



2006 Tuna Catches in the Western and Central Pacific at Near Record High, Yellowfin Tuna Stocks Fully Exploited

HONOLULU (21 August 2007) The Western and Central Pacific tuna fishery had near record landings of 2.2 million metric tons (mmt) in 2006 and is now valued at about three billion dollars. These were among the highlights revealed during the first week of the third meeting of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Scientific Committee, convening Aug. 13-24, 2007, at the Hawaii Convention Center.

As reported to the approximately 150 fishery scientists at the meeting, 2.189 mmt of skipjack, bigeye, yellowfin and albacore tuna were landed in 2006—the second highest landings on record from the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). Of this amount, 1.574 mmt, or 70 percent were landed by purse seine, 0.229 mmt by longline and 0.212 mmt by pole and line.

WCPO purse seine vessel effort appears to have stabilized in 2006 in terms of fleet size at about 180 vessels. Skipjack made up more than 70 percent of the purse-seine catch. Yellowfin tuna catch totals by purse seine vessels dropped slightly to 0.243 mmt, and bigeye tuna was reported at 24,180 mt (down 2 percent from 2005). The trend in catch per unit effort (CPUE) was up for all fleets. The number of sets by the purse seine fleets also increased in 2006 as did the number of sets on fish aggregation devices (FADs) by the US fleet. In terms of ex-vessel price, production fish prices moved up in the latter half of 2006—especially for skipjack tuna. It is estimated that the total value of the WCPO purse seine fishery was at a record high in 2006, at approximately US\$1.6 billion.

The WCPO longline fleet appears to have stabilized at about 5,000 vessels for the last three years. A significant decline in the number of offshore longline vessels targeting bigeye tuna was reported for Chinese Taipei (down 54 percent), Korea (down 30 percent) and Japan (down 23 percent). Aggregate landings in 2006 for yellowfin tuna were 70,000 mt, and 75,000 mt for bigeye tuna—the lowest for these species in seven years. The economics suggest that prices were up by 7 percent to 33 percent, depending on the product type and species, though some declines were noted. Yellowfin tuna prices were reported as flat in terms of the longer term trend, with bigeye tuna price steady or generally rising (5 to 9 percent). The total ex-vessel value of the longline fishery landings for the four main tuna species was estimated to be \$1.1 billion.

For the pole and line fishery, most fleets had not provided even preliminary data for 2006. Economic data suggest that in 2006 the value of pole-and-line caught skipjack increased substantially to more than \$2,000/mt. In 2006, the ex-vessel price for frozen albacore experienced a significant decline (33 percent).

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Beyond the performance of the WCPO fishery, the first week highlights included an updated stock assessment for yellowfin tuna. The assessment suggests a slightly more optimistic status than previous assessments in the past few years. However, the yellowfin stock is considered to be fully exploited, with about a 50 percent chance that it is being exploited at unsustainable levels.

Other tidbits of potential interest:

- A review of circle hook research by researchers at the National Marine Fisheries Service's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center suggests that the hook's efficacy in reducing turtle bycatch in shallow set fisheries warrants widespread application.
- The World Tuna Purse Seine Organization made a presentation calling for the WCPFC to implement a FAD closed area that would allow continued operation if observers and vessel monitoring system are on the vessel. They suggested that the implementation of this action should not disproportionately affect any coastal state.

The first week of the WCPFC Scientific Committee meeting consisted of specialist working group sessions focused on biology, ecosystem and bycatch, fishing technology, methods, statistics and stock assessment. The meeting continues this week with plenary sessions. Findings and recommendations made by the Scientific Committee will be considered by WCPFC at its 4th Regular Session, scheduled to be held Dec. 3 to 7, 2007, at Hyatt Regency Hotel, Tumon, Guam.

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PRESS CONFERENCE INVITATION

Members of the media are invited to a press conference on the outcomes of the 3rd meeting of the WCPFC Scientific Committee.

WHEN: 12:30 to 1:15 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 23, 2007

WHERE: Room 323, Hawaii Convention Center, Honolulu

**WHO: Andrew Wright, Executive Director, WCPFC
John Hampton, Senior Scientist, Secretariat of the Pacific Community
Moses Amos, Director of Fisheries Management, Pacific Islands Forum
Fisheries Agency
Dae Yeon Moon, Chair, WCPFC Scientific Committee
Keith Bigelow, Vice Chair, WCPFC Scientific Committee, and
Fishery Biologist, NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center**

The Hawaii Convention Center requires a list of reporters, so please RSVP if you plan to participate by contacting Paul Dalzell at 479-6563 (cell) or paul.dalzell@noaa.gov or Sylvia Spalding at 522-5341 (w), 383-1069 (cell) or sylvia.spalding@noaa.gov. Mahalo.

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Quick Facts about the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

Who belongs to the WCPFC?

The WCPFC is open to the following countries: Australia, Canada, China, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Republic of Korea, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, United Kingdom (in respect of Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands), United States and Vanuatu. Other States and regional economic integration organizations, whose nationals and fishing vessels wish to conduct fishing for highly migratory fish stocks in the Convention Area may also join the Commission, subject to approval by a consensus of the parties. The Commission also provides for participation by fishing entities. The Commission has 30 members currently.

Does the United States belong to the WCPFC?

The United States deposited its instrument of ratification of the Honolulu Convention establishing the WCPFC on June 27, 2007. The participation of the United States as a full member of the Commission simultaneously provides for the full involvement of U.S. Territories of American Samoa and Guam and the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in the work of the Commission.

What are the responsibilities of the WCPFC?

The Commission's primary responsibility is to support a consultative framework for cooperation on the sustainable use and long term conservation of the region's globally valuable tuna resources. A major concern of the Commission is fish taken illegally or which is unreported. These activities may add an additional 10 percent to the harvest. This is a major concern as such activities seriously undermine the efforts of the Commission to establish a long term sustainable level of harvest.

How is the WCPFC organized?

The Commission consists of three main bodies: the Commission itself and two subsidiary bodies, a Scientific Committee and a Technical and Compliance Committee.

What are the functions of the Scientific Committee?

The Scientific Committee recommends research plans; reviews assessments, analyses and recommendations prepared by scientific experts and provides information, advice and comments thereon; promotes cooperation in scientific research; reviews the results of research and analyses of target stocks or non-target or associated or dependent species and reports findings or conclusions on the status of such stocks; and recommends priorities and objectives of the regional observer programme and assessing the results of that programme.

Where is the WCPFC headquartered?

The Commission is based in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia.

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