



# OPRT

## NEWSLETTER INTERNATIONAL

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>

Aug. 2013, No. 45

FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

### OPRT Letter to WCPFC

## OPRT calls for an effective management program in the Western and Central Pacific

OPRT sent a letter to Professor Glenn Hurry, Executive Director, the Western and Central Pacific Tuna Commission (WCPFC), on July 22, requesting the establishment of an effective and fair multi-year management program to be implemented for 2014-2017 for recovering the declining bigeye tuna stock in the Western Central Pacific Ocean because of overfishing, as a matter of urgency.

The letter was written based on the shared recognition of OPRT members concerning the current stock condition of tuna resources in the region, in particular, bigeye tuna. OPRT held its annual members meeting in Tokyo on June 27 to exchange views on the situation. Eight members representing the tuna longline industry in Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Indonesia, Philippines, China, the Seychelles, and Vanuatu participated in the meeting and other eight members were informed of the result of the meeting later so that they may also express their view to the WCPFC in the letter of OPRT.

The major opinions expressed during the meeting are as follows.

1. Unless some concrete measures are introduced in order to cope with the overfishing capacity in the region, bigeye stock will not be recovered.
2. Capping the number of large scale purse seiners should be introduced. Without a limitation on the number of vessels, it will continuously increase. Foreign investment in purse seine fishery of the developing island nations will never stop without a limit of the number of vessels.
3. The recent increase in fishing capacity of small scale longliners is causing another problem. In the past, efforts have been concentrated on controlling large scale longliners. The fishing capacity of small scale longliners should be seriously addressed.
4. Vessel Day Scheme (VDS) management was not effective to control the purse seine fishery in the region. The fishing efforts by the purse seine fishery have rather increased. VDS management should be reviewed scientifically from the view point of effectiveness to the conservation and management of tuna resources.



OPRT requested each member to request its own government to make its best effort to establish the effective program, reflecting views expressed in the letter of OPRT to the WCPFC.

### OPRT Seminar

## Ishikawa expresses hope for achieving the sustainable development of deep sea tuna fishery

An OPRT seminar was held on June 28 in Tokyo by inviting Mr. Masahiro Ishikawa as a guest speaker. He is former president of Japan Tuna Fisheries Cooperative Association (Japan Tuna), who recently retired after working for 11 years for Japan Tuna, leading Japan's tuna industry.

At the outset of his speech, he talked about several hardships that the industry had faced, such as the reduction of fleets and catch quota. He stated: "In order to ensure sustainable supply of tuna to Japan, the world's largest sashimi tuna market, Japanese industry has eagerly addressed and observed the conservation and management measures introduced by RFMOs so that tuna



resources can be sustainably used.

The reduction of more than 200 large scale tuna longliners, caused by the reduction of global catch quota, was really painful and challenging to our fishermen, he said. But, he mentioned that he now feels it was necessary for the industry to survive.”

He pointed out the need for Japanese tuna industry to contribute to the international community for ensuring sustainable use of tuna resources by implementing responsible fisheries in the future as well.

He expressed his concern on the current critical management situation of the WCPFC. “I am afraid that all tuna fisheries in the region may be eventually ruined, unless the present situation is rectified. No fisheries can exist without fish. Developing nations are no exception. I hope all the nations and industries should cooperate in order to establish and implement effective management measures as soon as possible,” Mr. Ishikawa concluded.

## Editorial

### Overcapacity--WCPFC Must Overcome

The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) is going to hold a working group meeting Aug. 27-30th in Tokyo in order to develop a draft for a multi-year management program to be implemented between 2014 and 2017. The program will be established at the WCPFC annual meeting in December.

The annual meeting in 2012 decided to establish the upcoming working group meeting this year. In the report of the 2012 meeting, the WCPFC frankly acknowledged its failure on the Tuna stock management. It said that "since the foundation of the WCPFC, a number of resolutions and Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) were developed to mitigate the overfishing of bigeye and yellowfin tuna and to limit the growth of fishing capacity in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean and that these measures have been unsuccessful in either restricting the apparent growth of fishing capacity or reducing the fishing mortality of bigeye or juvenile yellowfin tuna." In addition, it noted clearly the current urgent stock

condition, saying that "the Scientific Committee has determined that the bigeye stock is subject to overfishing, and that yellowfin stocks are currently being fished at its capacity, reductions in fishing mortality are required in order to reduce the risks that these stocks will become overfished."

As long as the WCPFC recognized the current situation so severely, I bet the working group meeting can't make the program to be simply a formality with little effectiveness. However, to halt on sharply increasing fishing capacity of large-scale purse-seiners and newly emerging small-scale long-liners as well as limitation of FADs based operation are painful measures for many related fishermen. As such, then, can those measures be smoothly adopted into the new program? As watching how the WCPFC has been performing so far, it seems not to be easy.

