

# What is the future for the South Pacific albacore fishery?



**South Pacific albacore tuna** is one of the most important species for American Samoa’s cannery and local commercial fishery. It accounts for about 30% of the total landings (foreign and local) processed by the cannery. Albacore is also the principal species caught by the Territory’s local longline fleet. In 2018, the local fleet landed more than 3 million pounds of albacore.



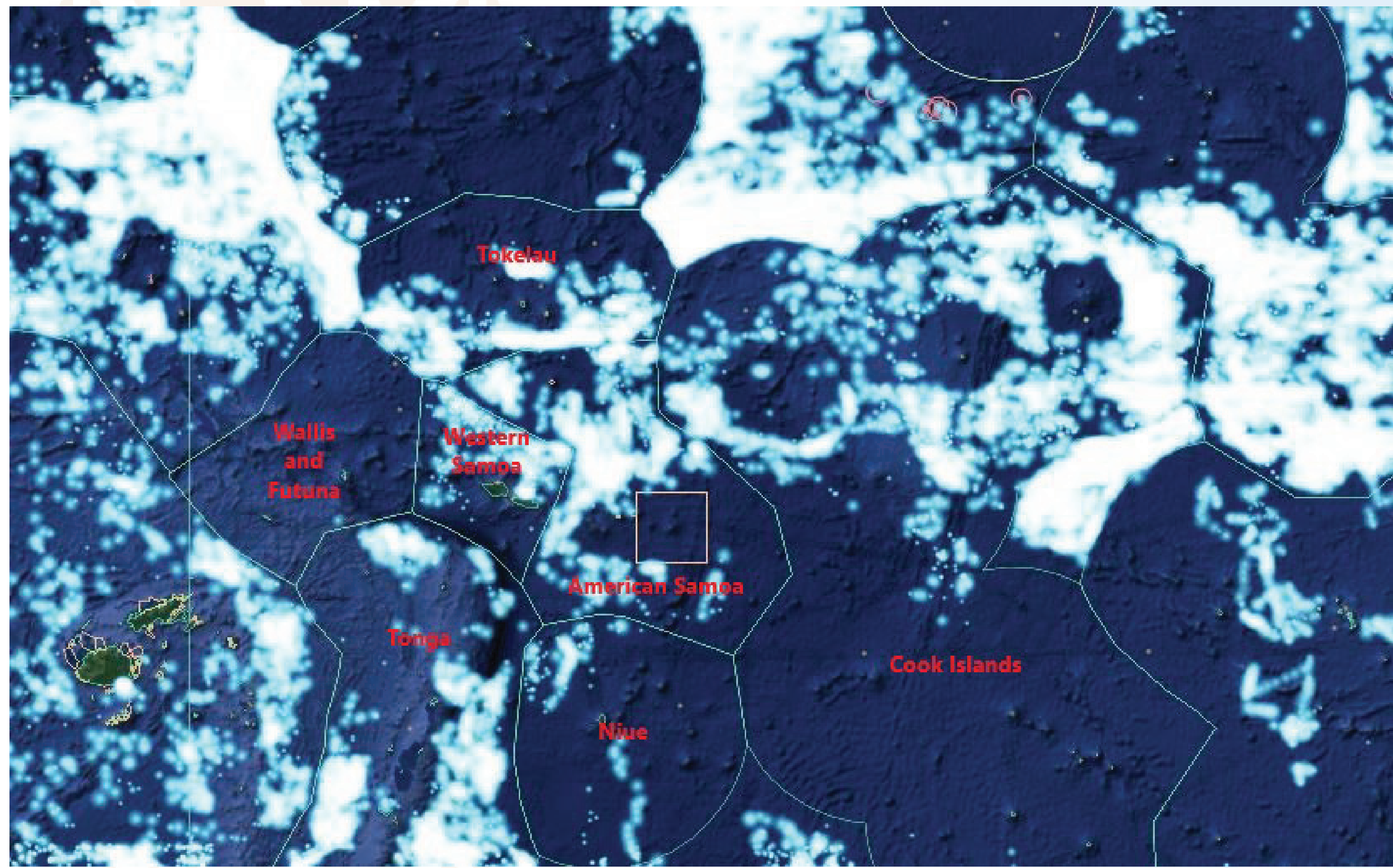
The South Pacific albacore stock is considered to be healthy. It is not overfished (the population is not too low)

and not experiencing overfishing (fishing effort is not greater than necessary to harvest the resource). The size of the species’ spawning population is considered to be at 52% of what it would be if no fishing had occurred, i.e., its virgin spawning biomass, or  $SB_{F=0}$ .

