

Report from the WPTT on the data situation for tropical tunas

Existing problem areas

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

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- Poor knowledge of the catches, effort and size-frequency from fresh tuna longline vessels, especially from Taiwan, China and several non-reporting fleets.
- Poor knowledge of the catches, effort and size-frequency from non-reporting fleets of deep-freezing tuna longliners, especially since the mid-eighties.
- Lack of accurate 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-Soviet purse seine boats flying flags of convenience in recent years.

Improvements since last meeting

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

- **A better level of reporting:** New NC, CE and SF datasets have been obtained from several countries as for South Africa and Seychelles longline fisheries.
- **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 (Indonesia, Sri Lanka) 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 non-reporting fleets.
- **Improved estimation of catches of non-reporting fleets:** 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 also permitted 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 250,000 individual fish weight records by species have been retrieved to date for 1998 to 2002.
- **IOTC/OFCF sampling programmes:** The collection of information on the activities of fresh tuna longliners landing in Phuket, Penang and Sri Lanka has continued during 2002. This has led to more complete and accurate estimates of catches of these fleets. 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.
- **Plan of Action in Indonesia:** A large scale operation involving several local and foreign institutions was initiated in April 2002 in Indonesia. The primary objective of this multi-lateral cooperation is building the necessary capabilities in the country, so as to allow Indonesia to generate good quality statistics in the near future. Sampling of landings of fresh tuna longliners operating in this country started in June 2002, with more than 2,000 sampling conducted (160,000 monitored) between June 2002 and March 2003, with coverage levels ranging from 20% to 30% of the catches unloaded by longliners in Indonesia.

- **Japan NC and CE:** New estimates of catches of Japanese longline vessels for 1950-1969 were conducted during 2002 on the basis of new information reported by Japan. New CE data was also submitted for 1950-2001 to replace previous estimates that did not consider the IOTC boundaries but the FAO ones.
- **Indonesia NC:** The NC for 1975-2001 was replaced by new estimates that took into account the IOTC Eastern boundary.
- **Taiwan,China NC:** The catches of Taiwanese longliners were updated during 2002 with new catches added for the period 1954-1965 and 1966-1978 catches updated.

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 non-reporting longline and purse seine fleets are still uncertain, although they are believed more accurate than past catches estimated.

Artisanal catches are negligible as regards bigeye tuna. On the contrary, catches of yellowfin tuna under artisanal gears, mainly gillnets, have dramatically increased in recent years being still uncertain in most cases.

CE data: Well known in the purse-seine 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 non-reporting longline, purse seine and most gillnet fisheries.

SF data: Data for the period 1997-2000 from the EU PS sampling is considered less accurate. Sampling coverage from Japan and Korea is low in recent years. The only data available regarding non-reporting fleets are from sampling in Phuket, Penang, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. No SF data are available from Taiwanese vessels since 1989. Little information is available on important artisanal catches (e.g. Oman, Pakistan, Yemen and Comoros).

Skipjack Tuna

NC and CE 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 (Indonesia).

SF data: Available for reporting purse seine fleets (1984-2002), Maldivian baitboats (1983-1998) and some gillnet fisheries and years (Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia and Sri Lanka).