that the stock status is much better than the stock assessment results indicate, which undermines managers' and stakeholders' confidence in the stock assessment. China expressed particular concern with the choice of reference points, especially B_{MSY} , as the estimation of B_{MSY} is unstable and makes it difficult to know the true stock status.
13. Japan acknowledged the concerns raised by China and Chinese Taipei but emphasized that the current stock assessment results using BSSPM, which was developed through intensive discussions among Member scientists and has been in place for years, represent the best available information. Japan reminded the SWG MSE PS that the current interim HCR was established through discussions and negotiations at the SSC PS, the SC, the SWG MSE PS, and the Commission, and that it clearly stipulates how to calculate the catch level for Pacific saury, as described in Annex 1 of CMM 2025-08. Japan also pointed out that the Commission has agreed on using this interim HCR until an age-structured model is developed or the Commission decides otherwise, and Japan suggested that the SSC PS continue to work on addressing the technical issues raised by Members as it develops an age-structured model.

Agenda Item 3. Review of the adopted HCR and its results

3.1 TAC for 2025

14. The SWG MSE PS noted the TAC set for 2025 in CMM 2025-08.

3.2 HCR-generated catch levels for 2026

15. China noted and referred to paragraphs 36 and 37 of the SSC PS16 meeting report, which highlight substantial uncertainties and limitations in the current Pacific saury stock assessment. As noted in the report, the model exhibits instability and considerable uncertainty in key

parameter estimates and does not adequately capture the non-stationary population dynamics driven by environmental variability. In addition, the assessment results show scaling instability across years as new data are incorporated, leading to fluctuations in estimated biomass, biological reference points, and stock status, which undermines the consistency and comparison of annual assessments. In light of these unresolved scientific concerns, China considered that the current stock assessment results are not sufficiently robust to be used as inputs to the HCR for the calculation of TAC, and therefore cannot support their application for management advice at this stage.

16. Japan reiterated that the current stock assessment represents the best available scientific information. Japan also reminded the SWG MSE PS that the current interim HCR represented a compromise, as Japan would have preferred a larger maximum allowable change (MAC) than 10%. Japan emphasized that the process described in the HCR for generating catch levels for 2026 should be followed.
17. The SWG MSE PS noted that the interim HCR for Pacific saury under CMM 2025-08 was used to calculate the annual catch level in the 2026 fishing year, while noting the lack of endorsement from China. Based on assessment inputs from Japan and Chinese Taipei, the unconstrained annual catch level for 2026 = $(B_{2025} * F_{MSY} * (B_{2025} / B_{MSY})) = 91,180$ MT. Based on the adopted interim HCR, the constrained 2026 catch level would be $0.9 \times 202,500 = 182,250$ MT.

3.3 Review of the adopted HCR

18. Chinese Taipei pointed out that as Pacific saury had been overfished for many years, it made sense that industry needed to endure a reduction in TAC to support the recovery of the stock. At the same time, it is necessary to strike a balance between ensuring the survival of the existing industry and allowing the stock to recover to the MSY level. Chinese Taipei explained that when Members considered the candidate interim HCRs, the table of the summary of key outputs from the simulations for each option (SWG MSE PS05 Report, Table 4) was an important reference for many Members. That table showed that for 2024–2028, the simulations of TAC were all above 200,000 MT, which is the level that Chinese Taipei's industry would be able to endure. It was on that basis that Chinese Taipei agreed to adopt the interim HCR. However, in recent years, the unconstrained catch level based on the stock assessment has been much lower than the median value in the simulations. Given this trend, the HCR is expected to reduce the TAC by 10% every year for many years, which would threaten the survival of Chinese Taipei's Pacific saury industry. Chinese Taipei suggested that the original simulation and the HCR that was adopted were overly optimistic and unrealistic. Chinese Taipei believed that in order to ensure the sustainability of its fisheries and the recovery of the Pacific saury stock, the current interim HCR needs to be reviewed and

amended if necessary. Chinese Taipei therefore intends to present a proposal at COM10 to amend the current interim HCR. The proposal is still being prepared but two important aspects will be the extension of the period of recovery and a change in the HCR's reference points.

