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

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NATIONAL REPORT

COOK ISLANDS

Brief Introduction

The Cook Islands has an Exclusive Economic Zone of 1.8 million square kilometers, extending from 6° to 22° S latitude, 156° to 167° W longitude, offering considerable scope for commercial fisheries development. Since the 1960s, the Cook Islands EEZ has been exploited by distant water fishing nations, under access agreements issued by the Government. However in the year 2000, the Cook Islands Government placed a moratorium on issuing foreign fishing licences in favour of domestic fisheries development. Currently, vessels under a Treaty between the Government of the United States of America and certain Pacific Island Countries are the only foreign vessels authorised to undertake purse seine fishing activity in Cook Islands EEZ. Other foreign vessels can be authorised to fish in Cook Islands EEZ, however these vessels are subject to reflagging requirements, and access must also be linked to onshore investments such as processing/packing facilities, or fishing companies owned by Cook Islands nationals.

Authorisations to fish were issued pursuant to Section 12 and 13 of the Marine Resources Act 1989, and more recently, under the new Marine Resources Act 2005. A national registry of vessels authorised by the Cook Islands to fish, is maintained by the Ministry of Marine Resources.

Fleet Structure

Since 2000, participation in the Cook Islands long line fishery has been limited to Cook Islands nationals or local companies, with restricted permission for chartered vessels. The number of vessels authorised by Cook Islands to fish in the WCPO Convention area are illustrated in *table 1*.

Cook Islands in-zone fishery has developed into two fleet types, larger freezer vessels base their operations out of Pagopago (American Samoa) and the smaller fresh fish vessels (ice boats) operate out the main port in Rarotonga. During the period under report some Cook Islands long liners had dual fishing authorisation (i.e in-zone and high seas) and with neighbouring states.

Table 1. Number of vessels by category and area fished authorised by the Cook Islands from 2000 to 2005.

	Local	Charter	H/Seas	Total
2000	1			1
2001	3			3
2002	18	1		19
2003	21	30	7	58

2004	17	20	9	46
2005	14	9	5	28

Note: 1) Some vessels held both high seas and in zone authorisations

2) 2005 figures as at Nov 30th 2005

3) The vessel list (2004) has been submitted to WCPFC Secretariat, however vessels were not issued with WIN numbers due to uncertainty with procedures related to issuing such numbers.

Annual Catches (2002 – 2004) in Cook Islands EEZ

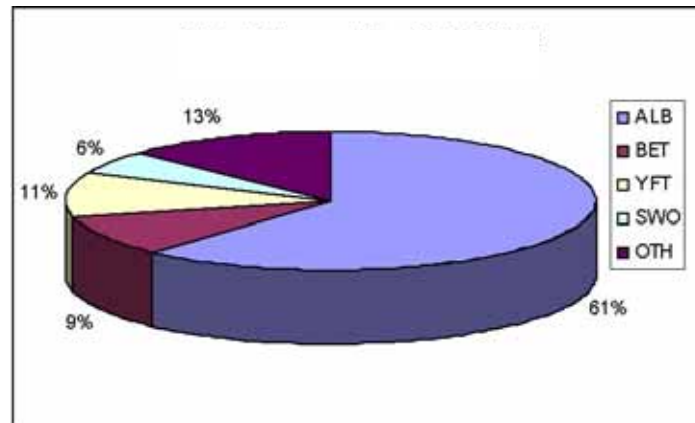
Long line operators are required by regulation to complete daily log sheets on a set-by-set basis and submit to Ministry of Marine Resources on the completion of each fishing trip. Logbook coverage have improved considerably since 2000, during 2004 log book coverage was greater than 95%. Species-specific catch statistics by gear type, fishing area (within EEZ and High Seas) for previous years (2002-2004) were provided to OFP and presented at SC1. Work on improving the quality of data for Cook Islands vessels operating exclusively on the high seas is ongoing.

