



# OPRT

Sankaido Bldg. (9th Floor)1-9-13 Akasaka,  
Minato-ku ,Tokyo, Japan 107-0052

Tel: 03-3568-6388; Fax:03-3568-6389

Website:<http://www.oprt.or.jp>

## NEWSLETTER INTERNATIONAL January 2009, No.21

FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

Interview with WCPFC Executive Secretary

### A 30% reduction in fishing mortality - WCPFC's hardest decision for sustainable tuna resources in the Pacific

**A**t its fifth regular session held in Busan, Korea, 8-12 December, 2008, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) adopted severe effort and catch reduction measures to ensure sustainability of tuna resources in the region.

OPRT interviewed Mr. Andrew Wright, Executive Secretary of WCPFC on the background of the adoption of such measures and their effectiveness etc. in order to better understand the efforts continued by the tuna regional fisheries management organization (RFMO).

**Q: Firstly, will you outline the specific nature of WCPFC region in the world tuna fisheries?**

**A:** The WCPFC has 32 members of which seven are participating territories<sup>1</sup>. It includes a range of socially and economically diverse countries and entities including small island States with small populations of largely artisanal and subsistence fisher folks living on limited land areas, but with large productive exclusive economic zones and developing local tuna industries, to some of the world's major political powers supporting large distant water tuna fleets.

The best profile of the WCPO tuna fishery is that presented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community - Oceanic Fisheries Programme (SPC-OFP) to the last session of the WCPFC's Scientific Committee. In summary, the provisional total WCPF Convention Area tuna catch for 2007 was estimated at 2,396,815 mt, the highest annual catch recorded, and more than 120,000 mt higher than the previous record in 2006 (2,273,322 mt). During 2007, the purse seine fishery accounted for an estimated 1,739,859 mt (73% of the total catch, and a record for this fishery), with pole-and-line taking an estimated 214,935 mt (9%), the longline fishery an estimated 232,388 mt (10%), and the remainder (8%) taken by troll gear and a variety of artisanal gears, mostly in eastern Indonesia and the Philippines. The WCPF Convention Area tuna catch (2,396,815 mt) for 2007 represented 84% of the



total Pacific Ocean catch of 2,800,740 mt, and 55% of the global tuna catch (the provisional estimate for 2007 is just under 4.4 million mt).

The 2007 WCPF Convention Area catch of skipjack (1,726,702 mt - 72% of the total catch) was the highest ever, continuing the trend of consecutive record catches since 2002. The WCPF Convention Area yellowfin tuna catch for 2007 (431,814 mt - 18%) was lower than in 2006 (442,288 mt), but higher than the average catch level for the period since 2000 (~424,000 mt). The WCPF Convention Area bigeye tuna catch for 2007 (143,059 mt - 6%) was the second highest on record (after the catch in 2004-156,768 mt), mainly due to a relatively high estimated bigeye tuna catch from the purse seine fishery, although observer data for 2007, used to estimate the purse-seine bigeye tuna

catch, are very preliminary. The 2007 WCPF Convention Area albacore catch (95,240 mt [4%]) was the lowest for over ten years, primarily due to the continuing trend of low catches in the North Pacific in recent years.

The provisional 2007 purse-seine catch of 1,739,859 mt was the highest on record, with most fleets catching more than in 2006, particularly the Chinese Taipei, PNG and Marshall Islands fleets. The 2007 purse-seine catch was dominated by a record catch of skipjack tuna (1,472,746 mt - 85% of the total catch). The annual purse-seine skipjack catch has increased by more than 500,000 mt since 2001, at an average of about 90,000 mt per year. The 2007 purse-seine catch of yellowfin tuna (228,426 mt - 13%) was lower than catches in recent years, but still higher than the average for the period since 2000 (~218,000 mt). The provisional catch estimate for bigeye tuna for 2007 (38,324 mt - 2%) was the second highest on record but may be revised once all observer data for 2007 have been received and processed.

The 2007 catch estimates for the key pole-and-line fleets operating in the Convention Area have yet to be provided, although the total catch estimate is expected to be similar to the level of recent years (i.e. 200,000-220,000 mt). Skipjack tuna tends to account for the vast majority of the catch (typically more than 85% of the total catch in tropical areas), while albacore tuna, taken by the Japanese coastal and offshore fleets in the temperate waters of the north Pacific, yellowfin tuna (5-7%) and a small component of bigeye tuna (1-4%) make up the remainder of the catch.

The provisional Convention Area longline catch (232,388 mt) for 2007 was the lowest since 2000 and around 12% lower than the highest on record which was attained in 2004 (264,465 mt). The Convention Area albacore longline catch (76,151 mt - 33%) for 2007 was the lowest since 2000. The provisional bigeye tuna catch (82,735 mt - 36%) for 2007 was close to the average for the period 2000-2007, and the yellowfin tuna catch (69,857 mt - 30%) was the lowest for 8 years.