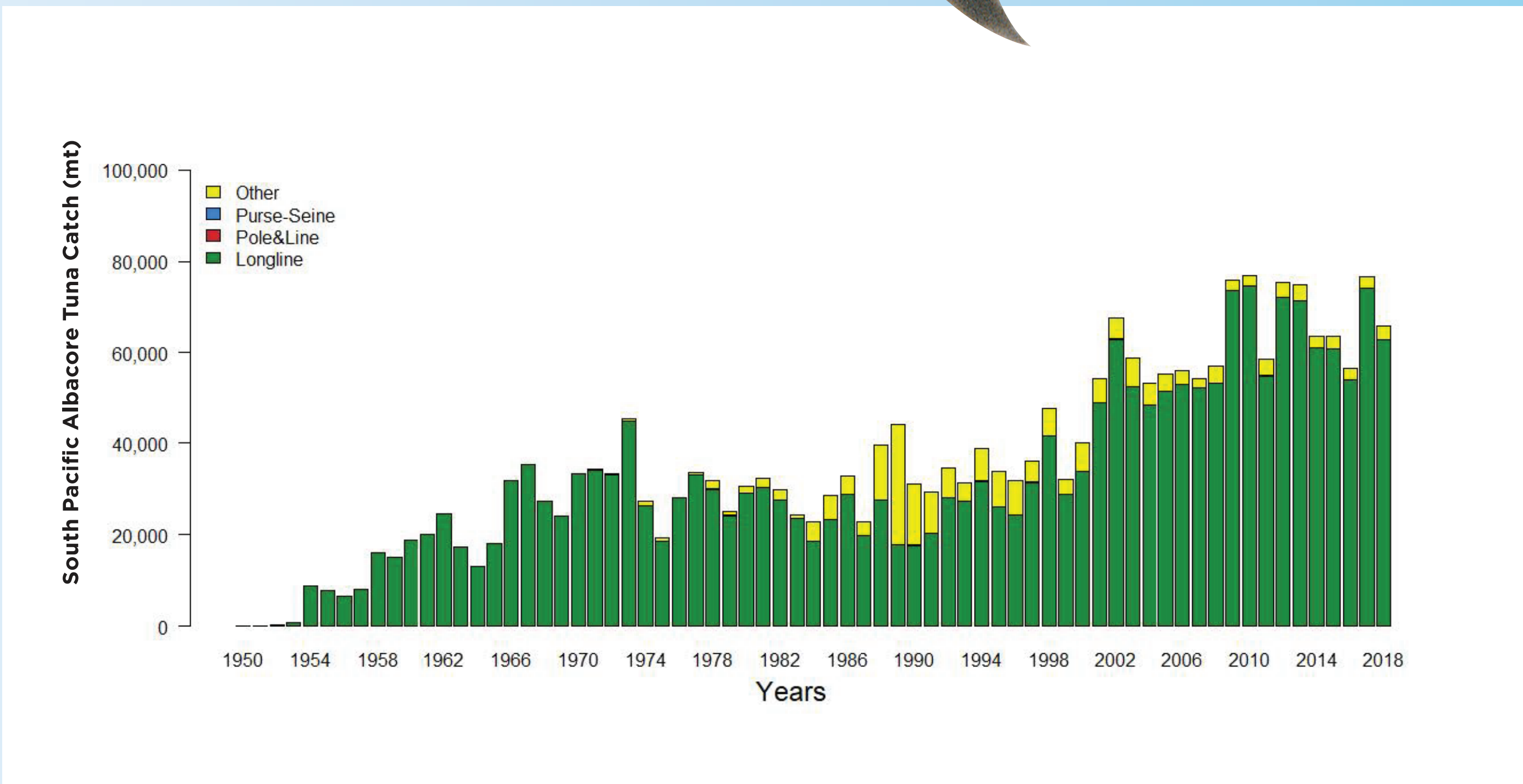


Despite the stock’s good health, the fishery performance of the albacore fleet in American Samoa and other Pacific Island countries has declined. In the Territory, only 11 of 60 local longline vessels are currently active.

The impact of a rapidly growing Chinese fleet in the region is one suspected reason for the decline in the local fishery performance. In 2017, China caught 45% of the total landings of South Pacific albacore, with record catches exceeding 92,000 metric tons. Some of this catch may have been counted twice, once to China and again for the charter flag state where the Chinese vessels were fishing (i.e., national waters where China had permission to fish).