Total catches have increased from around 1000mt in 2002, to 3000mt in 2004, although the last two years have seen a decline in overall CPUE for this fleet *table 2*. This trend has continued into 2005. The highest percentage of the catch has consisted of albacore tuna (61%), followed by yellowfin and bigeye tuna and swordfish (*figure 1*). It is interesting to note there has been a continued small but lucrative catch of Pacific Bluefin Tuna in the southern part of the EEZ (approx. 7mt).

Table 2. Cook Islands in-zone long line catch by dominant species for 2002, 2003 and 2004

Year	2002		2003		2004	
	number	weight (Mt)	number	weight (Mt)	number	weight (Mt)
ALB	50603	901	81978	1461	94435	1630
BET	2209	67	9315	202	17299	343
YFT	1756	52	8871	179	21250	458
SWO	214	15	2795	167	3489	176
OTH	8559	101	24461	332	34934	397
Total Weight (mt)		1136		2341		3004
Hook Total		1758446		5819479		7369849
CPUE (kg/100hks)		59.8		42.3		40.5

Figure 1. Catch Composition 2002 - 2004



Market Destinations

These include albacore to the canneries in Pago Pago, yellowfin and bigeye and swordfish to Japan and the US. All other bycatch is value added and sold on the local market.

Developments and Trends in Domestic and Offshore Fisheries

The Cook Islands tuna fishery experienced a rapid increase during 2000 to 2004. In 2005 vessel numbers have declined severely (by over 50%) due to continuing low catch rates and increased operating costs (fuel, freight). This decline in the fishing fleet in 2005 has resulted in the closure of processing facilities on Rarotonga, loss of employment and had a significant and detrimental impact on the local economy. The Government has tax rebates and other incentives in place to help support the industry, but catches have remained low and continue to negatively affect the industry.

At the present time the domestic fishery is managed through a licensing regime, however with the introduction of new legislation and a maturing fishery, the Cook Islands will prepare a comprehensive development/management plan for the fishery in 2006.

Application of Conservation and Management Measures on High Seas and Cook Islands EEZ

The Cook Islands has just implemented a comprehensive tuna fisheries data collection program, with the assistance of the OFP. The Cook Islands is now able to log all catch statistics by vessel, species caught and area fished. The process of collection and entering log sheets statistics for each year is completed by April the following year. The information is subsequently forwarded to OFP, and also summarised and presented at the annual scientific committee meeting.

With regards to a record of fishing vessels and areas authorised to fish, this can be provided and updated whenever required. A dedicated national VMS system has also been developed which allows Fisheries authorities to track Cook Islands vessels anywhere around the globe. These two tools will assist greatly in the effective management of the fishery and the fleet operating within the Cook Islands and on the High Seas.

A new Marine Resources Bill was been passed (July 2005) which brings Cook Islands fisheries legislation into line with recent international and regional fisheries developments. The current legislation stipulates a number of conservation and management principals and the application of the precautionary and ecosystems approaches to fisheries management to achieve sustainable use of fisheries. The current legislation fully implements international obligations and responsibilities as required by:

*1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement, the
1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing and the*

2000 Convention for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific.

The Ministry of Marine Resources has the responsibility to enforce the Act and associated regulations to address conservation, management and control of tuna fisheries.

With respect to the IUU fishing, the Cook Islands MTC's attached to fishing licences are very similar to those described in Annex III of the Convention.

MCS Activities 2005

Surveillance activity

Aerial surveillance	No. of trips: 7	Total hours: 87
Surface patrols	No. of trips: 6	Total days: 85

VMS Summary

Cook Islands Vessels currently monitored by FFA VMS: 12

Cook Islands Vessels currently monitored by National VMS: 14 (6 on H/S, and 8 in-zone)

Fisheries Violations

During 2004 one foreign owned/registered long line vessel was apprehended in Cook Islands EEZ. The case is currently before the Cook Islands high court. Details of the violation, and outcome of the high court can be provided after the court hearing. One Cook Islands owned/registered vessel has violated fisheries laws of another CCM and is currently being investigated.