



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
TWENTY-FIRST REGULAR SESSION**

Nuku'alofa, Tonga
13 – 21 August 2025

**ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COMMISSION
PART 1: INFORMATION ON FISHERIES, RESEARCH AND STATISTICS**

**WCPFC-SC21-AR/CNM-33
8 July 2025**

EL SALVADOR



ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COMMISSION PART 1: INFORMATION ON FISHERIES, RESEARCH AND STATISTICS

EL SALVADOR 2024

**CENTRO DE DESARROLLO DE LA PESCA Y LA ACUICULTURA
(CENDEPESCA)**

José Abilio Orellana González
Jose.orellana@mag.gob.sv

Purpose: To provide relevant information to the Commission on fishing activities of CCMs and cooperating non-CCMs, including management and compliance issues. The report should include all fishing activities for highly migratory species being undertaken within the Convention Area as required by the Convention and decisions by the Commission.

Scientific data was provided to the Commission in accordance with the decision relating to the provision of scientific data to the Commission by 30 April 2025	No
<p>If no, please indicate the reason(s) and intended actions:</p> <p>The report was not sent on the due date for the reasons that the required information to complete the Scientific Data Report was not handout to the Salvadoran Commissar until the end of May 2025. The change of designated liaison to the WCPFC had some trouble of communication internally that has provoked some delays and errors in compliance. By Friday July 18, 2025, the report will be sent finished to complement this report.</p> <p>The intended actions to avoid this event to become recurring in the future is that a calendar for internal due dates and responsible parties, has been set to finish well in advance to those dates established by the authorities to the RFMO.</p>	

Section 1 ABSTRACT/SUMMARY

Annual tuna catch by Salvadoran-flagged purse seiners in the WCPFC area increased by 36.8% in 2024, mainly due to Skipjack abundance since 2022, growing from 2,183 tons in 2022 to 4,480 tons in 2024 — a 43.35% annual average growth. Our data indicate that Bigeye and Yellowfin stocks have shown recovery in 2024 after years of decline.

El Salvador operates two active purse seine vessels (Montelucia and Monterocio) in the WCPFC. A third vessel (Montelape) will rejoin operations in 2025. Main fishing zones: Kiribati EEZ and high seas; Kiribati produced higher catches in most years.

No sea turtle or seabird interaction events were reported from 2020–2024, and strict laws prohibit sets on cetaceans. Shark finning has been banned since 2012; shark encounters have not been reported and handled per regulations.

Internally in El Salvador, the industrial shrimp trawlers reduced dramatically from 565 in 2021 to about 25 in 2024. Use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) is mandatory but inconsistently enforced. Only one active domestic longliner since 2020. Longline billfish targeting banned in 2021. Artisanal fisheries remain vital, with around 19,300 vessels and 27,200 fishers in 2023. Efforts are underway to modernize and regulate this sector to control overfishing. Seasonal small pelagic catches peak in May–June; bycatch of sharks and pelagic species continues to be a concern.

On catch disposal, artisanal catches are mainly sold fresh in local markets, consumed domestically. Shrimp and tuna catches are exported — shrimp to the US, Guatemala, Mexico, Europe; tuna to processing plants in Ecuador, Panama, and Colombia.

Government is investing on onshore developments with modernizing fishery infrastructure, including cold storage and logistics upgrades at La Libertad, Acajutla, El Triunfo, and San Luis La Herradura. New piers and a processing plant under construction at Punta Chiquirín, with similar projects planned for the Gulf of Fonseca by 2027.

The future prospects considers the artisanal fisheries' viability depends on introducing effective management; current unregulated fishing is unsustainable. Industrial shrimp trawling will likely continue to decline due to stock depletion and operational costs. Pelagic longlining faces contraction risks; only one vessel remains.

As to growth opportunities, there is mariculture based upon shellfish, shrimp, oysters and seaweed at least; like the promotion of value-added seafood processing (frozen, dried, filleted products) are the options that will allow the sector position itself.

The key threats facing the country are: overfishing, weak enforcement, climate change effects, and persistent IUU fishing risks.

