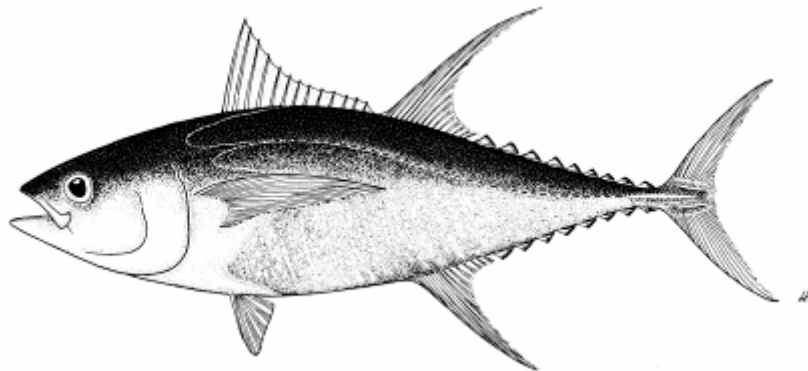




National tuna status report for Solomon Islands for 2004



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Introduction.

The domestic tuna industry is currently the second highest sources of foreign revenue earning to the country from the export of frozen and other processed tuna products to overseas markets. Other foreign revenues to the country are also derived from the licensing of foreign fishing vessels to fish for tuna within the fisheries limits of Solomon Islands under bilateral access agreements, the Multilateral Fisheries Treaty with the U.S. and the regional FSM Arrangement. Solomon Islands presently has bilateral access Agreements with Japan, Korea, New Zealand and Taiwan. A bilateral access agreement with the EU which was negotiated and concluded in early 2004 is yet to come into force.

In addition to the above financial benefits, the domestic tuna industry also provides a lot of employment opportunities on the fishing vessels, at the tuna cannery and at the tuna smoking and loin processing facilities to many Solomon Islanders. A lot of fresh and frozen tunas and a variety of canned tuna products are also supplied to the domestic market for local consumption.

Due to the high overall socio-economic importance of the tuna industry to the country and its people and to ensure the long term sustenance of these benefits through the proper management of the tuna resources and the orderly development of the country's tuna industry, a National Tuna Management and Development Plan was developed in accordance with the provisions of the 1998 Fisheries Act and brought into effect in 1998. Under the Plan, the tuna quota allocations which were difficult to administer were substituted with license limitations. The licensing of both the domestic and foreign fishing vessels and the types of fishing agreements the country can enter into are also guided by the 1998 Fisheries Act of Solomon Islands.

2. Domestic and foreign tuna fishing fleets that operated in Solomon Islands EEZ in 2004.

Fishing vessels from seven locally registered commercial tuna companies were licensed to fish for tuna in Solomon Islands fishery limits during 2004. These included 10 pole-and-line vessels from Soltai Fishing and processing Company as compare to 12 vessels in 2003, 3 purse seiners by NFD as that in 2003, 4 small purse seiners (< 100 GRT) by Global Fishing Company as compared to 3 vessels in 2003, 9 longline vessels by Solgreen compared to 12 vessels in 2003, 2 purse seiners by Warken as that in 2003 and 5 purse seiners and 2 longliner by Mako similar to that in 2003. Korean tuna longline vessels chartered by the Tuna Pacific Company although operated in Solomon Islands waters under a development agreement in 2003 and 2004, did not land their catch in Solomon Islands.

Under bilateral access agreements, purse seine, longline and long-range pole-and-line vessels from Japan, purse seine vessels from Korea and purse seine and longline vessels from Taiwan were also licensed to fish in the fishery limits of Solomon Islands during 2004. Licensed purse seine vessels under the U.S Multilateral Fisheries Treaty and the regional FSM Arrangement also fished in the EEZ of Solomon Islands during 2004. The

tunas caught by the foreign fleet were either transshipped at Honiara or landed at overseas ports as these not required to be landed in Solomon Islands. The bilateral fisheries access agreement with the Tuna Association of New Zealand however, was negotiated and signed in early 2005 and their licensed purse seine vessels commenced fishing operation in the fishery limits of Solomon Islands this year.

