



North Pacific Fisheries Commission

NPFC-2025-SSC BFME06-RP01

1st meeting of the Small Working Group on VME

12 June 2025

WebEx

Summary

Item 1. Opening of the meeting

The 1st intersessional meeting of the Small Working Group on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (SWG VME) in the 2025 operational year commenced at 9 am on 12 June 2025, Tokyo time in the format of video conferencing via WebEx. The meeting was attended by Members from Canada (Janelle Curtis, Chris Rooper), China (Xiaoxue Du, Jiaqi Wang), Japan (Kota Sawada, Yumiko Osawa, Mai Miyamoto, Moto-omi Yamaguchi, Sato Arai, Chris Ayer), Korea (Jeongseok Park, Hyejin Song), Russia (Vladimir Kulik), and the USA (Don Kobayashi) as well as the Secretariat (Robert Day, Alex Zavolokin, Sungkuk Kang). The meeting was opened by Chris Rooper (Canada) who served as the SWG VME Lead.

Item 2. Adoption of agenda

There were no amendments to the agenda.

The presentation from the Lead for this and following agenda items is available on the Collaboration site under [SWG VME](#).

Item 3. Review of tasks for SWG VME for 2025 (see list below)

The Lead updated participants on the tasks assigned by SSC BF-ME05 to the SWG VME:

- 1) Continue working on visual data objectives (Objective 2b and Objective 3)
 - a) Identify high density VME areas on each fished seamount
 - b) Develop new species distribution (presence/absence and abundance) models for VME taxa on all seamounts
- 2) Prepare to update fishing impacts assessment
- 3) Continue to work to develop a synchronized approach for assessing and managing the risk of SAI and determine data requirements and spatial/temporal resolution for SAI assessment
- 4) Develop or research alternative methods to apply to Japan and Korea's indicator taxa bycatch to further refine encounter thresholds that are taxon and gear specific
- 5) Consider and explore other methods for identifying VME
- 6) Discuss value of using fisheries VME indicator taxa bycatch data for managing VME and develop TOR if sharing is necessary
- 7) Literature review of connectivity, recruitment and recovery of VME indicator taxa among

Item 4. Fishing impacts assessments update

- Discussion of objectives of fishing impacts update
- Discussion of existing template from CMM (see attached CMM 2024-05)
- Proposed revisions to template (what do we need to add, what can we do without?) (See template below)
- How can/should we incorporate fishery bycatch data of VME indicator taxa into this process?

The Lead presented a template for reports on identification of VMEs and assessment of impacts as required by CMM 2024-05 and CMM 2024-06.

Participants reviewed the template and noted that:

- Information for items 1-4, 6 and 7 is contained in Members' Annual Reports.
- Item 5 Bycatch species: bycatch species list from 2020 will be updated collaboratively by the group, but each Member will provide its list of bycatch species in their VME assessments.
- Item 6 Recent level of fishing effort: information from Members' Annual Reports and, if needed, other data will be used.
- Sub-item 6(5) Total catch by species: if the reporting period starts from 2002, some catch data will be missing as there was no observer program for bottom fisheries in early years.
- Item 8 Analysis of status of fishery resources: this will refer to SWG NPA-SA results, sablefish assessments (US & Canada) and skilfish species summary.
- Item 9 Analysis of status of bycatch species resources: Members will provide time series of catch.
- Item 10 Analysis of existence of VMEs in the fishing ground and Item 11 Impact assessment of fishing activities on VMEs or marine species including cumulative impacts, and identification of SAIs on VMEs or marine species:
 - Japan plans to conduct these assessments following the approach outlined in working papers presented at SSC VME02 in 2017 (available on the Collaboration site under [SWG VME](#)). The approach is based on the visual survey data.
 - As Korea and Russia do not have their visual survey data that can be used for VME identification and SAI assessment, it was suggested that they may use maps of distribution of VME indicator taxa from Japan (Kor and Rus fishing event maps overlapping with Jpn visual survey map).
 - Alternatively, a joint assessment with combined data from all Members may be conducted. This may require a template and TOR for data sharing. The suggestion for a joint assessment will be discussed at SSC BF-ME06 in December 2025.
 - Korea and Russia noted that they have very limited data on VME indicator taxa bycatch and are unable to conduct analyses on Items 10 and 11 using only their own data.
 - Participants agreed to conduct assessments for the current/recent fisheries (from 2002 or around that) and do not update their historical assessments.