A high level and concentration of fishing effort in regions around American Samoa may reduce the availability of albacore tuna to the territory. *Image courtesy of Global Fishing Watch, fishing effort from June 2019 to September 2019.*

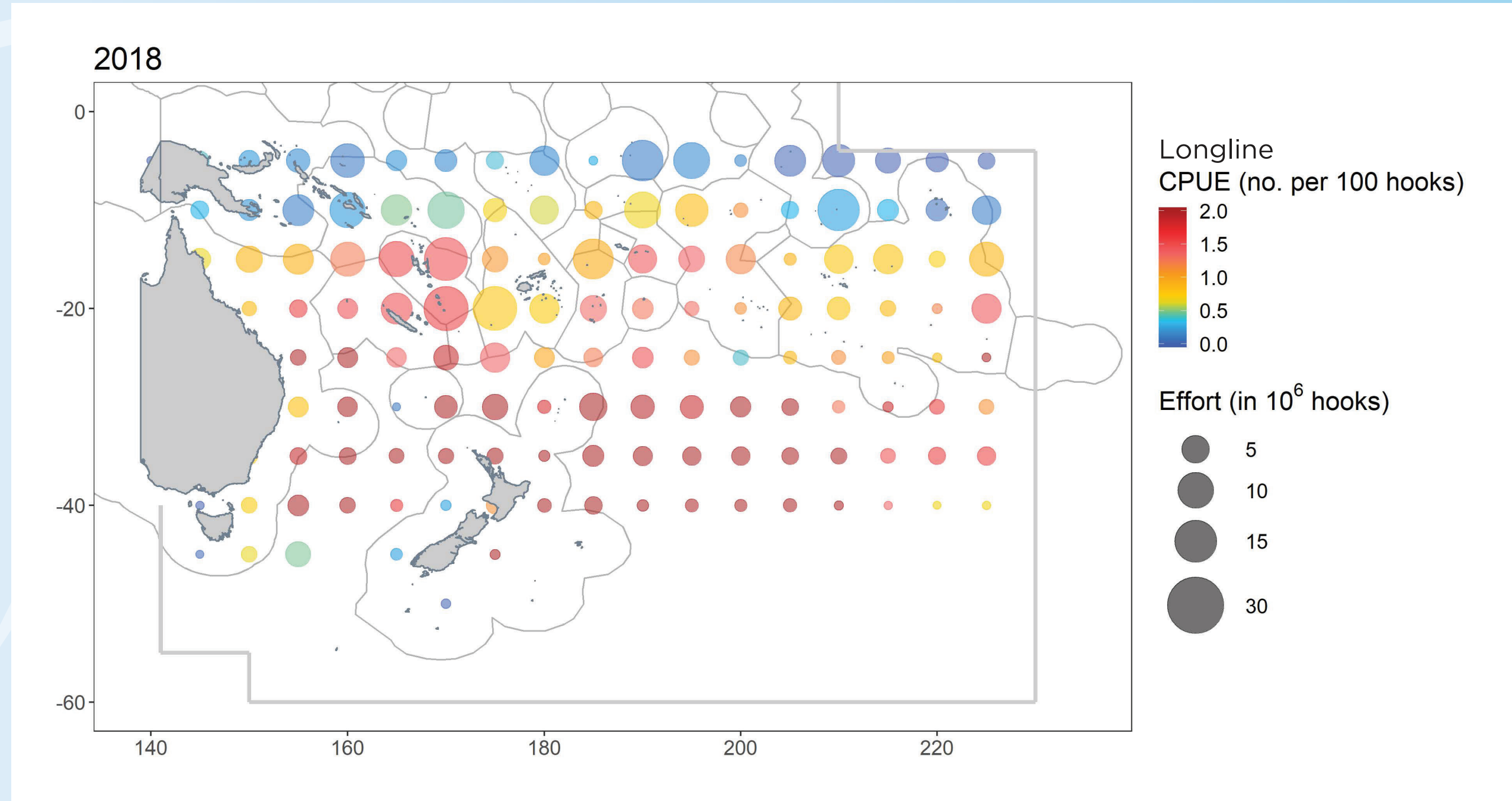


Longline fishing for albacore tuna expanded in the 1950s and remains the primary gear type for South Pacific albacore—a key species for American Samoa. Catches peaked at record highs in 2017. *Image courtesy of the Pacific Community (SPC), 2019.*

**THE SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE STOCK IS NOT OVERFISHED (THE POPULATION IS NOT TOO LOW) AND NOT EXPERIENCING OVERFISHING (FISHING EFFORT IS NOT GREATER THAN NECESSARY TO HARVEST THE RESOURCE).**

To improve the stock health, which can increase catch rates for American Samoa and other Small Island Developing States, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission may develop a target reference point for South Pacific albacore. One scenario under consideration would allow the stock to increase to 56% of its virgin spawning biomass, which would lead to increased fishery performance in the region in the near future.

Many climate change models also show that American Samoa may experience increases for all tuna species within the exclusive economic zone waters surrounding its islands in the future.



Longline catch per unit effort (CPUE) rates are highest south of 20° S, while the heaviest effort concentration remains along equatorial waters around small island states. Much of this fishing effort is attributed to nations such as China and Taiwan. *Image courtesy of SPC, 2019.*



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