19. China shared Chinese Taipei's concern regarding the difference between the catch levels in the simulations and the stock assessment results, pointing out that the two showed opposite trends. China explained that it too had agreed to the current interim HCR based on the belief that the TAC trend would be turning upwards after years of decline, as the simulations seemed to suggest.
20. The co-Chair explained that the numbers in the table that Chinese Taipei referred to were the median results of base case simulations. He explained that these simulations were conducted based on the 2023 stock assessment results and various assumptions and that they therefore contained uncertainties. One such assumption was that the stock assessment results would show an increasing trend in the biomass level. However, the biomass levels estimated by the stock assessments have not actually improved as fast as the median values under the base case scenario. The co-Chair explained that the SWG MSE PS also conducted simulations based on a robustness scenario in which a potential negative productivity scenario was assumed and he noted that the current biomass level estimated by the stock assessment lies between the base case and robustness case of the simulations.
21. Japan acknowledged that the stock assessment results deviate somewhat from the simulation results but pointed out that this often occurs in MSE processes. Japan also reminded Members that when the simulations were presented, it was emphasized that they contained wide uncertainty ranges. Japan noted that although the stock assessment results differed from the median results, they were still within these uncertainty ranges and within what scientists considered to be plausible. Japan emphasized that even if the stock assessment results and the simulations differ, that is not a valid reason for not following the adopted interim HCR this year.
22. Canada noted Chinese Taipei's point that its industry could not endure annual catch levels dropping below 200,000 MT. Canada pointed out that it could be one of the concrete management objectives to ensure annual catch levels are above 200,000 MT, and that the SWG MSE PS could design management procedures and evaluate their ability to meet this objective in MSE simulation. Canada emphasized that the development and testing of such potential management objectives is an important role of the SWG MSE PS and encouraged Members to develop and propose more such objectives.
23. Pew welcomed the discussion on management objectives and supported Canada's comments.

24. The United States recognized Members' positions and concerns with the TAC but reminded Members that the current interim HCR is a compromise. The United States pointed out that during discussions that led to the adoption of the interim HCR, it had supported a MAC of 40% to allow the quicker recovery of the Pacific saury stock. The United States also noted that, nevertheless, the current HCR is working in aiding the recovery of the stock.
25. Pew reiterated its view that the overall objective of ensuring the recovery of the Pacific saury stock has not yet been achieved. Pew acknowledged the legitimate concerns raised by Members but encouraged the SWG MSE PS to discuss and explore these issues further as part of the process of developing a full MSE. Pew encouraged the SWG MSE PS to not lose sight of its goal of developing a full MSE and to devote resources to completing that work in a timely manner.
26. The co-Chair recognized the concerns raised by Members about the current interim HCR but pointed out that the SWG MSE PS has also been tasked with developing and conducting a full MSE. He suggested that the SWG MSE PS focus on addressing these concerns as part of its current task of developing a full MSE and work towards developing an age-structured operating model, which could better account for the biological characteristics of Pacific saury and consider environmental perspectives. The co-Chair explained that the existing interim HCR could be tested in the full MSE and that other management procedures (MPs) could also be considered, such as other model-based MPs (e.g., using BSSPM) or empirical MPs. In addition, he pointed out that under the newly proposed meeting schedule for the SSC PS, future assessments would be able to include not only the most up-to-date fisheries-independent data, but also the most up-to-date fisheries-dependent data, which would decrease the data lag between assessment time period and annual advice.

Agenda Item 4. Discussion toward development of management procedures (MPs) as a mid-term goal

4.1 Management objectives

4.2 Operating models

4.3 Management procedures

4.4 Performance indicators

27. The SWG MSE PS reviewed the draft table of elements that could be considered when developing a full MSE.
28. The invited expert presented a summary of the work done in 2025 to develop an SS3 assessment for Pacific saury and provided additional comments regarding the ongoing MSE process (NPFC-2026-SWG MSE PS07-IP04). Further improvements have been made to the SS3 model structure and parameterization. The high uncertainty in the preliminary assessment

outputs compromises the reliability and predictability of annual advice. Age-structured models such as SS3 have higher biological realism but may not increase reliability as retrospective patterns remain. Furthermore, the short lifespan of Pacific saury makes estimation difficult because new, unobserved cohorts could significantly impact the next year's abundance. Nonetheless, age-structured models can serve as operating models to evaluate robustness of management procedures. The philosophy of MSE is to develop complex operating models to test robustness of simpler procedures (BSSPM, empirical types). The SWG MSE PS should use MSE to evaluate the "value" of decreasing data lag. The SWG MSE PS should also identify lessons learned from previous work to inform improvements on communication of MSE results (for example, emphasizing that projections are not predictions or forecasts). However, the invited expert also cautioned that the assessment model that explains the dynamics better does not necessarily ensure better management.

