



**NORTH PACIFIC
MARINE SCIENCE
ORGANIZATION**

NPFC-2024-SC09-OP06

August 26, 2024

Dr. Robert Day
Executive Secretary
North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC)
2F Hakuyo Hall, Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology
4-5-7 Konan, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108-8477 JAPAN

Dear Dr. Day,

I am writing to invite NPFC to join us as a co-sponsor of the PICES/ICES/FAO International Symposium, titled “*Navigating Changes in Small Pelagic Fish and Forage Communities: Climate, Ecosystems, and Sustainable Fisheries*”, to be convened from May 4–8, 2026, in La Paz, Mexico.

Small pelagic fish (SPF) constitute over 30% of the total catch in global fisheries, making them a pivotal component for sustaining food security world-wide. Together with other forage species (*e.g.*, myctophids, squid), their significance extends beyond mere sustenance, since forage species are key for energy transfer within food webs. Consequently, understanding the intricacies governing their population dynamics and ecological roles remains imperative for fostering robust management practices. Over the past five decades, concerted global research endeavors have shed light on these aspects for SPF, revealing important insights and identifying critical knowledge gaps – notably that less research has focused on dynamics of forage species beyond SPF.

The upcoming symposium (SPF-2026) would be the third meeting in the Small Pelagic Fish Symposium series initiated in order to reunite a community of scientists and managers who work to improve the ecological understanding, management, and future status of SPF and other forage species populations in marine and inland systems. The first symposium in the series, “*Drivers of dynamics of small pelagic fish resources*”, was held in March 2017 in Victoria, Canada (SPF-2017), and the second, “*Small Pelagic Fish: New Frontiers in Science and Sustainable Management*”, took place in November 2022 in Lisbon, Portugal (SPF-2022). Both symposia were a success – SPF-2017 resulted in two special issues in *Deep-Sea Research Part II* (2019, Vol. 159, pp. 1–182) and *Marine Ecology Progress Series* (2019, Vol. 617–618, pp. 1–376), and two other special issues from SPF-2022 were published in *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Science* (2024, Vol. 81, No. 8, pp. 984–1173) and again in *Marine Ecology Progress Series* (2024, Vol. 741, pp. 1–330).

SPF-2026 aims to showcase recent advancements in SPF and forage communities research and, by delving into topics encompassing ecology, population dynamics, climate and oceanic impacts, social-ecological systems, and sustainable management practices, promises to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and pave the way for informed decision-making in forage species conservation and utilization. The symposium also has the potential to contribute meaningfully to the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030), serving as a platform for important discussions on how science can address the current needs for innovative fisheries management strategies and policy responses. We will be seeking endorsement of the symposium as a Decade Action.

The current NPFC/PICES Framework for Enhanced Scientific Collaboration identifies stock assessment support as one of the priority areas for cooperation between our organizations. A number of SPF and squid species are included in the NPFC target species list and, thus, SPF-2026 should be of great interest for NPFC. As one of PICES’ strategic regional partners, NPFC has generously co-sponsored various PICES events, including provision of \$15,000 US for SPF-2022, and we very much hope that you will accept our invitation and consider supporting SPF-2026 at a similar level. This symposium will be led by the joint ICES/PICES WG on *Sustainable Pelagic Forage Communities* (WGSPF or WG 53), which is expected to have two NPFC-designated members. If you decide to join SPF-2026, then we expect that NPFC will nominate a representative to serve on the Scientific Steering Committee. We are certain that your involvement, combined with contributions from other international and national organizations and agencies, will make this symposium a truly successful and cooperative effort.

Yours sincerely,

Sonia Batten
PICES Executive Secretary

Secretariat

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PICES/ICES/FAO International Symposium
Navigating Changes in Small Pelagic Fish and Forage Communities:
Climate, Ecosystems, and Sustainable Fisheries
May 4–8, 2026, La Paz, Mexico

Small pelagic fish (SPF) constitute over 30% of the total catch in global fisheries, making them a pivotal component for sustaining food security worldwide. Together with other forage species (*e.g.*, squid, myctophids), their significance extends beyond mere sustenance, since forage species are key for energy transfer within food webs. Consequently, understanding the intricacies governing their population dynamics and ecological roles remains imperative for fostering robust management practices. Over the past five decades, concerted global research endeavors have shed light on these aspects for SPF, revealing important insights and identifying critical knowledge gaps – notably that less research has focused on dynamics of forage species beyond SPF.

One noteworthy revelation from global analyses is the oscillatory nature of SPF productivity, often attributed to climate variability spanning seasonal to multi-decadal scales. Such fluctuations, in line with other forage species, have profound ecological and socioeconomic ramifications, underscoring the interconnectedness of forage species dynamics with broader environmental processes. Leveraging comparative studies across diverse geographical regions offers invaluable perspectives for refining management strategies.

Scientific advancement in comprehending forage community dynamics is ongoing, utilizing an array of tools and methodologies. Integration of numerical models with extensive monitoring data and stock assessments enhances our ability to explore hypotheses regarding population variability. Furthermore, innovations such as eDNA analysis, machine learning, and genomic studies present promising avenues for unveiling nuanced aspects of forage species ecology. Collaborative efforts involving stakeholders from various sectors are instrumental in devising effective regional management approaches tailored to specific social-ecological contexts.

The upcoming international symposium, “Navigating Changes in Small Pelagic Fish and Forage Communities: Climate, Ecosystems, and Sustainable Fisheries” aims to showcase recent advancements in SPF and forage communities research. By delving into topics encompassing ecology, population dynamics, climate and oceanic impacts, social-ecological systems, and sustainable management practices, the symposium promises to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and pave the way for informed decision-making in forage species conservation and utilization.