COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF HIGHLY MIGRATORY FISH STOCKS IN THE WESTERN AND CENTRAL PACIFIC OCEAN

FIRST MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL AND COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE
[5-9 December 2005]
and
SECOND ANNUAL SESSION
[12-16 December]

2nd December 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

JAPAN

1. Introduction

This paper describes recent trends in Japanese tuna fishing activities (longline, pole-and-line and purse seine) mostly in the WCPFC Convention Area (WCPFC CA). Fleet, fishing effort and catch statistics are included. Governmental officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) conduct landing surveys at fishing port to obtain catch statistics. In addition, the logbook system covers all fishing vessels which operate in the high seas and all fishing vessels which are greater than 20 gross registered tonnages (GRT). Purse seine catch statistics are updated to 2004. However, 2004 catch statistics of longline and pole-and-line fisheries are not available yet, because of the long fishing trips undertaken by many of these vessels. Therefore, Tables 1, 2, and 3 have provisional data, which are within parentheses.

2. Fleet structure

Table 1 shows the number of Japanese tuna boats engaged in fishing by type of fishery and vessel size class during 2000-2004 (MAFFJ 2000-2002).

For the longline fishery, most of the boats larger than 200 GRT are operating in areas other than the WCPFC CA. The number of longline vessels of the largest size class (over 200 GRT), which experienced 20% reduction in 1999, was 484 in 2002. This reduction in the number of vessels was implemented in accordance with the FAO's International Action Plan on management of fishing capacity. The total number of longline vessels in 2002 was 1,447, which is 29 vessels less than in 2001.

In the case of pole-and-line boats, the number of vessels of the largest size category (over 200 GRT) was 47 in 2000 and was 48 in 2002. The number of vessels of this category has been stable during the past 10 years. On the contrary, the number of vessels of other categories, namely 0-10 GRT, 10-50 GRT and 50-200 GRT classes, decreased during 2000-2002. Among them, the number of vessels of the 0-10 GRT class sharply decreased from 265 in 2000, to 176 in 2002. The numbers of vessels of the categories 10-50 GRT and 50-200 GRT decreased from 93 to 76 and 113 to 103, respectively, during 2000-2002. The total number of pole-and-line vessels in 2002 was 403, which is 115 fewer vessels or 22% less than that in 2000.

Regarding purse seine vessels, those that operate in the equatorial waters of the western and central Pacific

are greater than 200 GRT (most of them are 349 GRT), while those in the 50-150 GRT class size operate in near-shore Japanese waters, north of 20°N. The number of vessels of the latter size category engaged in the tuna fishery has slightly decreased from 23 in 2000 to 18 in 2002. The number of purse seine vessels operating in equatorial waters was 36, and has not changed after 1995.

3. Annual catches in the WCPFC Convention Area, 2000-2004

3. 1. Longline fishery

The latest available statistics are provisional for 2004 for longline boats larger than 20 GRT. The catch, in weight, of tunas (albacore, yellowfin, and bigeye tunas), swordfish and billfishes (striped marlin, blue marlin, black marlin, sailfish, and shortbill spearfish) caught by the Japanese offshore and distant water longline fishery in the WCPFC CA from 2000 to 2004 are shown in Table 2. In Fig. 1, historical changes in catch by species and in effort are shown, respectively, for the years 1971-2004. Total longline fishing effort (in number of hooks) has decreased steadily since a peak in 1981. The fishing effort in 2004 was 118 million hooks, which is 30 % lower than 10 years ago. Among the species caught, albacore and swordfish did not show any decline in catches, while the other species indicated continuous catch reductions, particularly after 1981. The yellowfin catch was at a peak during the late 1970s and the early 1980s, and started going down soon after. The bigeye catch followed this trend in more recent years, beginning in the early 1990s. The billfish catch more or less reflected the decreasing trend in fishing effort.

3. 2. Pole-and-line fishery

The catch and effort statistics in the WCPFC CA by the Japanese pole-and-line fishery (larger than 20 GRT in vessel size) are shown in Table 3, from 2000 to 2004. In addition, this historical change in catch by species and in effort is shown in Fig. 2, respectively, for the years 1972-2004. Catch and effort decreased gradually throughout the 1980s, with a peak occurring around the late 1970s. After 1991, they were relatively stable. Total yearly catches in the 1970s and the early 1980s were from 250,000 to 300,000 MT, and were around 150,000 MT in 1990s and later. Skipjack occupied the major part of catches, followed by albacore and yellowfin. The number of fishing days exceeded 60,000 days in 1970s, but it is now slightly over 20,000 days. The number of poles used also peaked at 1977, and were more than 1,200,000 before 1982, except in 1972. Then, it decreased to 400,000 poles during the 1990s and thereafter.