29. The SWG MSE PS considered potentially extending the timelines of the draft management objectives for the full MSE.
30. The SWG MSE PS agreed that the final MP should include an exceptional circumstances protocol.
31. Chinese Taipei suggested changing the order of priority among the draft management objectives and elevating "Avoiding unsustainable state of the stock" above "Recovery of the stock." Japan and the United States expressed their preference for maintaining the current order of priority.
32. Canada reiterated its suggestion that a potential additional management objective could be to maintain annual catch levels above 200,000 MT to reflect Chinese Taipei's concerns about the viability of its Pacific saury fishery.

Agenda Item 5. Other matters

33. No other matters were raised.

Agenda Item 6. Timeline and future process

6.1 Timeline

6.2 Future process with assistance of SSC PS

6.3 Workplan till SSC PS17&18 and SWG MSE PS08 meetings

34. The SWG MSE PS prepared two schedules, with future tasks, for developing a full MSE (Annex D). One schedule follows the original timeline set by the Commission (2026–2027). The other schedule follows a longer timeline (2026–2028).

35. Some Members expressed their initial preference for the longer timeline, noting the heavy workload required and Members' time and capacity constraints. One Member acknowledged the concerns raised by other Members but expressed initial preference for adhering to the original timeline set by the Commission. There was general agreement that a decision of the Commission would be required to lengthen the currently agreed timeline, which will end in 2026–27.
36. The SWG MSE PS agreed to forward both schedules (Annex D) to the Commission for its consideration.
37. Pew expressed disappointment at the potential delay of the full MSE development by a year. Pew encouraged Members to strive to complete the full MSE as soon as possible. Pew also noted that in both of the proposed schedules, management objectives would be a focus of discussions at the next SWG MSE PS meeting and strongly encouraged Members to present concrete proposals of management objectives at that meeting to ensure robust discussions.
38. The invited expert stated that initial MSE results would be helpful to advance discussions on refining objectives, revising candidate MPs, and interpreting results. Until then, much of the concepts are currently abstract. A two-year timeline would also facilitate these discussions and MSE revisions.

Agenda Item 7. Recommendations to the Commission

39. The SWG MSE PS recommends that the Commission note the following regarding the annual catch level calculated for the 2026 fishing year:
 - (a) The interim HCR for Pacific saury under CMM 2025-08 was used to calculate the annual catch level in the 2026 fishing year, although there was lack of endorsement from China.
 - (b) Based on assessment inputs from Japan and Chinese Taipei, the unconstrained annual catch level for 2026 = $(B_{2025} * F_{MSY} * (B_{2025} / B_{MSY})) = 91,180$ MT.
 - (c) Based on the adopted HCR, the constrained 2026 catch level would be $0.9 \times 202,500 = 182,250$ MT.
40. The SWG MSE PS recommends the hiring of an invited expert to support future meetings of the SWG MSE PS and the technical work to develop a full MSE.
41. The SWG MSE PS recommends that the Commission endorse one of the schedules prepared by the SWG MSE for full MSE development and to endorse the holding of meetings of the SWG MSE PS accordingly (Annex D).
42. The SWG MSE PS recommends that the Commission reaffirm the importance of including scientists, managers, and stakeholders at future meetings to facilitate communication and

completion of this important work.

Agenda Item 8. Adoption of Meeting Report

43. The report was adopted by consensus.

Agenda Item 9. Close of the Meeting

44. Mr. Mahoney thanked the SWG MSE PS for its productive discussions and looked forward to making further progress in future meetings. He also expressed his thanks to the Secretariat for hosting the meeting, the Rapporteur for his support, and his fellow co-Chair for his hard work.

45. The meeting closed at 12:30 on 4 February 2026, Tokyo time.

LIST OF ANNEXES

Annex A – Agenda

Annex B – List of Documents

Annex C – List of Participants

Annex D – Meeting schedule and tasks for developing a full MSE for Pacific saury

Annex A:

Agenda

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- 1.1 Opening of the meeting
- 1.2 Adoption of agenda
- 1.3 Meeting logistics

Agenda Item 2. Overview of the outcomes of previous NPFC meetings

- 2.1 SWG MSE PS06
- 2.2 COM09
- 2.3 SSC PS15 and 16

Agenda Item 3. Review of the adopted HCR and its results

- 3.1 TAC for 2025
- 3.2 HCR-generated catch level for 2026
- 3.3 Review of the adopted HCR

Agenda Item 4. Discussion toward development of management procedures (MPs) as a mid-term goal

- 4.1 Management objectives
- 4.2 Operating models
- 4.3 Management procedures
- 4.4 Performance indicators

Agenda Item 5. Other matters

Agenda Item 6. Timeline and future process

- 6.1 Timeline
- 6.2 Future process with assistance of SSC PS
- 6.3 Workplan till SSC PS17&18 and SWG MSE PS08 meetings

