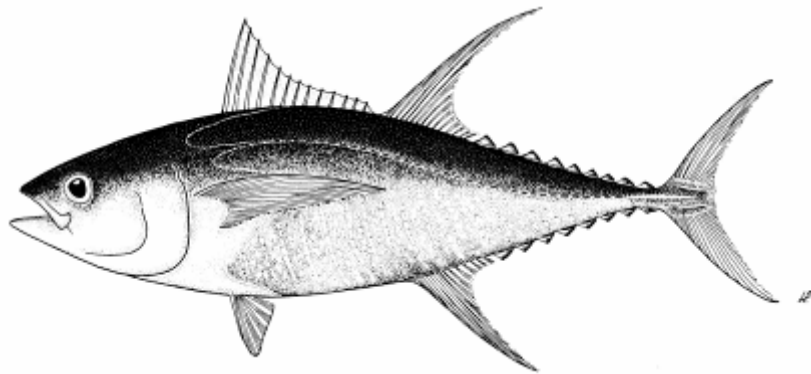


**COUNTRY FISHERIES REPORT – NIUE**



James Tafatu

Department of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries  
Niue

July 2006

# COUNTRY FISHERIES REPORT

## NIUE

### 1. Introduction

Niue has a small EEZ (~450,000 km<sup>2</sup>) which has only been fished reasonably lightly and sporadically by longline vessels of foreign distant water fishing fleets under license access arrangements in the past. The highest number of vessels licensed in any one year has been 48, with catches in the order of several hundred metric tonnes per annum. The local offshore tuna fishery consists of three components, a small artisanal boat and canoe fishery, small tourism related sport fishery, and the newly developing commercial domestic longline fishery. Tuna resources are considered by Niue as a major natural resource available to support significant economic development opportunities in the fisheries sector.

The first component of the of the Fishery consists entirely of local fishers and the third component is made up entirely of foreign fleet this has seen a competition for some species where Wahoo a much valued specie to the local market is amongst the list. This specie to the Commercial fishery is but a bycatch however still exported. Catch numbers according to local Fishers have been significantly reduced coupled with rising fuel prices has seen the first component of the fishery slowing.

This drop of catch numbers cannot be totally attributed to the introduction of the new fishery, as other parameters needs to be considered before any possible assumption is adopted.

### 2. Fleet Structure

Niue does not currently have a fleet operating in the WCPFC under its flag, however since the beginning of 2005 it now licenses 13 vessels to fish under charter arrangement. The latter vessels, ranging in size from 10-29 metres, fish into the new government joint venture fish processing facility (Niue Fish Processors Ltd). The number of vessels under charter arrangement is expected to increase to 20 over the next 12 months.

Primary species that has made the proportion of the catch are Albacore, Yellowfin, Bigeye, wahoo, and skipjack.

Albacore has been the dominant species totally due to the depth where the hooks are set coupled with increase in hook numbers per basket.

This is supported by the size of wahoo which are caught to be much larger than those associated with surface to near surface depths.

Wahoo as earlier discussed is highly valued specie on Niue and is locally sold for 9- 12 dollars (NZD) a kilo. It is by far the most demanded and desired specie on the Island so the added competition for the local biomass has certainly been a cause of concern to the local fisherman, especially if by-catches are sold overseas.

**Table 1: Vessel numbers by size class licensed to fish in Niue waters under charter.**

<b>VESSEL TYPE</b>	<b>Size Class 10-15 metres</b>	<b>Size Class 15m +</b>
<b>Longline</b>	8	5

### 3. Annual Catches in the WCPFC Convention Area, 2001-2005

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the catch by species from the Niue longline fleet during 2005.

**Table 2. Catch and effort for the Niue longline vessels in the WCPFC Convention Area, 2005.**

<b>100s of hooks</b>	2,631.5
<b>Catch by species (metric tonnes)</b>	
Albacore	55.4
Yellowfin	34.1
Bigeye	10.1
Wahoo	3.6
Mahi-mahi	1.5
Skipjack	4.1
Swordfish	1.4
Blue Marlin	0.7
Black Marlin	1.8
Striped Marlin	2.8
Moonfish / Opah	1.2
Other / Unspecified (e.g. Sharks)	6.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>122.8</b>

<b>CPUE in kgs / 100 hooks</b>					
<b>Month</b>	<b>100s of hooks</b>	<b>alb</b>	<b>yft</b>	<b>bet</b>	<b>wah</b>
5	271.0	30.4	9.3	3.4	1.3
6	162.0	30.9	10.8	3.5	0.9
7	134.5	55.4	9.9	2.9	2.1
8	87.5	17.6	1.1	0.8	1.3
9	436.5	12.4	5.1	1.1	1.3
10	526.5	13.8	9.9	1.3	0.9
11	489.0	24.3	22.1	6.4	2.0
12	524.5	13.7	18.8	5.7	1.2
		20.5	12.9	3.5	1.4