In 2003, the number of fishing days was 20,664 days, down slightly from 2002, and the number of poles was equivalent to those in 2002. The total catch in 2003 was higher than that of previous years, amounting to 152,784 MT (Table 3). Catches of skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye tunas in 2003 were 115,257 MT, 2,089 MT and 822 MT, respectively. The skipjack catch increased to 115,257 t, an increase of 127% compared to 2002. On the other hand, the albacore, yellowfin and bigeye catches were lower than those in 2002.

3. 3. Purse seine fishery

The total catch of the purse seine fishery has stabilized to nearly 200,000 MT in recent years. The majority of the catch has been skipjack, which accounted for more than 74% of the total catch in recent years (Table 4 and Fig. 3). The annual total catch in 2004 in the WCPFC CA by this fishery and obtained by logbooks was 174,000 MT, 22,000 MT and 4,500 MT for skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye, respectively.

About 135,500 MT of skipjack, 20,000 MT of yellowfin and 3,500 MT of bigeye were caught in the equatorial waters, and the remaining was caught in the vicinity of Japan in 2004. The skipjack catch was the same as the recent five year average, while the bigeye catch was about 91% of the five year average (Table 4), and the yellowfin catch was lower than the recent average (81%).

3.4. Total catch for tropical tunas for all gears combined

The total catch for tropical tunas for all gears combined, including coastal fisheries (longline, pole-and-line, troll and other miscellaneous gears), are shown in Table 5 for 2000-2004. The data in 2004 is provisional. The catches in 2003 for bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack were 34,836 MT, 50,591 MT and 317,944 MT, respectively. During 2000-2004, the bigeye catch was relatively stable, ranging from 32,000 MT to 37,000 MT, but the yellowfin catch showed a declining trend from 70,000 MT to 41,000 MT. The skipjack catch showed no apparent trend, ranging from 372,000 MT to 438,000 MT.

4. Monitoring and Management

Fisheries are managed based on the Fisheries Law and other fisheries-related laws and regulations. Governmental officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) conduct landing surveys at fishing port to monitor catch.

Regarding high sea fisheries, the number of licenses and the fishing capacity of tuna vessels are strictly regulated by the Government of Japan in order to prevent the expansion of fishing effort and/or fishing capacity. No Japanese tuna vessel is authorized to operate in the high seas unless the Government of Japan issues a license.

When Japan acceded to the WCPFC Convention, the government of Japan made the following changes in its national regulations in order to fulfill its responsibility as a Contracting Party to the WCPFC Convention.

(1) No Japanese fishing vessel entitled to fly its flag shall be used for fishing for highly migratory fish stocks in the Convention Area beyond areas of national jurisdiction unless it has been authorized to do so by the MAFF.
(2) Each Japanese tuna fishing vessel on the high seas in the Convention Area shall display WIN as specified for the marking and identification of fishing vessels by the WCPFC.
(3) Each operator of a Japanese tuna fishing vessel on the high seas in the Convention Area shall ensure that a recent and up-to-date copy of the International Code of Signals (INTERCO) is on board and accessible at all times.
(4) Each operator of a Japanese fishing vessel on the high seas in the Convention Area shall ensure the continuous monitoring of the international distress and calling frequency 2182 khz, or the international safety and calling frequency 156.8 Mhz, at all times .

The export and charter of Japanese tuna vessels are strictly regulated by FAJ in order not to become a source of IUU fishing vessels.

5. Enforcement

Japan has been dispatching patrol vessels to the Convention area every year to monitor and inspect Japanese tuna vessels. Japan will continue to dispatch such patrol vessels in 2006.

In addition, Japanese tuna fishing vessels that operate in the high seas and land their catch at Japanese ports must report their landing plans to the FAJ in advance. FAJ randomly inspects landings of those Japanese tuna vessels.

Table 1. Number of fishing vessels engaged in tuna fisheries in the WCPFC Convention Area by gear and size of vessel. Figures in parentheses indicate provisional data.