On tuna data collection systems, it is followed by logsheet data collected by industry and CENDEPESCA with random verifications; observer coverage very limited, based only on industry-provided ledgers; port sampling planned to improve via digital systems.

And then, research capacity oriented towards fisheries research has declined significantly due to budget cuts, retirements, and migration. Current efforts rely on external cooperation and private sector involvement. New biological sampling initiative planned with Argentina in 2025 to assess coastal resources for future blue economy opportunities.

Section 2. Tabular Annual Fisheries Information – El Salvador, for years 2020 to 2024

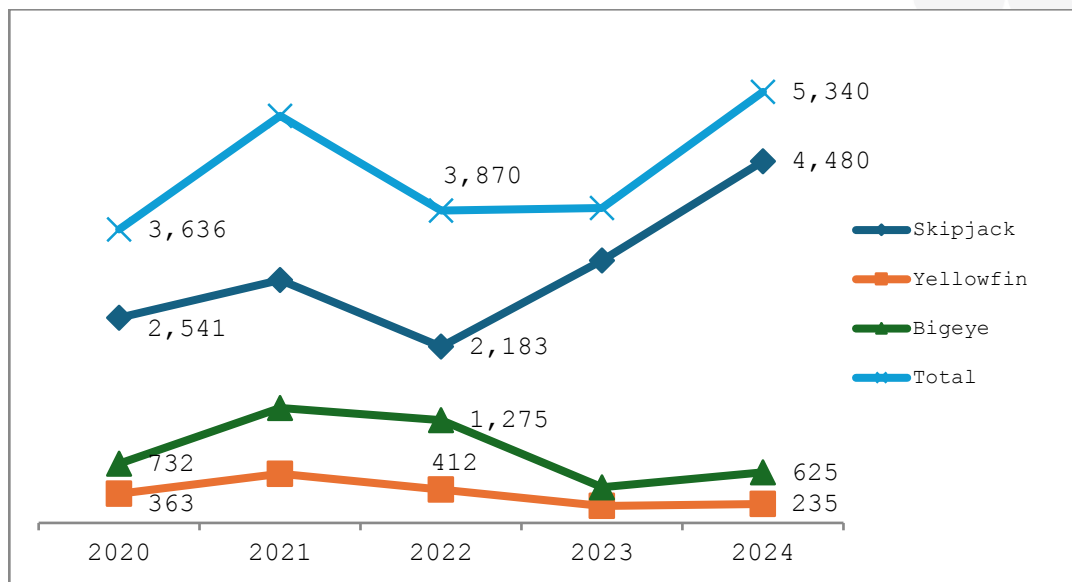
Table 1. Annual catch and effort estimates for the Salvadoran fleet, by purse seine and primary species, for the WCPFC Convention Area, for years 2020 to 2024.

Species	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	Volume in Metric Tons				
skipjack	2,541	3,009	2,183	3,251	4,480
yellowfin	363	609	412	210	235
bigeye	732	1,424	1,275	442	625
TOTAL	3,636	5,042	3,870	3,903	5,340

Source: Data from the vessels owned by Oakcity Tuna, 2024.

During the last five years, the annual catch and effort estimates have increased significantly in 36.8% during 2024, mostly due to the abundance of Skipjack has had a steady presence in the high seas since 2022, passing from 2,183 tons to 4,480 tons in 2024; this is an average 43.35% annual growth (you may see this reflected in Figure 1 below).

Figure 1 Historical annual catch for the Salvadoran fleet, by purse seine and primary species, for the WCPFC Convention Area presented as a line graph. Metric Tons