The OPRT held its members' meeting regarding these issues in Tokyo with its members in Japan and abroad at the end of June. A member stated that "the tuna fishery in the Central and Western Pacific Ocean will be extinct if the issues keep standing as they are," while others said "unless actions are taken to freeze the number of large-scale purse seiners globally, the increase will never be stopped under agendas of the industrial countries and developing countries. The developing islands countries seemingly desire to develop the tuna fishery by inviting purse-seiners from overseas while developed countries try to justify increasing the number of vessels by taking advantage of such island countries." Such harsh opinions made me recognize the seriousness of the current situation and the depth of these issues.

Even if the working group meeting comes out with highly effective program to recover and stabilize the stock condition, will it be adopted as it is at the annual meeting? Especially, under the principle of not to entrench legitimate rights of developing countries, there might be no room left for any people to raise disagreement on such principle. Being as such, at the conclusion of the discussion, the program may become mutilated as it may include measures to approve an exception for island developing counties to increase the number of fishing vessels, which may eventually nullify the effectiveness of the program. I have a deep and endless apprehension over the outcome.

If such exception, regardless of to what extent, is approved, the catch capacity will never effectively be controlled. Even if any small exception is admitted, the new plan needs to show security that it will not harm the effectiveness of catch capacity control. Otherwise, the WCPFC will end up by exposing how incapable it is in managing relevant issues to the world.

Will the WCPFC be able to regenerate its ability as the stock management organization? The working group meeting being held in this month will be a key to see whether or not such revitalization can be attained.

(This is a translation from Minato Fisheries Daily in Japan.)

## Jiro's Critical Eye

**Dr. Jiro Suzuki, Tuna Biologist**

### 1. Sea turtles are recovering

It has been a long time since all sea turtles were listed in Appendix I of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) because they were considered species with a high risk of extinction. The various conservation measures for the sea turtles have been implemented accordingly.

The number of loggerheads spawning in Japanese coastal areas has been increasing in recent years. It has even reached a historical high level in some areas. This indicates recovery of the stock, which is distributed in the North Pacific including areas off Hawaii.

The change in rules off Hawaii last year seems to have reflected such an increasing trend in the loggerhead population of the North Pacific. Namely, the measures limiting the bycatch of sea turtles in the Hawaiian swordfish fishery have been significantly relaxed. In Hawaii, the green turtle population is also increasing. Those facts show that not all species of sea turtles in the world are declining but that there are several species for which their status seems stable or even increasing.

The recent trend of recovery for the sea turtles might have been brought about by the implementation of measures to mitigate the impact caused by fishing activities. However, it has not yet been proven scientifically how much impact is given by fishing activities. Fishing activities have been highlighted as a major factor giving a negative impact to the sea turtles but it is not always correct. There are many examples that the conservation measures in the spawning areas on land were effective for the rapid recovery of the populations. Moreover, the decline of Pacific leatherback, the biggest charismatic sea turtle attaining a weight of around 1 ton when fully grown could not be stopped by restricting fishing activities only. Wild boars preying on eggs and consumption by local people in the major spawning areas are the obvious impacts. The recent development of coastal areas of Papua New Guinea (and Indonesia) also causes a significant negative impact. My view is supported by the recent finding that the Hawaiian green turtle recovered in just a few years only right after the strengthened conservation activities implemented on the landing sites.

In conclusion, for the purpose of ensuring the effective conservation of the sea turtles, I would like to emphasize the need for holistic research on various factors (including water pollution and climate change) other than fisheries together with improvement in the biological knowledge of sea turtles. Scientific and holistic conservation approaches



should be further promoted. Simplistic and emotional conservation approaches blaming fishing activities as the only culprit will not help sea turtles.

### 2. Rising concern for overfishing of Albacore in the Indian Ocean - Need for control of small longliners -

I have noticed a rapid and substantial increase in the catch of albacore in the Indian Ocean by Indonesia in recent years. I felt curious about this phenomenon because I had thought Chinese Taipei is the dominant country catching albacore in the Indian Ocean. My curiosity was confirmed at the Annual meeting of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) held last May in Mauritius where serious arguments over the management of albacore stock were reported.

A significant reduction in tuna fishing activities in the Western part of the Indian Ocean has been attributed to piracy off Somalia, forcing longline fishing vessels to shift their fishing grounds to the southern Indian Ocean. Their target fish is sashimi grade albacore and thus the catch amount has increased rapidly. In the past, albacore in the Indian Ocean was exploited almost exclusively by longline fishing vessels, particularly by Chinese Taipei vessels. However, Indonesia remarkably increased its catch of albacore in recent years, even slightly exceeding that of Chinese Taipei for some years.

The Scientific Committee (SC) of the IOTC recognized that overfishing of the albacore stock is occurring and recommended to reduce the catch by 20%. However, Indonesia claimed that its catch is much less than the figures used in the stock assessment. The arguments forced the Commission to have the SC conduct a stock assessment again next year and the management measures will be considered based on the new assessment.