Longline*

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
0-10 ton	291	339	342	(342)	(342)
10-50 ton	444	442	442	(442)	(442)
50-200 ton	187	186	179	(179)	(179)
200-500 ton	493	490	484	(484)	(484)
500+ ton	3	4	0	(0)	(0)
total	1,418	1,461	1,447	(1,447)	(1,447)

Pole-and-line

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
0-10 ton	265	199	176	(176)	(176)
10-50 ton	93	87	76	(76)	(76)
50-200 ton	113	108	103	(103)	(103)
200-500 ton	47	47	48	(48)	(48)

Purse Seine

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
0-200 ton	23	19	18	(18)	(18)
200+ ton	37	36	36	(36)	(36)

* Boats larger than 50 GRT include those operated in areas other than the WCPFC CA.

Table 2. Fishing effort (in million hooks) and catch (MT) in the WCPFC Convention Area by species for the Japanese longline fishery (boats larger than 20 GRT). Figures in parentheses indicate provisional data.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Number of hooks	128	122	119	125	(118)
Albacore	12,848	14,651	9,770	7,743	(8,658)
Bigeye	23,119	23,102	23,992	20,917	(21,910)
Yellowfin	20,823	12,288	12,030	12,058	(9,400)
Swordfish	6,260	6,006	5,957	5,935	(6,500)
Striped marlin	1,033	1,066	680	1,148	(791)
Blue marlin	2,297	1,962	1,759	2,043	(2,094)
Black marlin	76	39	80	46	(60)
Skipjack	20	79	56	98	(61)
Sailfish	29	41	72	86	(65)
Shortbill spearfish	128	89	66	82	(86)
Total	66,633	59,324	54,463	50,157	(49,625)

Table 3. Days fished, number of poles used, and catch (MT) by species for the Japanese pole-and-line fishery (larger than 20GRT) in the WCPFC Convention Area. Figures in parentheses indicate provisional data.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Number of fishing day	23,593	22,050	20,960	20,664	(20,664)
Number of pole	428,140	405,319	390,937	391,562	(391,562)
Albacore	21,502	29,225	49,443	34,580	(34,580)
Bigeye	1,792	1,321	1,714	822	(822)
Yellowfin	3,475	2,616	2,501	2,089	(2,089)
Skipjack	138,860	96,144	90,466	115,257	(115,257)
Total	165,629	129,306	144,124	152,748	(152,748)

Table 4. Fishing days, including search days and catch (MT) by species for the Japanese tuna purse seine fishery in the WCPFC Convention Area based on logbook data.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Number of fishing day	9,259	8,032	8,320	8,677	8,837
Albacore	2,161	979	3,072	837	6,932
Bigeye	4,735	6,125	4,587	5,099	4,577
Yellowfin	36,125	33,735	19,138	27,120	22,627
Skipjack	167,726	169,328	188,052	187,338	172,563
Total	210,746	210,166	214,848	220,394	206,699

Table 5. Japanese catches for tropical tuna species by gear. Figures in parentheses indicate provisional data. LL: longline, PL: pole-and-line, PS: purse seine.

		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Bigeye	Total	36,017	36,403	37,009	34,836	(31,717)
	Distant water and Offshore LL	23,119	23,102	23,992	20,917	(21,910)
	Distant water and Offshore PL	1,792	1,321	1,714	822	(822)
	Tuna PS	4,735	6,125	4,587	5,099	4,577
	coastal LL	6,042	5,587	6,510	7,792	(4,202)
	coastal PL	125	56	43	(43)	(43)
	coastal PS		1	2	(2)	(2)
	Troll	190	182	126	(126)	(126)
	Unclassified	14	29	35	(35)	(35)
Yellowfin	Total	70,122	58,241	41,367	50,591	(41,406)
	Distant water and Offshore LL	20,823	12,288	12,030	12,058	(9,400)
	Distant water and Offshore PL	3,475	2,616	2,501	2,089	(2,089)
	Tuna PS	36,125	33,735	19,138	27,120	22,627
	coastal LL	6,895	5,944	3,896	5,522	(3,488)
	coastal PL	377	520	874	(874)	(874)
	coastal PS	6	2	87	(87)	(87)
	Troll	2,258	2,840	2,524	(2,524)	(2,524)
	Unclassified	163	296	317	(317)	(317)
Skipjack	Total	331,416	281,734	293,819	317,944	(303,127)
	Distant water and Offshore LL	20	79	56	98	(61)
	Distant water and Offshore PL	138,860	96,144	90,466	115,257	(115,257)
	Tuna PS	167,726	169,328	188,052	187,338	172,563
	coastal LL	149	73	78	84	(79)
	coastal PL	8,926	7,288	6,901	(6,901)	(6,901)
	coastal PS	49	852	1,024	(1,024)	(1,024)
	Troll	14,528	6,949	6,376	(6,376)	(6,376)
	Unclassified	1,158	1,021	866	(866)	(866)