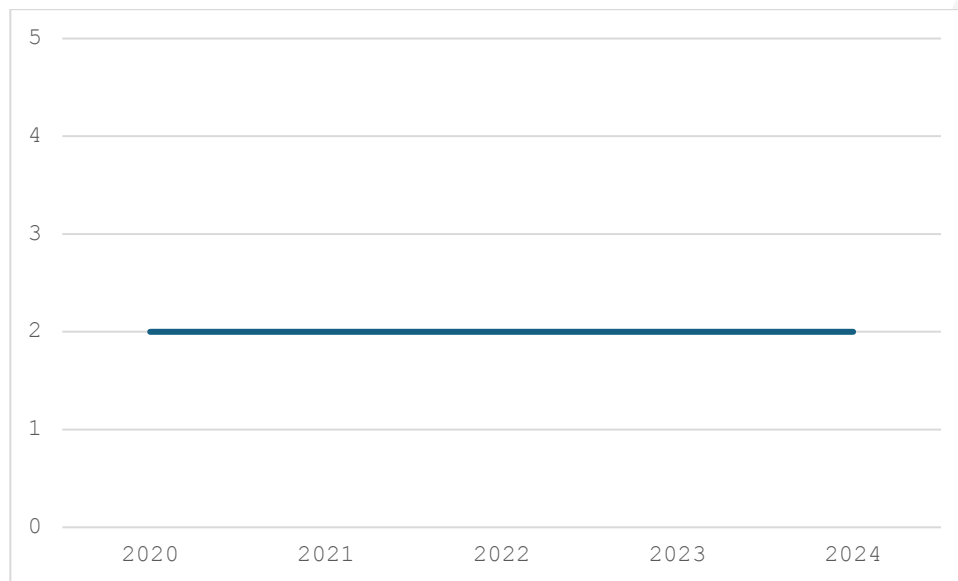


Source: CENDEPESCA from data from the vessels owned by Oakcity Tuna, 2024

Analysing furthermore Figure 1, we notice that there is a recovery of the fish stocks for Bigeye and yellowfin in the last year, after years of diminishing amounts in the catch for these species. This indicates that research on the matter should be placed on both species in the following years; our experience of recovery in the Eastern Pacific is similar in that sense.

The albacore and Pacific Bluefin tuna is not a target specie, thus El Salvador does not hold data of capture.

Figure 2 Historical annual vessel numbers for the Salvadoran fleet, by purse seine for the WCPFC Convention Area presented as a line graph



Source: CENDEPESCA, 2025.

El Salvador has had presence in the Convention area with 2 purse seine vessels for the last five years. Due to the levels of catches and disposal of the product captured, for the following years, a third vessel will be introduced into the RMFO.

Table 2. Number of Salvadoran fleet vessels, by purse seine, active in the WCPFC Convention Area, for years 2020 to 2024.

Vessel	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Montelape	Inactive	Inactive	Inactive	Inactive	Inactive
Montelucia	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active
Monterocio	Active	Active	Active	Active	Active

Source: CENDEPESCA, 2025.

After years of removal and inactivity from the WCPFC area, the Montelape vessel will be placed to fish once more in 2025. Montelucia and Monterocio will carry on with their activities as the past years.

In regards of interactions with sea turtles on purse seine operations, no interaction events were reported to Salvadoran authorities for the 2020 to 2024 period in the WCPFC Convention Area. Salvadoran purse seine vessels authorized to fish in the WCPFC are not allowed to perform sets on cetaceans as they know they may face hard sanctions from CENDEPESCA based on our national law (article 79, letter m), the international framework and own resolutions from the Western Pacific Organization. As to sea birds, they're observers high in the sky or sometimes go to deck in search of fallen fish; however no birds are registered when that happens unless they interfere with loading activity by the vessel. For all these animal species, El Salvador thrives in assuring compliance by the crew in terms of knowing what are the permitted procedures to be carried out to remove them and separate from the prized catch.

Until now, El Salvador does not make a count thoroughly of the annual estimated catches of non-target, associated and dependent species, except sharks. El Salvador has adopted in 2011 the Regional Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Shark, which provided the feedback needed to the creation of the National Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Shark that was adopted in 2012. As follow up of both plans, El Salvador has prohibited shark finning since 2012 in legislation decree N°199 "Special law for the

prohibition of shark finning" which prohibits the finning activity, landings, transshipment and commercialization and CENDEPESCA Resolution for management of the hammer shark. In addition, El Salvador as a member of SICA/OSPESCA signed the Regional Regulation OSP-05-11 for "Prohibition of shark finning in the country members of SICA" entering in force in January 2012. Therefore, if a shark encounter is to occur within one of our vessels' operations, it would be reported and handled the correct way using artefacts that are constantly been improved for that matter.