**Q: What is the current status of tunas in the region?**

**A:** Based on the consensus view at the last session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee, at its Fourth Regular Session, in August 2008, focusing on tropical tunas:

**Bigeye tuna:** Over-fishing of bigeye tuna is occurring but the stock is not in an over-fished state. While

relatively important catches of small bigeye are taken in associated sets in the western tropical Pacific, particularly in archipelagic waters, the longline fishery has the greatest impact on this species. The Scientific Committee recommended a 30 per cent reduction in fishing mortality for bigeye tuna from the average levels for 2003-2006.

**Yellowfin tuna:** The most recent assessment of the status of yellowfin stocks completed at the Third Regular Session of the Scientific Committee in 2007 is that the resource is fully exploited with a high probability (47 per cent) that overfishing is occurring in the WCPO. Although the stock is not yet in an overfished state, the Scientific Committee recommended a reduction in fishing mortality. Although the purse seine is having an impact on yellowfin resources in the western tropical Pacific the Indonesian and Philippines domestic fisheries are considered to have the greatest impact on this stock. The Second Regular Session of the Scientific Committee, at Manila in August 2006 recommended a 10 per cent reduction in fishing mortality for yellowfin from the average levels for 2001-2004. The status of this stock will be re-assessed in 2009.

**Skipjack tuna:** Skipjack was assessed in 2008. The existing level of catch is considered to be sustainable unless recruitment persistently falls below the long term average.

**South Pacific albacore:** The most recent assessment for south Pacific albacore was completed in 2008. Overall, fishery impacts on the total biomass are low (10 per cent), although considerably higher impacts occur for the portion of the population vulnerable to longline. The 2006 session of the Scientific Committee advised that the current catch levels appear to be sustainable and yield analyses suggest that increases in fishing mortality and yields are possible. However, given the age-specific mortality of the longline fleets, any significant increase in effort is forecast to reduce catch per unit of effort (CPUE) to low levels with only moderate increases in yields.

**North Pacific albacore:** The International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) presented the results of the most recent assessment for North Pacific albacore to the Third Session of the Scientific Committee. ISC recommended that, despite a current high standing stock biomass, fishing mortality needs to be reduced - the extent of which will depend on the management objectives established for the stock.

**Pacific bluefin:** Total annual catches are currently about 23,000 t per year. There has been an increase in fishing mortality rates during the last 10 years, principally for the youngest age classes. The June 2008 assessment of the status of the stock concluded that increases in fishing mortality above the current level, and/or unfavourable changes in environmental conditions, may result in recruitment levels which are insufficient to sustain the current productivity of the stock.

**Q: Will you explain major regulatory measures adopted at the meeting?**

**A:** The formulation of the Measure adopted in Busan started in April 2008 when the Chairman of the Commission, Mr Glenn Hurry from Australia, convened a stakeholder workshop in Canberra. The objectives of the workshop were to provide an informal opportunity for a range of stakeholders in the WCPO fishery - coastal States and fishing States and elements of the harvesting, processing and market sectors to discuss the contributions of different elements of the fishery to the bigeye and yellowfin overfishing situation in the WCPO - and to flag options and review impacts for different strategies that might be considered to reduce the risk of these stocks becoming overfished.

The effort and catch reduction measures included in the Busan decision that seeks to reduce fishing mortality on bigeye by 30% were formulated around a broad effort to introduce measures for the high seas that are compatible with measures being introduced by the eight island States that make up the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) through what is known as the PNA's Third Implementing Arrangement. It includes a closed period for setting on FADs (August and September in 2009 and July to September 2010 and 2011), catch retention, and consideration of a full closure of the high seas pockets in 2010 and 2011. Monitoring the implementation of these measures will be achieved by observers deployed under the Regional Observer Programme (ROP) (20% coverage target in 2009, 100% thereafter) and the Commission's vessel monitoring system (WCPFC VMS).

The Commission's regulatory Scheme is slowly evolving as a suite of inter-related national and regional programmes designed to better monitor fishing activity in the WCPO and assist in detecting non-compliance with the Measures and decisions

adopted by the Commission. The main elements discussed at Busan were the ROP and the VMS. The need for observers authorized under ROP was highlighted at the Busan meeting through the Measure adopted there seeking a 30% reduction in fishing mortality for bigeye tuna. This will partially be achieved by a closure on fishing on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) - which will be monitored by observers. In addition, the Busan Session adopted the implementation of the high seas VMS for all vessels operating in the WCPFC Convention Area - and that is scheduled to become operational on 1<sup>st</sup> April this year. Other elements that are either already operational or are currently being developed include the WCPFC Record of Fishing Vessels, the WCPFC IUU List, a high seas boarding and inspection scheme, port State measures and a scheme for verifying transshipment. The development of a transshipment verification scheme has been on the agenda for the Commission since 2005. While some progress was made at Busan there remains some work to do in 2009 before consensus agreement among WCPFC members on the scope of the scheme can be achieved. At Busan, the Commission also started a process to better monitor compliance and start considering measures to deter non-compliance.