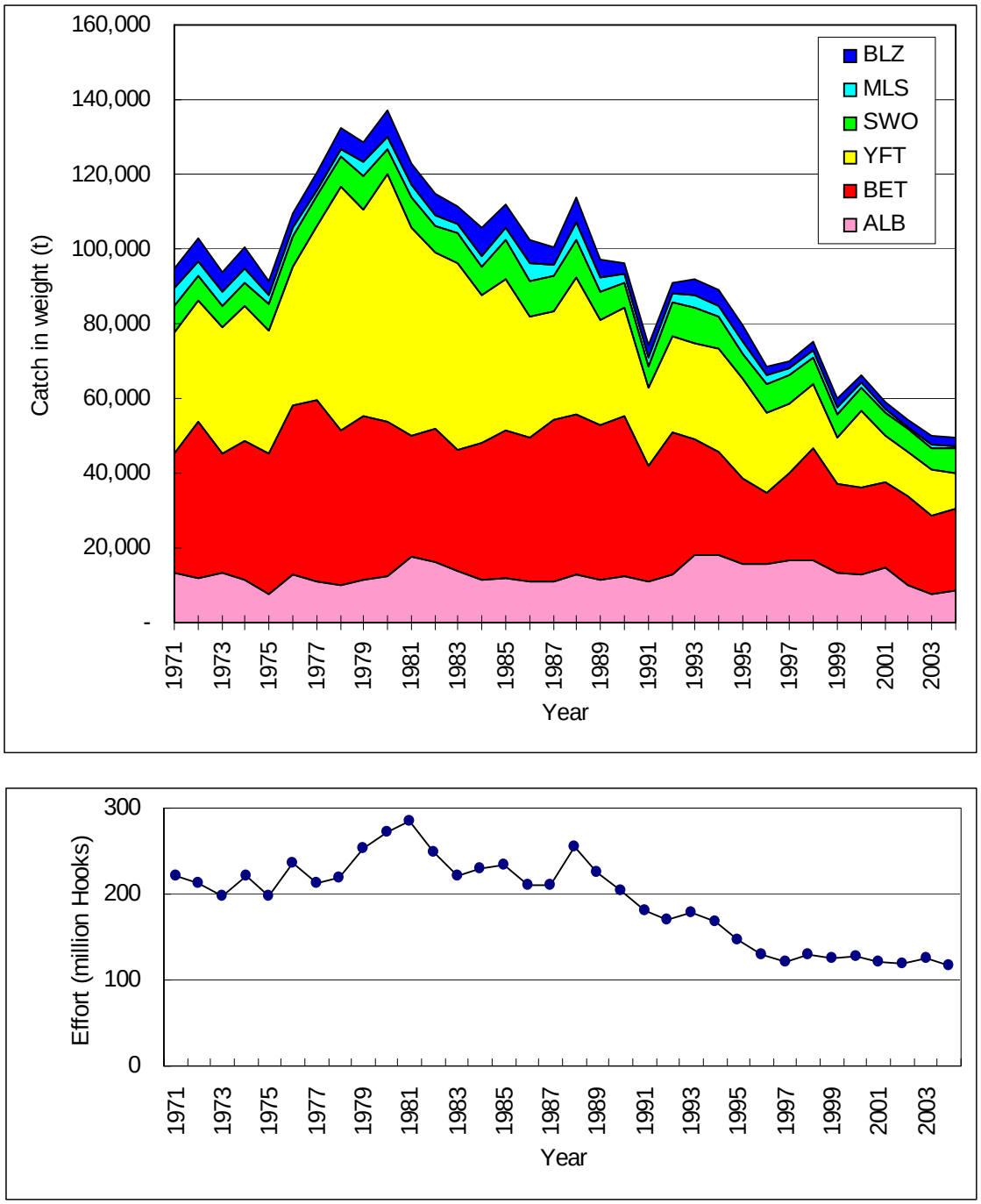
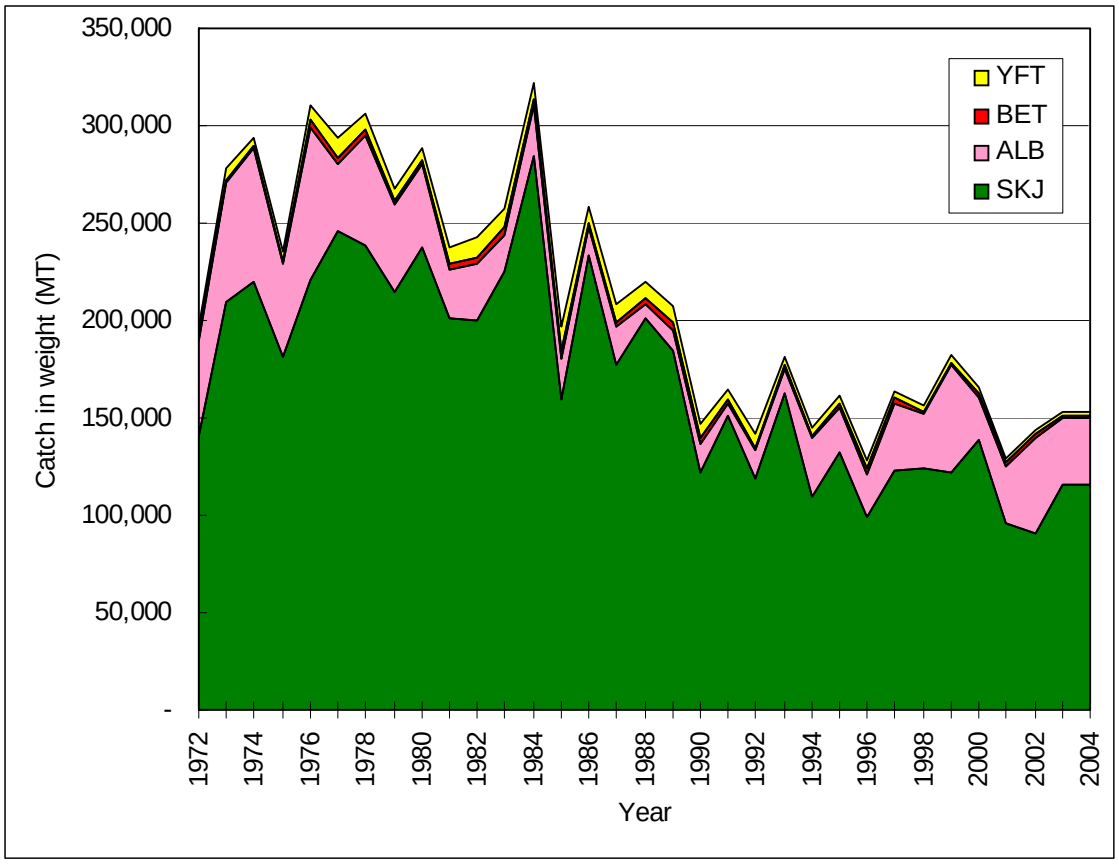