On the subject of port sampling, the Salvadoran authorities register all vessels entering our EEZ to assure not to harbour IUU vessels; however, we have a plan to improve our methods electronically and with much time in advance as a way to assure our few inspectors don't have to do all the paperwork once in front of the vessel in port.

The data from the observers on-board for the Salvadoran fleet, is very limited and only obtained from the industry ledger reports that are shared to CENDEPESCA. Being aware of our active status with both vessels in the WCPFC Convention Area, since 2020 to 2024, we would gain information and scientific understanding of our catches, to seek a more sustainable approach if required. We look forward to a change of rules in having access to observer reports from the 2025 season onwards.

Section 3. Background

Salvadoran fisheries in the WCPFC (Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission) Convention Area are relatively small in scale but active, primarily focused on tuna fishing, especially yellowfin and bigeye tuna.

El Salvador operates a limited number of industrial purse seine vessels, which are often flagged to the country but may be owned or operated by foreign companies. These vessels participate in regional tuna fisheries, often in cooperation with other Pacific nations under WCPFC regulations.

The country is a Cooperating Non-Member (CNM) of the WCPFC, meaning it has certain rights and responsibilities, including reporting catches and complying with conservation measures, even though it is not a full member.

Section 4. Flag State Reporting

The two purse seine vessels (Montelucia and Monterocio) in the Convention Area have been very active in the RMFO during the last years. One detail that calls the attention is the fact that the Kiribati EEZ is the main area of fishing, even providing more catch than international waters some years (2021 and 2023); in order to avoid a possible situation of sudden reduction of the stock, in the last years the Cook Islands have been consider as an alternative area to operate.

Besides the fact of an increasing catch of Skipjack previously in the document, the fleet also has reported the details of the weight of the fish caught in a great majority of time to be lesser than 9 kgs a piece. This is important to compare with other flag states' information as to identify any trend of an evolution adjustment to smaller adult size fish. Such factors are, in most cases, visible with yellowfin and bigeye tuna according to reports.

Table 3. Preliminary catch numbers of Salvadoran fleet vessels, by purse seine, active according to geographical location in the WCPFC Convention Area, for years 2020 to 2024.

CATCH ESTIMATES FOR 2024 PERIOD (MT)							
WCPFC AREA	SKIPJACK		YELLOWFIN		BIG EYE		TOTAL CATCH
	CATCH	%	CATCH	%	CATCH	%	
HIGH SEAS	2,244.00	50.09	88.00	37.45	218.00	34.88	2550
COOK EEZ	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0
KIRIBATI EEZ	2,236.00	49.91	147.00	62.55	407.00	65.12	2790
TOTAL	4480	100	235	100	625	100	5340
CATCH ESTIMATES FOR 2023 PERIOD (MT)							
WCPFC AREA	SKIPJACK		YELLOWFIN		BIG EYE		TOTAL CATCH
	CATCH	%	CATCH	%	CATCH	%	
HIGH SEAS	971.00	29.87	109.00	51.90	240.00	54.30	1320
COOK EEZ	52.00	1.60	10.00	4.76	3.00	0.68	65
KIRIBATI EEZ	2,228.00	68.53	91.00	43.33	199.00	45.02	2518
TOTAL	3251	100	210	100	442	100	3903
CATCH ESTIMATES FOR 2022 PERIOD (MT)							
WCPFC AREA	SKIPJACK		YELLOWFIN		BIG EYE		TOTAL CATCH
	CATCH	%	CATCH	%	CATCH	%	
HIGH SEAS	1,330.00	60.93	219.00	53.16	526.00	41.25	2075
KIRIBATI EEZ	853.00	39.07	193.00	46.84	749.00	58.75	1795
TOTAL	2183	100	412	100	1275	100	3870
CATCH ESTIMATES FOR 2021 PERIOD (MT)							
WCPFC AREA	SKIPJACK		YELLOWFIN		BIG EYE		TOTAL CATCH
	CATCH	%	CATCH	%	CATCH	%	
HIGH SEAS	1412.00	46.93	294.00	48.28	728.00	51.12	2434
KIRIBATI EEZ	1597.00	53.07	315.00	51.72	696.00	48.88	2608
TOTAL	3009	100	609	100	1424	100	5042
CATCH ESTIMATES FOR 2020 PERIOD (MT)							
WCPFC AREA	SKIPJACK		YELLOWFIN		BIG EYE		TOTAL CATCH
	CATCH	%	CATCH	%	CATCH	%	
HIGH SEAS	2009.00	79.06	300.00	82.64	587.00	80.19	2896
KIRIBATI EEZ	532.00	20.94	63.00	17.36	145.00	19.81	740
TOTAL	2541	100	363	100	732	100	3636