These catches has certainly increased initially towards the end of the year (2005) with the injection of the larger vessels, however with one larger boat returning early to its country of registration and mechanical and bad weather has seen the other larger vessels un operative has seen a temporary

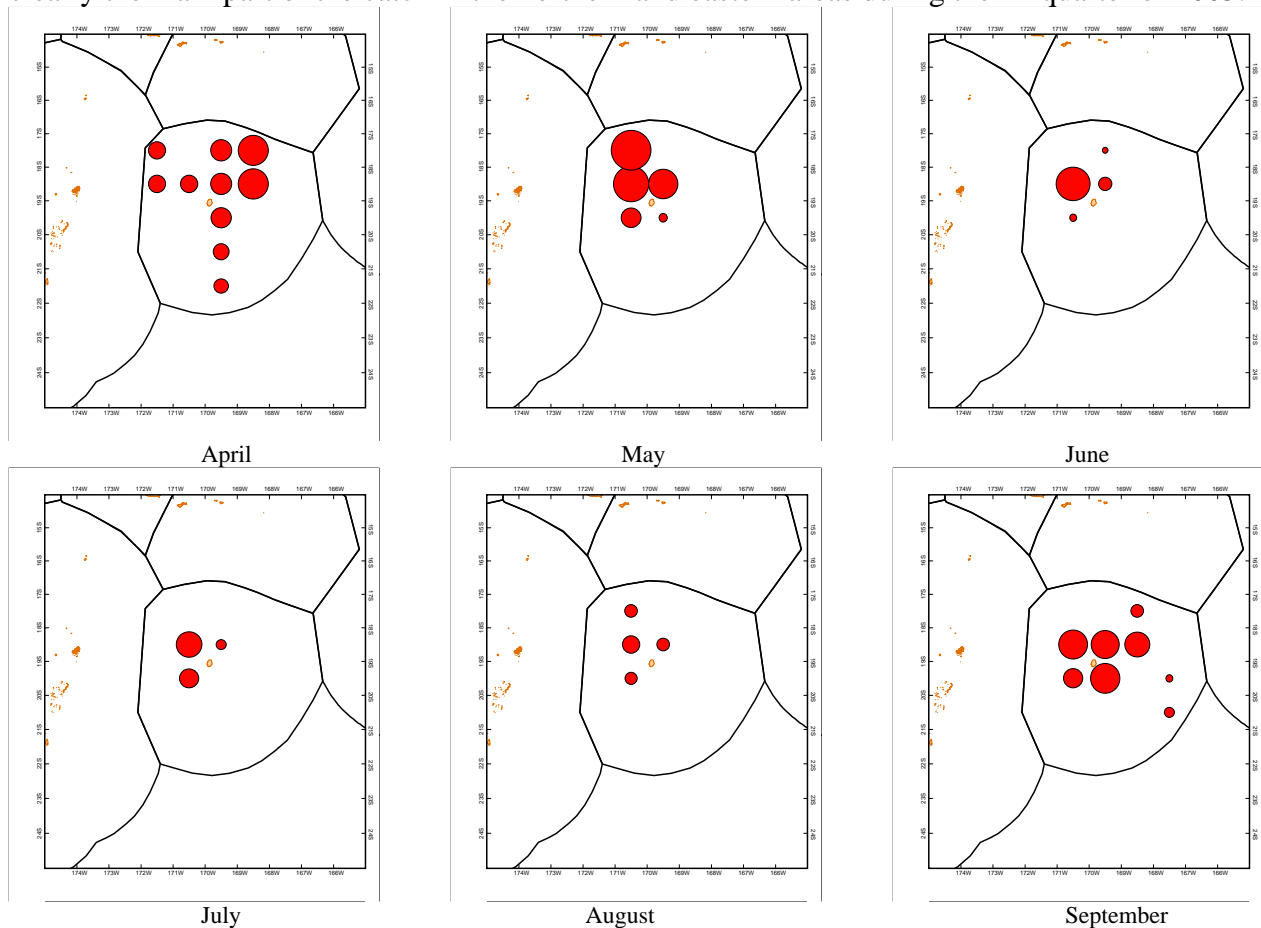
decline in catch numbers at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006. However if these larger vessels are operational again then there is a certain increase of catch numbers.