Fig. 1. Historical change of fishing effort and catches by species for the Japanese longline fishery (>20GRT) in the WCPFC Convention Area.



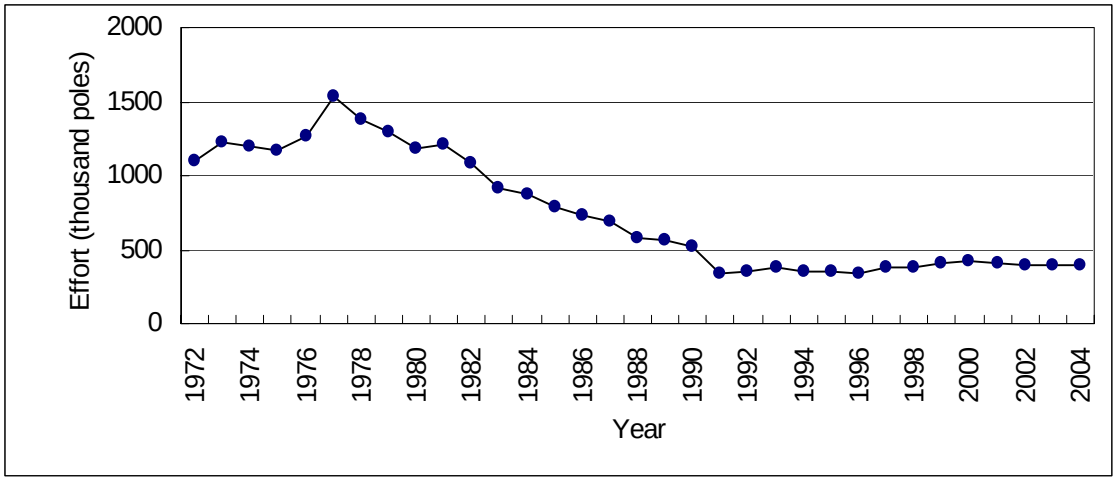


Fig. 2. Historical change of fishing effort and catches by species for the Japanese pole-and-line fishery (>20GRT) in the WCPFC Convention Area.