Source: Data from the vessels owned by Oakcity Tuna, 2024.

Section 5. Coastal State Reporting

The situation of commercial fishing in El Salvador may sum up in these words:

- a) The number of licensed trawlers has dropped sharply—from 565 licensed in 2021 down to only about 25 currently active, belonging to 24 companies focused on marine shrimp and incidental fish catch. All large trawlers are required to have Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs), though enforcement remains inconsistent due to low monitoring.
- b) Just one domestic longline vessel is currently authorized (as of 2020), compared to historic fleets of 10–25 m longliners with up to 5,000 hooks. In 2021, El Salvador implemented a policy via CENDEPESCA Resolution 21-02 banning targeted billfish fishing and prohibiting longlining beyond 75 nm for larger vessels and 50 nm for smaller ones.
- c) Artisanal fishing remains vital: as of 2023, there were about 19,300 vessels (fiberglass boats, pangas, etc.), operated by some 27,200 fishers in coastal zones. This year, CENDEPESCA along Spanish cooperation is looking at modern regulation of the vessels and its structure and reduction of vessels as to reduce overfishing.
- d) Small pelagics (anchovies, herrings, jacks) show seasonal abundance changes, with peak catch typically in May–June and declines in September. Bycatch species including sharks, barracuda, and sashimi-grade tunas are often caught incidentally by the longliner and trawlers.

Section 6. Socio-economic factors

Several socioeconomic factors in El Salvador influence its participation in high seas fishing in the Western Pacific:

- **Limited Domestic Fish Stocks:** El Salvador has a small domestic Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and relatively modest fishery resources, prompting some operators to pursue fishing opportunities abroad, especially in the resource-rich Western Pacific.
- **Economic Incentives & Employment:** The high seas tuna industry provides foreign exchange earnings, jobs for Salvadoran crew members, and support for related industries (e.g., logistics, port services). This incentivizes participation despite the geographical distance.
- **Foreign Investment & Vessel Ownership:** Many vessels flagged to El Salvador are linked to foreign companies. The country's open vessel registry attracts these operators, who benefit from Salvadoran flagging without being locally based. This impacts the scale and nature of the country's fishing activity in the Pacific.
- **Access Agreements & International Cooperation:** Participation in the WCPFC and regional fishing agreements allows Salvadoran-flagged vessels access to Pacific tuna stocks, aligning with the government's interest in maintaining international fishing rights and visibility.
- **Development Goals:** El Salvador sees offshore fishing—particularly via distant-water fleets—as a tool to boost maritime development, technology transfer, and global market integration, despite domestic limitations

Section 7. Disposal of catch

The majority of artisanal fisheries catch — small pelagic (anchovetas, sardines), demersal fish (snappers, groupers), and coastal species (rays, small sharks) — is sold fresh in local markets or consumed directly by coastal communities.

This catch supplies:

- Municipal fish markets (La Libertad, Acajutla, La Unión, Puerto El Triunfo)
- Street vendors and coastal towns
- Small restaurants (comedores) in coastal and urban areas

Artisanal fishing is the primary source of fresh seafood for national consumption.

