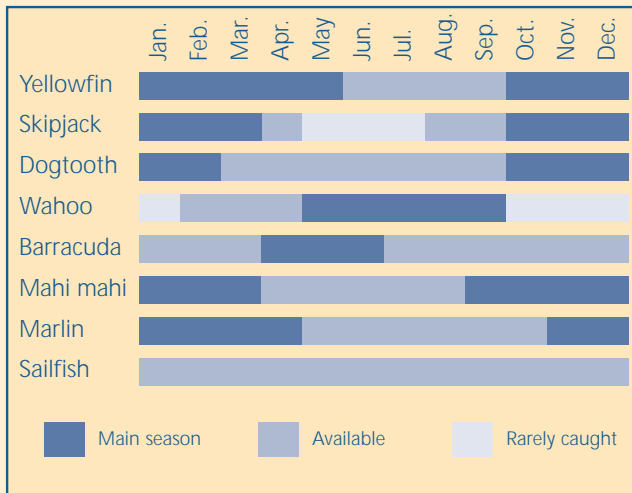


At present all local catch is sold on the local market (restaurants, hotels, etc.). As the entire volume of this catch is absorbed locally, there is no fish exported overseas.

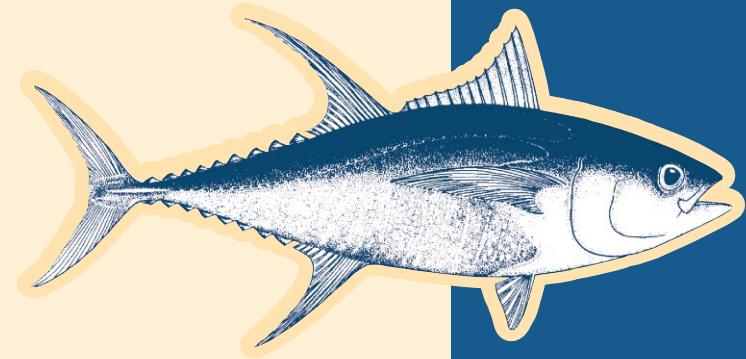
Catches by near-shore fishermen are highly seasonal, especially in the Southern group. On Rarotonga, Wahoo are abundant from May to September, the Skipjack tuna from October to March and the Yellowfin tuna from October to May. These seasons are not consistent and can be longer or shorter from year to year.

Seasonality of Tuna and other pelagic fish around Rarotonga



Tuna & other pelagic fisheries In the Cook Islands

2000



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GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS
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 Cook Islands



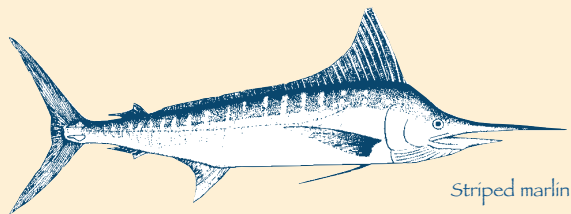
The Cook Islands
Exclusive Economic
Zone (EEZ)

covers an area of 1.8 million km² and shares common borders with five other Pacific Island nations or territories. The Western and Central Pacific Tuna fishery is now the largest Tuna fishery in the world, worth NZ\$ 4 billion annually.

The Tuna fishery in the Cook Islands is important both commercially and as subsistence catch. Yellowfin (see cover drawing), Albacore, Skipjack and Bigeye are the main Tuna species found in the Cook Islands. Other pelagic (ocean) fish caught include Mahi mahi, Wahoo, Marlin (see below) and Swordfish.

Revenue for the Cook Islands from offshore fisheries varies from year to year, depending on the number of vessels licensed and the amount of fish caught in the Cook Islands EEZ. Licensing and payment assessment occurs through the Ministry of Marine Resources and is renegotiated annually for each vessel under terms of an access agreement.

