

REPORT FROM THE WPTT ON THE DATA SITUATION FOR TROPICAL TUNAS

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A number of problem areas were identified in the data situation for tropical tunas:

- Poor knowledge of the catches, effort and size-frequency from fresh tuna longline vessels, especially from Taiwan, China and several flags of convenience.
- Poor knowledge of the catches, effort and size-frequency from deep-freezing tuna longliners flying flags of convenience, especially since the mid-eighties.
- Lack of catch, effort and size-frequency data for the Indonesian longline fishery in recent years.
- Poor knowledge of the catches and lack of effort and size-frequency data for ex-Russian purse seine boats flying flags of convenience in recent years.

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

A better level of reporting: NC and CE information have been obtained for deep-freezing Taiwanese vessels. The submission of NC, CE and SF statistics from Maldives is currently complete. Sets of CE and SF statistics have been provided by Korea, although the SF data have not been integrated into the database due to numerous problems found during the validation process. It is important to note also the submission by Pakistan and Vanuatu of NC statistics for recent years.

Revision of the IOTC databases: Several revisions have been conducted during the last year on the IOTC databases. This has led to new datasets being input, especially regarding CE and SF statistics and to new series of NC data for some countries.

An improved Vessel Record: More 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 an important element in the estimation of the catches of the NEI component.

Improved estimation of the NEI component: The collection of historical and current information on the landings of small fresh tuna longliners in ports in the Indian Ocean has improved the accuracy of earlier estimates. The more complete Vessel Record will also permit the estimation by flag of the catches of deep-freezing longliners.

Recovery of historical activity and size data from processing plants: The collection of historical information from operators in different ports of the Indian Ocean has continued since last year. Some 120,000 individual fish weight records by species have been retrieved to date for 1998 to 2001.

IOTC sampling programmes: The collection of information on the activities of fresh tuna longliners landing in Phuket and Penang has continued during 2001. This has permitted an estimate of the catches unloaded for these vessels in Phuket for the first time. Other valuable data collected in the scope of these programmes refer to length frequencies which will allow length-length, length-weight and weight-length relationships to be established. Sampling will also soon start in Sri Lanka, where fresh tuna longliners have been operating since the early nineties.

Korean size-frequency data: Korea has reported SF statistics for yellowfin and bigeye tunas since 1990. Nevertheless, the data are scarce and inaccurate and cannot be used as many errors were found during validation.

Maldives NC, CE and SF data: Maldives has submitted all pending statistics this year. Only the 1999 size frequencies and the 1993-99 detailed CE statistics are pending submission.

Sri Lanka nominal catch and size-frequency data: the reporting of catches has improved for vessels operating with gillnet and longline gears. SF and CE statistics are also recorded and will soon be submitted.

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 Taiwan, China). Catches of large NEI LL vessels are still uncertain, especially for the period 1988-1997. Artisanal catches are uncertain, although they are not considered large, with the possible exception of gillnet/longline and other coastal fleets where the catches are reported under "other species" groups, especially for early years.

CE data: Well known in the purseseine fisheries and the main longline operations (Japan, Korea and Taiwan, China). Nevertheless, the Korean data are thought inaccurate. No catch-and-effort statistics are available for NEI longline and purse seine vessels.

SF data: Data since 1997 from the EU PS sampling is considered less accurate. Sampling coverage from Japan and Korean is low in recent years. No SF data are available from Taiwanese vessels since 1989. Little information is available on important artisanal catches (e.g. Oman, Pakistan and Comoros).

Skipjack Tuna

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