The export activities work around marine shrimp (from industrial trawlers and aquaculture) is the main fishery export product, destined for markets in the United States, Guatemala, Mexico, and occasionally Europe. And the tuna caught by vessels operating under El Salvador's quota is typically exported directly via foreign processing and shipping routes, often landing in Ecuador, Colombia, or Panama for canning or export.

Section 8. Onshore developments

Due to the Salvadoran President interest in promoting a blue economy in the country, he wants to improve the value chain of artisanal fishing and thus has been investing in the renewal of the present piers at La Libertad, El Triunfo, Acajutla and San Luis La Herradura; these infrastructure had not being modernize or had an upgrade since the 1970's. Here is more oriented towards having cold storage facilities and logistics platforms to facilitate commerce.

Also is finishing building a set of docks starting with Punta Chiquirin in the south eastern tip of El Salvador, that includes a processing plant, support facilities such as a wincher, small vessel storage and repair spaces and gas station. Hopefully by 2027, two other similar constructions will be finished in the nearby areas of the Fonseca gulf.

Section 9. Future Prospects of the fishery

It is understood that coastal and small-scale fisheries (artisanal) will remain vital for food security, livelihoods, and local markets — but their long-term viability hinges on introducing some degree of management. Right now, unregulated exploitation of nearshore resources (small pelagic, demersal fish, and sharks) is unsustainable in the long run.

Industrial shrimp trawling will likely contract further due to economic inefficiencies, declining stocks, and rising fuel costs.

Pelagic longline fisheries are at risk of further contraction. With only one domestic longliner left and strict billfish management policies now in place, the incentive for investment is low unless tuna markets or quota allocations become more accessible.

Possible areas of expansion include Mariculture (marine aquaculture) as a promising area. El Salvador has coastal areas suitable for farming shrimp, oysters, and potentially seaweed — sectors with growing international demand and lower environmental impacts compared to trawling. Also there is value-added seafood processing and exports (frozen products, fillets, dried fish, fishmeal) could grow if better supply chain infrastructure and quality standards are implemented, especially for small pelagic and artisanal catches.

Our key threats go from overexploitation of coastal stocks by artisanal fleets (e.g., sharks, snappers, groupers, and small pelagic like anchovetas) as without effective monitoring, enforcement, or co-management frameworks, stock depletion will continue; climate change impacts — rising sea temperatures, acidification, and ecosystem

shifts in the Eastern Tropical Pacific are predicted to affect migration patterns of tuna, billfish, and small pelagic, possibly reducing availability in Salvadoran waters over time; Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing remains a risk, especially with weak vessel monitoring and control over artisanal and foreign-flagged fleets.

Section 10. Status of tuna fishery data collection systems

- a. Logsheet data collection and verification – With the collaboration of private industry, this method has allowed us to record much of the information we provided to the different RMFO; verification is carried out aleatory to confront information and reduce possible miscalculations or errors in the description of the species that is reported.
- b. Observer programme – The data from the observers on-board for the Salvadoran fleet, is very limited and only obtained from the industry ledger reports that are shared to CENDEPESCA.
- c. Port sampling programme – we have a plan to improve our methods electronically and with much time in advance as a way to assure our few inspectors don't have to do all the paperwork once in front of the vessel in port.
- d. Unloading/Transshipment – El Salvador does not allow transshipment in the WCPFC area to its vessels but instead promotes unloading in ports around the Pacific (Christmas Island, Ecuador or La Union) to have a more precise, transparent and accurate registration of the catch.

Section 11. Research activities covering target and non-target species

El Salvador has lost much of its research capacities due to migration, retirement and fewer young professionals seeking to pursue a career in research. Then there is the fact of a decreasing budget each year; the situation is such that the research team was disbanded and transfer to support other activities in CENDEPESCA such as international fisheries.

For now, CENDEPESCA is advocating to cooperation from foreign entities and private sector to biological studies supporting stock assessments; composition of the catch according to length, weight and sex; research on environmental factors, abundance/biomass surveys, oceanographic and ecological studies. We have received an offer from Argentina to start in August 2025 a recollection of samples of biological populations in the near EEZ zone in order to identify potential resources that would follow the guidelines for a blue economy strategy.