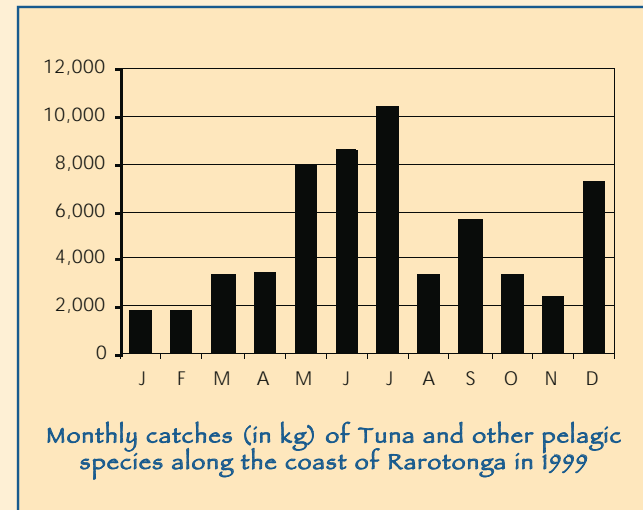
As well as deriving income from selling licenses, the Cook Islands gain valuable data from the fishing boats on catch rates and fishing locations. This has aided in formulating a detailed management plan for future development of the Cook Island Tuna industry and is vital for ongoing management of the offshore fisheries sector.



Near-shore
tuna fisheries

The Ministry of Marine Resources records the catch of fishermen on some of the islands. Catches by near-shore local fishermen mostly consist of Yellowfin and Skipjack tuna, Wahoo, and Mahi mahi. For Rarotonga, total catches of Tuna and associated species were 35 t in 1998 and 59 t in 1999 (see figure below for 1999 monthly data).

Local fishermen generally catch Tuna by trolling lures behind small boats. They also use the drop-stone method (*i'i*) and vertical longlining to target the larger, deep swimming Tunas. Fishermen will often concentrate their fishing activities around the Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs) deployed at sites along the coast (see FAD pamphlet for more information).

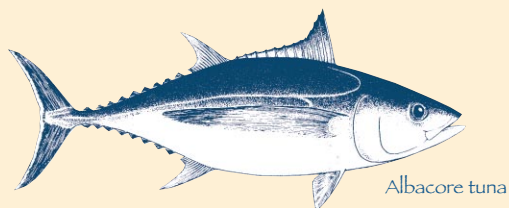


Potential problems

Illegal longlining is suspected to be a problem in the Cook Islands and there are limited resources to survey the zone. Seventy hours of aircraft time and four surface patrols of the zone per year, made by the police patrol boat 'Te Kukupa', comprise the total Cook Islands effort against illegal fishing. However, it is hoped that new surveillance technology, such as the satellite based Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), will help greatly in the fight against illegal fishing in the Cook Islands.

The impact of increasing fishing pressure on the highly migratory oceanic fish stocks is still being studied. Most of the information on the biological impact of Tuna fishing comes from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), where scientists are studying the effects of this increased fishing activity, in order to protect the very valuable Tuna resources of the Western and Central Pacific region.

Worldwide, there are initiatives to maintain sustainable Tuna stocks so that the fisheries will not be over exploited. The Cook Islands is party to several regional initiatives to implement management and conservation of the Tuna resource of the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

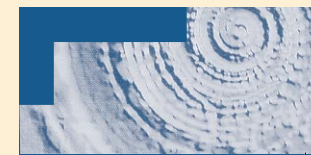
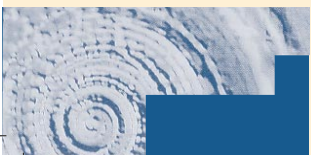
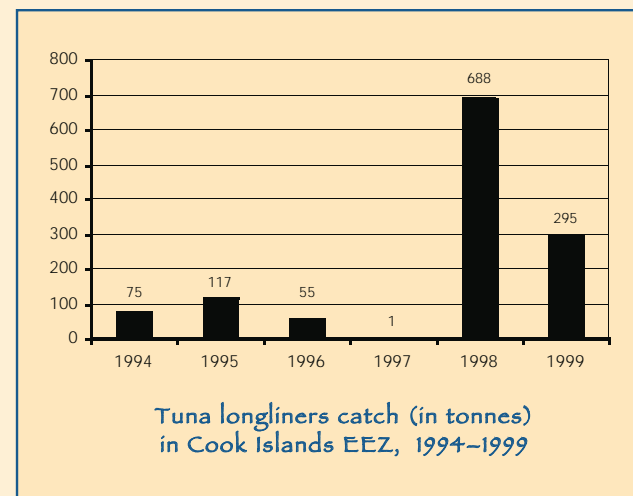


Offshore tuna fisheries

Distant water fishing nations have fished in the Cook Islands area for several decades (1960-1994). Such fleets have included Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese longline vessels targeting predominantly albacore, and frozen 'sashimi' Tunas.