Agenda Item 7. Recommendations to the Commission

Agenda Item 8. Adoption of report

Agenda Item 9. Close of the meeting

Annex B:
List of Documents

MEETING INFORMATION PAPERS

| Document Number | Title |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| NPFC-2026-SWG MSE PS07-MIP01 | Meeting Information |
| NPFC-2026-SWG MSE PS07-MIP02 | Provisional Agenda |
| NPFC-2026-SWG MSE PS07-MIP03 | Annotated Indicative Schedule |

INFORMATION PAPERS

| Document Number | Title |
|-----------------------------|--|
| NPFC-2026-SWG MSE PS07-IP01 | Overview of the outcomes of SWG MSE PS06 |
| NPFC-2026-SWG MSE PS07-IP02 | Overview of the outcomes of SSC PS15 and PS16 with focusing on stock assessment outcomes and recommendations |
| NPFC-2026-SWG MSE PS07-IP03 | Meeting materials for Agenda Items 3, 4 and 6 |
| NPFC-2026-SWG MSE PS07-IP04 | Summary of the Pacific saury SS3 assessment in 2025 |

Annex C:
List of Participants

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Annex D:

Meeting schedule and tasks for developing a full MSE for Pacific saury

Option 1

| Meeting | Date | Task | Format |
|--------------|--------------------------|--|---------|
| COM10 | Apr 14-17 2026 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend 2026 catch level (CL) based on the adopted HCR • Review outcomes and recommendations from SWG MSE PS07 (including timeline for full MSE) | Hybrid |
| SWG NSAM | Jun / Jul | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review progress of age-structured modelling (finalize specification) • Review issues arisen for the BSSPM | Hybrid |
| SWG MSE PS08 | Sep / Oct | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize the management objectives • Finalize conditioning of OMs (based on age-structured models with consideration of uncertainty of parameters and climate impacts, base and robustness cases). Data guillotine • Develop a list of candidate MPs (model-based, empirical) • Finalize performance indicators • Discuss definitions of exceptional circumstances | Hybrid |
| SSC PS17 | Dec 15-17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare data for 2026 assessment (BSSPM, SS3) • Review results of conditioning of OMs • Review results of preliminary runs of MPs | Virtual |
| SSC PS18 | Jan 19-22 2027 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review results of BSSPM and application of the adopted HCR for computing 2027 CL (back-up) • Review results of age-structured models • Review progress of MSE | Hybrid |
| | Jan / Feb | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running MSE and prepare results of performance of MPs | |
| SWG MSE PS09 | Late Feb | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize evaluation of performance of candidate MPs • Recommendations of a few MPs (including exceptional circumstances definitions) to COM11 | Hybrid |
| COM11 | Apr 12-15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of CMM on MP? • First implementation of MP for 2027 TAC | Hybrid |

Option 2

| Meeting | Date | Task | Format |
|--------------|-------------------|---|---------|
| COM10 | Apr 14-17 2026 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend 2026 catch level (CL) based on the adopted HCR • Review outcomes and recommendations from SWG MSE PS07 (including timeline for full MSE) | Hybrid |
| SWG NSAM | Jun / Jul | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review progress of age-structured modelling (finalize specification) • Review issues arisen for the BSSPM | Hybrid |
| SWG MSE PS08 | Sep / Oct | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-start discussion on objectives, conditioning of OMs (based on age-structured models with consideration of uncertainty of parameters and climate impacts) and possible types of MPs | Virtual |
| SSC PS17 | Dec 15-17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare data for 2026 assessment (BSSPM, SS3) • Review results of conditioning of OMs | Virtual |
| SSC PS18 | Jan 19-22 2027 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review results of BSSPM and application of the adopted HCR • Review results of age-structured models (completed) • Review progress of MSE | Hybrid |
| SWG MSE PS09 | Feb | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize management objectives • Review conditioning of OMs • Develop a list of candidate MPs (model-based, empirical) | Virtual |
| COM11 | Apr 12-15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review progress of MSE | Hybrid |
| SWG MSE PS10 | Summer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize conditioning of OMs (based on age-structured models with consideration of uncertainty of parameters and climate impacts, base and robustness cases). Data guillotine • Finalize a list of candidate MPs (model-based, empirical) • Finalize performance indicators • Discuss definitions of exceptional circumstances | Hybrid |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run MSE and prepare results of performance of MPs (SSC will review in its meeting) | |
| SWG MSE PS11 | Jan / Feb 2028 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize evaluation of performance of candidate MPs • Recommendations of a few MPs (including exceptional circumstances definitions) to COM12 | Hybrid |
| COM12 | April ? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of CMM on MP? | Hybrid |