

REPORT FROM THE WPTT ON THE DATA SITUATION FOR TROPICAL TUNAS

The First Meeting of the WPTT identified a number of problem areas in the data situation for tropical tunas. These included:

- Poor knowledge of the catches, effort and size frequency from small LL vessels flying flags of convenience.
- Lack of catch, effort and size-frequency data for the Indonesian longline fishery in recent years.
- Lack of size-frequency data for the whole period of operations for the Korean longline fishery.
- Lack of catch (since 1997), effort (since 1994) and size-frequency (since 1988) data for the Taiwanese longline fishery.

In the specific case of the skipjack tuna, there was concern about the lack of reporting from important artisanal components of the fisheries directed to this species, such as those of the Maldives.

Improvements have taken place in a number of these areas. These include:

A better level of catch reporting: Catches and catch-and-effort information have been obtained concerning the activities of Taiwanese vessels. Maldives has provided catch and catch-and-effort information and will submit size-frequency information shortly. Philippines has provided information on the activities of its vessels in the Indian Ocean.

An improved Vessel Registry: Better information has been obtained on the number and type of vessels operating under flags of non-reporting parties. This information comes mostly from various licensing schemes in the Indian Ocean and has become a very important element in the estimation of the catches of the NEI component.

Improved estimation of the NEI component: Two components are included under the NEI category: a) vessels whose activities are monitored under regular sampling programmes, such as the EU PS vessels under non-EU flag and b) vessels that are not monitored closely under any statistical system, such as small LL vessels operating under different flags or large LL (> 100 GRT) flying flags of non-reporting parties. A considerable effort has been spent in obtaining a better estimation of the second component and, as a result, the total catch of tropical tunas, in particular of bigeye and yellowfin tunas, is better known.

Improved estimation of Indonesian longline catches: New estimates were carried out during the last year regarding the historical series of catches of Indonesian longliners in the Indian Ocean based upon data on the landings of longliners in Benoa provided by the CSIRO/RIMF sampling scheme. Nevertheless, work is still needed to improve the estimation of catches from other fisheries in the country, for which only aggregated data have been reported since 1995.

Recovery of historical activity and size data from processing plants: At unloading points for small LL vessels, processing plants record individual weights for all the fish processed. Cooperation has been established with some of these operators and the Secretariat has been able to obtain copies of records for recent years covering about 36,000 specimens. Efforts to recover more of this information will continue. These historical records are an important source of information, which in some cases could go back as far as the 1970s and provide information about total catch for a fishing trip and also the size-frequency and species composition of the catches.

IOTC sampling programmes: Sampling programmes have been initiated in Thailand and Malaysia through cooperative arrangements between the Secretariat and national institutions, with the objective of obtaining information about size-frequencies, fishing operations and the total number of vessels operating from Phuket and Penang. Activities have focused on recovering past information, interviews with fishing masters and sampling of unloaded catches (about 15,000 fish have been sampled to date in Phuket). Contacts have been initiated with Indonesian and Mauritian authorities to explore the possibility of initiating similar activities in their ports.

Korean size-frequency data: Some size-frequency information has been obtained from operation of vessels from Korea. However, sample sizes are very small and no other source for this information has been identified to date. It is not clear at this time whether further data exist and this will remain a problem for any analysis that would require size information for bigeye and yellowfin tuna.

The status of the current data situation for each of the species can be summarised as follows:

YELLOWFIN AND BIGEYE TUNA

NC data: Relatively well known for most purse-seine fisheries and the main longline fleets (Japan, Korea and China(Taiwan)). Uncertainty remains for large NEI LL vessels, especially for the period 1988-1997. Artisanal catches are uncertain, although they are not considered large, with the possible exception of the gillnet/longline and other coastal fleets where the catches are reported under other species groups.

CE data: Well known in the purse-seine fisheries and the main longline operations (Japan, Korea and China (Taiwan)). Unknown for NEI longline vessels.

SF data: Data from 1999 and part of 1998 from the EU PS sampling is considered preliminary. Low sampling coverage from Japan and Korean in recent years. No SF data available from Taiwanese vessels since 1989. Little information is available on important artisanal catches (e.g. Oman, Pakistan, Comoros).

SKIPJACK TUNA

NC data: Relatively well known for most purse-seine fisheries. Data are available in the important artisanal fishery in Maldives. Artisanal components (not well known) are important for this species (e.g. gillnet fisheries in Pakistan). In several coastal countries the catches are not reported by gear.

CE data: Relatively well known in the purse-seine fisheries. Little is known from the artisanal fisheries with the exception of Maldives.

SF data: Data from 1999 and part of 1998 from the EU PS sampling is considered preliminary. Information from artisanal fisheries is poor (with the exception of Maldivian BB catches and gillnet catches from Iran). There are significant catches from gillnet (Sri Lanka) and unclassified gears (Indonesia) for which no size information is available.