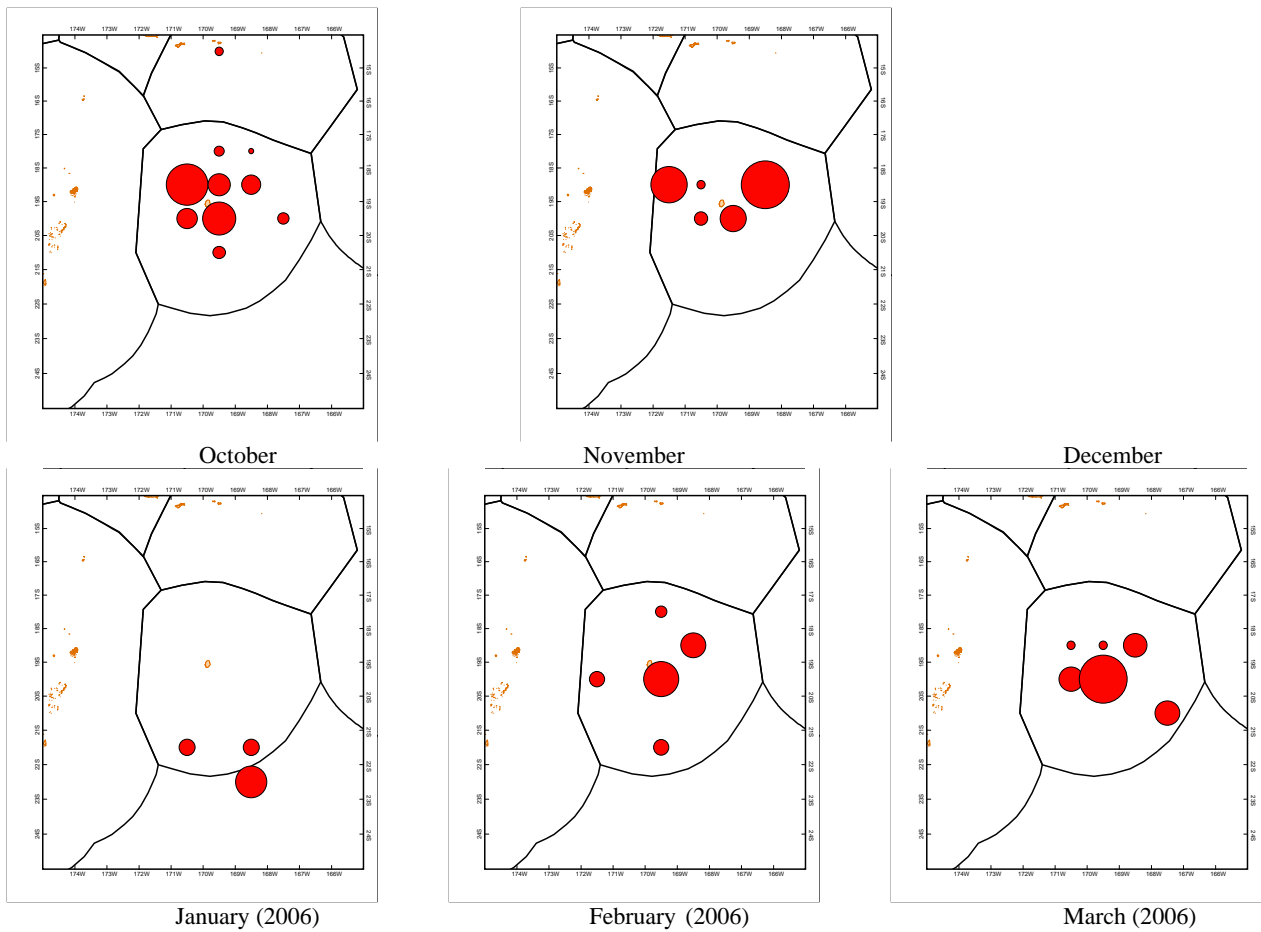
#### 4. Annual Catches in EEZ

In 2002, 21 licensed vessels (TW and AS flag) caught approximately 50-100mt of tuna in the EEZ. Over the period 2003–2004, there were no catches in Niue’s EEZ by commercial fisheries, due to the development of a local based joint venture and the associate discontinuation of licensing of foreign vessels under access arrangements.