I personally felt doubt in the accuracy of the catch statistics. I found the trend of abundance indices used in the assessment differed among the major longline fishing countries, especially in recent years. In my view, since the size of fish taken by longline vessels is similar, the indices should show a similar trend for any longline vessel of any country. Both the catch statistics and the interpretation of different trends in recent abundance indices should therefore be carefully reviewed in order to assess the stock status more certainly.

If the albacore is really declining, its main cause may be due to the increase in the number of small longline vessels. In fact, the number of small longline vessels has rapidly increased and it now far exceeds the large longline vessels. This happened through improvement in the fishing efficiency and the economic competitiveness of small longline vessels. The increase of the number of small longline vessels seems not to be well acknowledged by the IOTC but it should start to seriously consider measures to control the fishing capacity of the small longline vessels in order to ensure the sustainability of the albacore fishery and the stock in the region.

In general, management of small longline vessels (less than 24 m in length) has been a rather low key issue



hidden by the management of large longline vessels. However, in view of the fact that concern is also rising in the South Western Pacific over expansion in the capacity of small longline vessels, I think RFMOs and their parties should pay more attention to the impact to tuna resources caused by the unlimited expansion of small longline vessels.

## OPRT General Meeting

### OPRT further promotes responsible tuna fisheries for ensuring sustainable use

OPRT held its Ordinary General Meeting on June 28 in Tokyo. In its business plan for 2013, OPRT reported its view on the current situation surrounding tunas and tuna fisheries. A summary of the report is as follows.

**1.** The sign of recovery of the Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna stock was recognized by the scientific committee of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) last year, as a positive outcome of ICCAT's implementation of rigorously reduced total allowable catch. Regarding the southern bluefin tuna as well, the trend of stock recovery has become increasingly evident.

**2.** In the Indian Ocean, many tuna longline fishing vessels which took countermeasures against piracy activities in Somalia moved from the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) and resumed their operation. There is a need to pay attention to the stock assessment of the species by the coming scientific committee of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) to see if the resumption of operation may not have caused overfishing.

**3.** In the WCPO, where over 50% of the world's production of tunas and skipjack takes place, no concrete progress has been observed toward the solution of the issue of overcapacity. Notably, the bigeye tuna stock is in a serious situation. The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) decided to establish a multi-year management program within this year in a bid to help recover the stock. It would not be an easy task to establish an effective program in the WCPFC, where the interests of member countries are tangled up. However, the establishment of a program in this year and its swift implementation would be indicative of the fact that the WCPFC truly has management capability. Thus, this issue should be followed with a close attention as the most important issue.

**4.** The International Scientific Committee has reported that the parent biomass of the Pacific bluefin tuna has declined to around the lowest ever level, and has recommended rigorous compliance with the agreed management measures on this species. Japan, as the largest consuming country of the stock, needs to monitor the import strictly, with the aim to contribute to ensuring compliance with the management measures.



**5.** The issue of overcapacity has become a global issue, especially serious in the WCPO. With the aim to cope with it, OPRT has restrained the increase in the number of large-scale tuna longline fishing vessels, with cooperation of its member industries. In order to render such efforts effective, the needs have arisen to cope with the increase of large-scale purse-seine fishing vessels, the increase in the use of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), and the increase of small-scale longline fishing vessels -- all of which are now recognized internationally as the factors causing overcapacity, notably in the WCPO.

**6.** With respect to the need to prevent illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing activities, tuna laundering (i.e. submissions of falsified reports on the species of the catch, fishing grounds and vessel names), if occurred allegedly, needs to be prevented because such activities would undermine the effectiveness of stock management.

**7.** In order to shut out illegally-caught tunas from the market, the Catch Documentation Scheme--one that is designed to ensure traceability of the catch from the stage of production to landing markets--is being implemented for the Atlantic bluefin tuna and the southern bluefin tuna. With regard to the Atlantic bluefin tuna, ICCAT decided to electronize this scheme from this year in a bid to ensure more thoroughgoing implementation of catch management. There is a need to promote proper implementation of the electronized Catch Documentation Scheme because the scheme will possibly be applied to all species under catch limit in the near future.

(Detail of Business Plan is available on OPRT website.)

### Announcement: Nagahata named new OPRT Managing Director

OPRT elected Daishiro Nagahata as its Managing Director at an Extraordinary Board Meeting on June 28, following resignation of his predecessor Yuichiro Harada. Nagahata, born in 1955, graduated from Kyoto University (Department of Fisheries) and has worked for Fisheries Agency of Japan from 1979 to 2013. He assumed key positions in various fields including the fisheries trade and management of far seas fisheries. He was the Commissioner representing Japan for the IATTC (Inter-American Tuna Commission). Harada will stay with OPRT as advisor.