Several local or locally based longline vessels were licensed from the period 1994 to mid 1997. The vessels ranged from 16 to 35 metres in length and targeted export quality fish for the fresh chilled and 'sashimi' markets overseas.

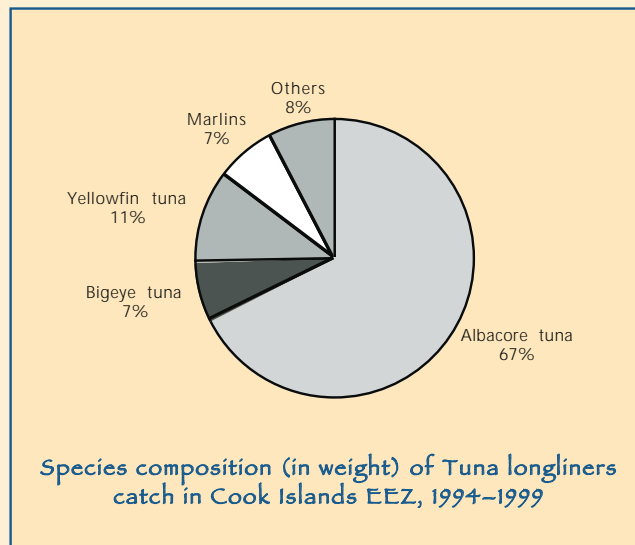
More recently, there have been several bilateral arrangements concluded with foreign companies based overseas. Catch from these vessels, operating mainly in the northern part of the Cook Islands EEZ has been very high, particularly of Albacore tuna, which is unloaded at a cannery in Pago Pago, American Samoa.



US purse seiners have also operated in the Cook Islands under the US Multilateral Treaty on Fisheries. This Treaty allows US vessels access to the Cook Islands EEZ, as part of an access arrangement between the US and several Pacific Island countries. There have however, only been a handful of trips made by US purse seiners to the Cook Islands zone since the inception of the Treaty in 1988.

Fishing techniques

The longline vessels use horizontal fishing lines of up to 150 km and can set up to 3,000 hooks. In the Cook Islands longliners target the key Tuna species: Albacore, Bigeye and adult Yellowfin. Albacore tuna is frozen, and is caught primarily for supply to the canneries in American Samoa and Fiji.



Yellowfin and Bigeye tuna are considered to be more valuable species, and are normally chilled (iced) and later air freighted to 'Sashimi' markets overseas. 'Sashimi' is a method of preparing the fish so that it can be consumed raw, and is considered a delicacy, particularly by the Japanese. Fresh sashimi grade Tuna can fetch very high prices at overseas markets (up to NZ\$ 200/kg.).

Purse seining is a method whereby boats encircle a large area with an enormous net that reaches from the water's surface down tens of meters. When the school of fish are completely surrounded, the bottom of the net is drawn shut, trapping everything within the enclosure. Skipjack tuna and other fish near the surface of ocean are the principal species targeted by the Purse Seiners. Purse seine fishing rarely occurs in Cook Islands waters as this type of fishing is more typically confined to equatorial waters near PNG, Nauru and Kiribati where Skipjack tuna are most abundant.

Restrictions

All foreign fishing vessels (including those which base locally) are licensed in accordance with terms set under an access agreement. This access agreement contains specific terms and conditions of fishing (e.g. on the type of fishing allowed, the areas where fishing may take place, and the duration of the license period, among other things).

All foreign fishing vessels are restricted to fishing outside the 12-mile territorial sea around each island, which avoids any confrontation with local artisanal and subsistence fishing craft.

The fishing regulations and conditions of licenses are provided for by law under the Marine Resources Act (1989) and the Fisheries Regulations (1995). Vessels that contravene these regulations are subject to heavy penalties including fines or imprisonment, and confiscation of the boat, gear and catch.