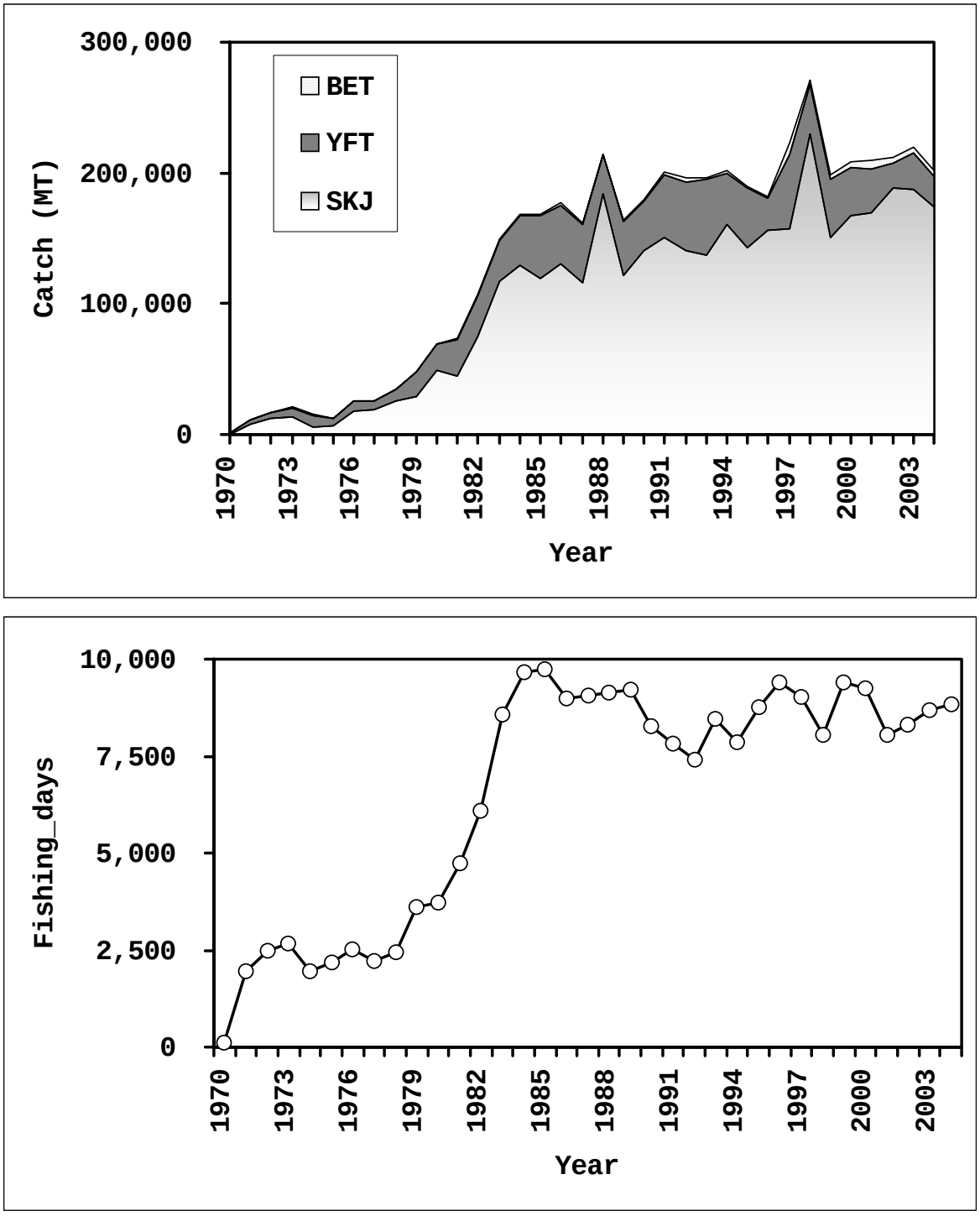


Fig. 3. Trends of fishing effort and catches by species for the Japanese tuna purse seine fishery in the WCPFC Convention Area.