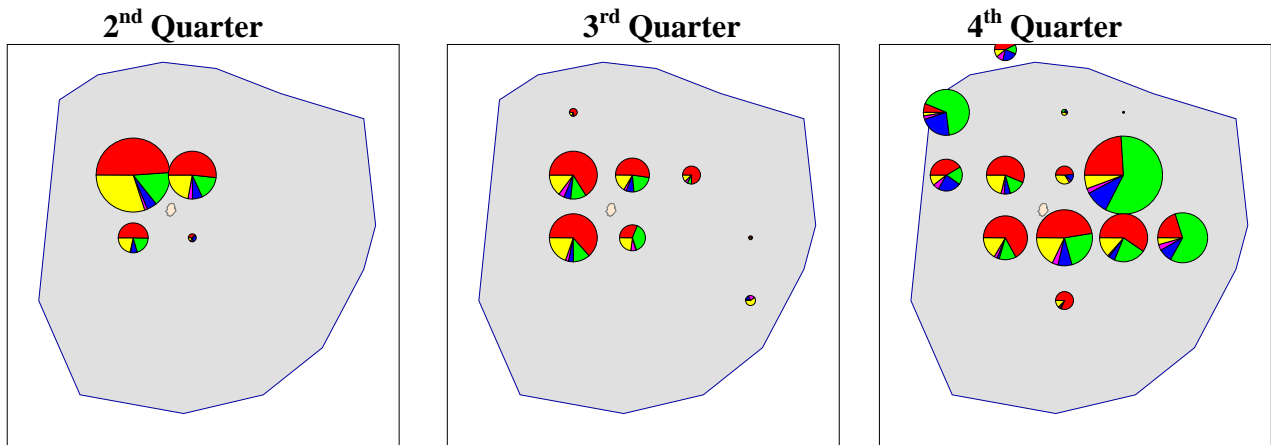
Domestic commercial longline fishing commenced with 4 small vessels fishing since May 2005. Over the three-month period May – July the estimated total catch of these vessels has been around 33 tonnes. This is expected to increase significantly as larger vessels licensed arrive, and operations under the new joint venture become fully developed. The predominant catch in the zone has been albacore tuna, accounting for around 60% of catch taken.

Figure 1 shows a breakdown of effort by month by the Niue longline fleet during 2005 and the first few months of 2006. Effort is generally within 60-100 nautical miles of Niue Island. Figure 2 shows the quarterly breakdown of catch for the main species taken by the Niue longline fleet. Most of the catch comprised albacore in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarters of 2005. In contrast, yellowfin was clearly the main part of the catch in the northern and eastern areas during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2005.





**Figure 1. Monthly distribution of effort (100s of hooks) by the Niue Longline fleet during 2005 - 2006**



**Figure 2. Quarterly distribution of catch by species for the Niue Longline fleet during 2005**  
(Red – Albacore; Green – Yellowfin; Blue – Bigeye; Crimson – Wahoo; Yellow – Other)

## 5. Final Market Destination of Catches

Frozen albacore is currently exported to the two canneries in Pago Pago, American Samoa, with small quantities of fresh Bigeye and Yellowfin tuna being exported to New Zealand and US markets.

## **6. Onshore Developments**

A new processing plant capable of processing up to 6000mt of fish per annum was completed and commissioned in late 2004. A new dedicated air service (Reef Air) has also been established under joint venture to freight fish out of Niue, and significant wharf and harbour development are in the advanced planning stages.

Wharf developments is under consideration that seeks to ensure the quality of fish especially during unloading rather than by hand which is time consuming, strenuous and adds to lowering of fish quality.

Water pipes have been installed which can be directly used for vessels tied on the wharf and for use of local fishers.

Port security measures are also considered at this point which also aide in unloading and transportation of catch to the processing factory.

## **7. Future Prospects**

The offshore tuna fishery is managed under a tuna management and development plan. The number of licenses and larger vessels under charter is expected to increase to 15 over the next year, with smaller local boats not yet limited. Port sampling and observer programmes are in place and have commenced and Niue is working closely with SPC in the development of collection of data and data management systems.

Port Sampling has been the main source of data collection, with a hundred percent recording of all catch landed on shore this has been cut down to 50% due to staff numbers.

SPC has been a major help with data interpretation and information and management systems.

Port sampling data collection has continued throughout 2005 and into 2006, the trips of vessels have been rather short taking 1 – 3 days and returning with high catches. The whole fisheries section is involved in port sampling as vessels return at odd hours involving shift work for staff.

Niue has also not just filled out the port sampling sheets but also has set up a spread sheet or data base of its own as a back up data and with further training by SPC on stock assessment would enable Niue to assess and interpret its own data and help advice managers in decision making.

There are observers that has gone through the SPC observer programme on the Island however there is a temporary halt in the national observer program which is due to resume soon, most of the observers are working for fisheries which may add to the temporary halt as there would be a shortage of staff if fisheries staff is on board vessels.