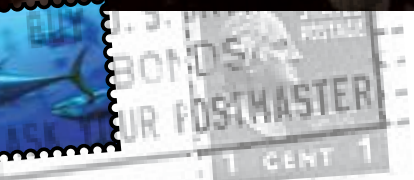


TUNA STOCKS: HOW MUCH TUNA IS IN THE REGION



Photo Credit: PANOS PICTURES



CARD

PACIFIC POSTCARD:

Fish stocks in the WCPFC region provide more than 54% of the world's tuna catch in 2007.



ESTIMATING OUR OCEANIC FISH POPULATIONS

Safeguarding and managing the region's fish stocks is a major concern of the Pacific Islands Forum and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), which provides policy advice to 17 member governments on the sustainable management of their fisheries in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

A major part of management is having information and evidence upon which to base decisions and plans. FFA and WCPFC use scientific data and advice provided by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) through its Oceanic Fisheries Programme (www.spc.int/oceanfish/). Trying to get an exact idea of just how many fish, or fish stocks are still in the sea may seem impossible-- especially for species which are highly migratory -- ie. able to cross ocean zones the way planes fly

through time zones. But SPC scientists use a number of different types of information to make estimates to help them offer advice to WCPFC members. Fish stock assessments are based on catch records and weights taken from fishing vessels, estimates on the catch sizes using different fishing methods, research vessels taking data from tagging or marking of fish, and studying the reproductive cycles of commercial tuna fish species; just to name a few.

Data on stocks is compared over time to identify emerging trends. Measuring the size of fish species, tagging fish, and noting where in the Pacific they are caught before being released again can help to understand where fish stocks are higher or lower, and the numbers of fully grown mature fish vs. young juvenile fish.

BRINGING TUNA BACK

REPORTED
TOTAL CATCH
FOR 2006

2.2 MILLION TONNES

MADE UP OF:

- Skipjack
1.5 MILLION TONES
- Yellow fin
426,000 TONNES
- Big eye
125,900 TONNES



RECENT MEASURES THE COMMISSION HAS TAKEN:

- Introduced conservation and management measure to cut bigeye tuna fishing by 30% from 2008-2011
- Banned Fish Aggregate Devices (FAD) sets being used for three months of the year
- Permanently closed off two fishing areas called high seas pockets -- pockets of ocean bordered by Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

FISH STOCKS

So how do member nations manage regional fisheries?

Keeping an eye on fish stocks helps WCPFC member countries from the Pacific to better understand and plan for the demands of running fishing as a global business while ensuring the main resource is protected. Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) is the current model used to manage numbers of fish, or fish stock in the Pacific region. It tries to predict the highest number of any species of fish that can be continuously taken from the ocean, without having too big an impact on the ability of schools to reproduce and grow. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and the Western Central Pacific Fishing Commission (WCPFC) are using MSY-based management models to determine their "reference point," a figure derived scientifically based on the state of the fish resource, which gives them a measure of what is being managed and thus provides a point of reference to guide their fisheries projections.

Is it possible that fish like Yellowfin and Bigeye Tuna might become extinct in the WCPFC?

Overfishing makes it likely that the businesses and workers who depend on fish for their commercial revenues and jobs risk losing out. It is also makes it difficult for small island fishers using far less sophisticated methods, to catch deep sea fish either for food or the market. The impact of overfishing on fish stocks has not reached talk of extinction yet, but scientists

are warning the WCPFC of increasing numbers of young fish, known as juveniles, forming part of the reported catch. As with any living species, when the young adults are taken out of the mix before they have a chance to breed, it can be difficult for total numbers to increase.

Overfishing, overfishing...if it's all so urgent, why isn't the WCPFC taking urgent action?

WCPFC member countries are national governments with their own fishing management priorities in place. The Convention has only recently started raising the alarm on overfishing and other harmful impacts on marine life, but national governments are left with the responsibility of taking action, by making decisions at the WCPFC and national levels. The cost of implementing recommendations may be seen as far beyond what many can afford, or are willing to commit to given their own commercial fishing agreements. Meanwhile, there is action taking place, just at differing levels in member nations depending on resources and priorities. It is only through reporting back to WCPFC meetings that the Commission can find out what progress is being made.

Are there other stocks affected by the current fishing situation?

The 2006 scientific findings reveal stocks of striped marlin and swordfish are also highly uncertain, and cautions against more increased fishing efforts. Fish stocks of many other marine life are also affected by tuna fishing.

In the Pacific, we cannot shy away from the responsibilities we have for the tuna resources important to our nations, our region and indeed the world...We must act together as one voice to enable us to share ideas and information to better protect the joint resource that is the Pacific's strength-our fish.

- Kiribati Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resource Development, the Honorable Taberannang Timeon.

HYPERLINK QUOTE: <http://www.ffa.int/node/6>

MORE INFORMATION: Oceanic Fisheries Management Project: www.ffa.int/gef or email barbara.hanchard@ffa.int

Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency: www.ffa.int or email info@ffa.int. Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission: www.wcpfc.int or email wcpfc@mail.fm.



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