**Q: It should have been a long way to introduce the regulatory measures under the complex factors WCPFC faces. How could you obtain consensus?**

**A:** It appears none of the WCPFC members want to vote on any matter - so they exert every effort to find a solution by consensus. However, the Chairman has made it clear that he will go to vote if necessary. In observing other Commission's it is clear that the competence of the chair is a significant influence on the quality of outcomes.

**Q: Do you think that the measures adopted are effective enough to achieve the purpose? Some conservationists criticize that the measures are not sufficient.**

**A:** Probably not - it depends on a number of factors including how effective both flag States and coastal States are at achieving their relative contributions to the reduction targets, how the stocks respond to recent high levels of fishing mortality resulting from an increase in FAD sets in the purse seine fishery that occurred as a response to high fuel costs and environmental conditions and associated impacts on recruitment, for example. There's an annual review

provision in the Measure adopted at Busan which means the Commission will be able to monitor the impact of the Measure and determine if any additional adjustments are required. Some observers expressed disappointment that the Commission did not adopt a Measure that would result in a 30% reduction in bigeye mortality in 2009. Instead the Commission elected to phase in the 30% target reduction over three years. You don't have to look very far at other RFMOs to appreciate just how significant the WCPFC agreement to set a firm 30% reduction target is. A 30% reduction will require significant adjustments in the fishery - it is unrealistic to expect that these can occur in one 12-month period - particularly in an RFMO with membership representing such a diverse range of social and economic characteristics and with some of the small economies so dependent on tuna as a source of foreign exchange earnings and supporting domestic economic development.

***Q: Unfortunately, some tuna RFMOs are questioned recently on their management capacity. Do you think tuna RFMOs can regain their trust? And if so, how?***

**A:** It is right that the effectiveness of RFMOs should be continually questioned - how else are they to be held accountable? The RFMOs, generally, have not demonstrated a capability to do that honestly themselves. The capacity of RFMOs to manage effectively is still severely compromised by some members, often a select few, who do not engage in good faith. Effective management of tunas requires genuine international collaboration based on shared operational level data and independent scientific assessment. While independent efforts by some fishing States can contribute to conservation and sustainability efforts the assessment of relative contributions to such efforts is difficult to determine if States elect not to consolidate operational level data for stock-wide assessments and harmonise their actions.

***Q: Finally, will you tell us about the position of WCPFC concerning the overfishing capacity? OPRT has been working hard to address the issue and limited the number of large scale tuna longliners among OPRT members in the world. We are concerned about growing tuna fishing capacity in the world, especially purse seine fishing.***

**A:** WCPFC members have expressed concern about over capacity since 1999 when, during the

Multilateral High Level Conference (MHLC) that supported the negotiation of the Convention establishing WCPFC, participants in the Conference adopted a resolution calling for restraint in relation to further increases in fishing capacity in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). This was followed with two further resolutions - one prior to the conclusion of the MHLC in 2000 and a call during the Preparatory Conference, which was established by MHLC participants in 2000 to progress administrative and other arrangements while the Convention was achieving the required ratifications for it to enter into force. While some individual WCPFC members have implemented national measures to reduce some of their fleets, largely in response to developments in other oceans, or elevated fuel costs, none of these WCPFC resolutions appear to have been successful in constraining capacity in the WCPO tuna fishery - particularly in the purse seine fishery. A major factor contributing to this is the adoption by WCPFC members, who are also parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), and in whose waters the majority of the WCPO purse seine occurs, of the vessel day scheme (VDS) in 2007. The PNA have elected to manage the purse seine fishery within their combined EEZs by limiting allowable effort, in terms of fishing days, rather than by vessel numbers. The VDS seeks to maximize the value of a day's fishing within EEZs, The theory supporting the implementation of this Scheme is that this will be achieved by maximizing competition for the limited fishing days the PNA have capped the fishery at. As a result, the PNA have not supported calls by some other WCPFC members to limit capacity in the WCPO purse seine fishery - and this has contributed to an increase in purse seine vessel numbers this decade.

**(Foototes)**

<sup>1</sup> American Samoa, Australia, Canada, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Cook Islands, People's Republic of China, European Union, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, French Polynesia, Guam, Japan, Kiribati, Korea, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Chinese Taipei, United States of America, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna. Belize, El Salvador, Indonesia, Mexico and Senegal were accepted as Cooperating Non-Member (CNM), for a 12-month period, at the most recent annual session of the Commission in December 2008. Subject to meeting certain conditions Ecuador will also be accorded CNM status early in 2009.