- [Assignments for completion by next meeting](#)

The Lead summarized that Japan and Canada will present their assessments at SSC BF-ME06 in December 2025. SSC BF-ME06 will discuss future plans, including assessments by Korea and Russia and a joint approach.

He also outlined the structure of an assessment report with chapters on individual fisheries as follows:

- Catches/effort/characteristics by Member/gear type (items 1-4, 6-7)
- Bycatch species separated by gear type (items 5, 9)
- Assessments by species (e.g. NPA, SA, Sablefish, Skilfish) (item 8)
- VME existence in the fishing ground by seamount chain (ESC & CSC) (item 10)
- Impact assessment by Member/gear type (item 11)
- Single recommendation section by gear type, target species and seamount chain (item 13)

[Item 5. Update on visual data objectives \(Chris Rooper\)](#)

The Lead reported that Objective 1 (presence/absence of VME indicator taxa) and 2a (VME hotspots) have been accomplished. Also, the group addressed Objective 2c (validation of models).

For Objective 2c, Japan will provide its previous analysis (Miyamoto et al. 2018) for comparison to presence/absence data from Objective 1.

- [New update on Objectives 2b](#)

The Lead informed participants that he had updated analysis on kernel density estimation and posted them on the Collaboration site right before this meeting.

- [Proposed plan for meeting objective 3](#)

The Lead invited Members to share ideas on Objective 3 and work collaboratively with him on accomplishing this objective.

- [Expected deliverables for SSC BFME06, participants and timeline](#)

The Lead and Members will draft meeting papers and submit them to SSC BF-ME06.

[Item 6. SAI Assessments](#)

- [Update from Janelle Curtis on where we are with this project](#)

Janelle Curtis gave an update on the progress toward a synchronized approach for assessing and managing the risk of significant adverse impact (SAI). This document was circulated to Members a few weeks ago (available on the Collaboration site under [SWG VME](#)). She outlined the tasks as follows: (1) Developed synchronized approach, (2) Determine data needs, and (3) Determine resolution of spatial and temporal data. She reminded participants that Japan and Canada have

independently developed similar approaches to assessing the risk of SAIs to vulnerable marine ecosystems: Miyamoto and Yonezaki (2019) NPFC-2019-SSC VME04-WP02 and Gasbarro et al. (2022) NPFC-2022-SSC BFME03-WP02. Both approaches assess the relative risk of SAIs by evaluating the overlap between the distribution of fishing activity and VMEs.

Janelle Curtis summarized data requirements for each step of the flowchart for SAI assessment and outlined the resolution of spatial and temporal data (see ppt presentation on the Collaboration site for details).

Japan suggested to add a reference to its 2017 documents from SSC VME02 that had been uploaded on the Collaboration site.

- [What needs to be done this year?](#)

Janelle Curtis will make an update as suggested by Japan. No other suggestions were made.

- [Deliverables for SSC BFME06](#)

Janelle Curtis will submit a working paper on the presented standardized SAI approach to SSC BFME06.

[Item 7. Other matters](#)

- [Plan to address Gear Specific Thresholds using Japan/Korea observer bycatch data](#)

Participants noted that Japan and Korea will work on gear specific thresholds and report progress at the next SWG VME meeting.

- [Planned work to explore methods for identifying VME](#)

No updates were made. This work will be discussed at the next SWG VME meeting.

- [Discuss value of using fisheries VME indicator taxa bycatch data for managing VME and develop TOR if sharing is necessary](#)

Participants noted that SAI assessment will mostly rely on visual survey data. Therefore, sharing data on VME indicator taxa bycatch may not be needed. This topic will be discussed at the next SWG VME meeting.

- [Literature review assignment \(who, what, when?\)](#)

As there were no volunteers to conduct a literature review, the Lead suggested that this would be a group project. The Lead will develop a plan for review at the next meeting.

[Item 8. Proposed meeting schedule/workplan for 2025](#)

- [List of things to deliver to SSC BFME06](#)

- [List of people who will deliver these things](#)

Participants agreed on the following items to be delivered to SSC BF-ME06:

- Draft assessment (Canada, Japan, Korea?, Russia?)
- Complete visual data objectives (Chris Rooper and others)
- Update gear specific thresholds (Japan & Korea)
- Submit final SAI document (Janelle Curtis)
- Draft literature review

The next SWG VME meeting will be held in late September – early October 2025.

[Item 9. Close of the Meeting](#)

The meeting closed at 11:00 am on 12 June 2025, Tokyo time.