3. Annual tuna catch estimates for the domestic and foreign licensed fishing vessels

An annual summary total tuna catch estimate for 2004 by the domestic and foreign fleet for Solomon Islands fishery limits amounted to 87,494 mts as compared to 62,910 mts by both fleet in 2003. From the 2004 summary total catch, 27,860 mts representing 32% of the total catch was caught by the domestic fleet. The majority of the domestic tuna catch was from the purse seiners and this was followed by that from the pole-and-line fleet and then the longliners. The total catch by the foreign fleet was also dominated by that from the purse seiners and was followed by that from the longline vessels. The zero catch by the pole-and-line vessels of Japan is probably due to the late entry of data from the fleet. A historical summary total catch for the domestic and foreign fishing vessels for 1971 - 2004 is provided in table 1.

As anticipated, the total catch by the domestic purse seine and pole-and-line vessels in 2004 was mainly of skipjack and yellowfin tunas. The total catch by species in 2004 by the domestic purse seine vessels consisted of 6,817 mts of skipjack, 9,197 mts of yellowfin and 80 mts of bigeye tuna. The total 2004 catch by the domestic pole-and-line fleet, in comparison consisted of 6,625 mts of skipjack and 257 mts of yellowfin tuna. The total tuna catch by the domestic longline fleet in 2004 consisted of 538 mts of yellowfin, 357 mts of bigeye, 267 mts of albacore and others accounting for 12 mts. The total catch by species for the foreign licensed longline fleet in 2004 for the Solomon Islands EEZ also showed the same trend as that for the domestic fleet with yellowfin accounting for 387.3 mts, 115.9 mts of bigeye, 108.9 mts of albacore and others accounting for 5.7 mts. The total catch provided here is however incomplete and data at hand and provided here is only for Taiwan vessels. The total catch by species by the foreign purse seine vessels in 2004 for Solomon Islands EEZ consisted of 58,015.4 mts of skipjack, 11,795.4 mts of yellowfin, 372.3 mts of bigeye and others accounting for 1 mt. The compilation of catch by species for the foreign pole-and-line vessels operations in Solomon Islands EEZ for 2004 however has not been completed, hence not provided here. The overall catch by species for all vessels licensed to fish in Solomon Islands EEZ were not included in the data compiled, hence not provided here.

4. Markets for the tuna and tuna products.

As noted in the introduction, some of the tunas caught by the domestic fleet are processed locally into canned tuna, smoked tuna, tuna loins and fishmeal for the export market. The majority however, are exported frozen for further processing overseas or as fresh tuna for the sashimi markets. The total volume of tuna and tuna products export from the country in 2004 amounted to 27,496 mts. This was 4,602 mts higher than the exports for 2003. Japan and Europe are currently the main markets for tuna and tuna products exports from

Solomon Islands, while the canned tuna products are exported mainly to other neighbouring Pacific Island countries. A historical summary total of tuna products exports from Solomon Islands for the years 1998 – 2005 are provided in table 2.

Although a majority of the tunas caught by the domestic fleet are destined for the overseas markets, a lot of fresh and frozen tunas and canned tuna products are also sold at the domestic market for local consumption. The volume of the tunas supplied to the domestic market is currently not well documented, hence not provided here.

5. Transshipments and onshore developments.

A number of purse seine vessels transshipped at the three officially designated ports of Honiara, Noro in the Western Province and Tulagi in the Central Province in the early and late 2004 and continued until early 2005. The placement of observers from Solomon Islands also occurs during the transshipments at these ports as this is the most convenient time for both our Department and the vessel owners as provided for under the bilateral fisheries access agreements. In accordance with the 1998 Fisheries Act, transshipment is deemed to be carried out only by fishing vessels that are not operated by the domestic tuna companies as all locally operated fishing vessel are required to land all their catch in Solomon Islands.

On the processing of tunas, Soltai is the major local company that presently produces canned tuna products, tuna loins, smoked tuna (arabushi) and fishmeal from its shore-base facilities at Noro for export. Solgreen, a domestic longline fishing company is the other company that is also involved with onshore processing of tunas caught by its fishing vessels with the packaging of fresh sashimi tuna for the export market. Global Fishing enterprises a locally registered company is presently in the process of negotiating the possibility of either leasing or buying the former NFD base at Tulagi in the Central Province, for onshore processing of tunas caught by its fishing vessels.

The much anticipation establishment of another onshore tuna processing facility in the late 1990s with ADB loan at Bina in the Malaita Province did not materialize and was due to difficulties with land acquisition. This project was also pursued just before the recent unrest in Solomon Islands, hence cannot be followed through thereafter.

6. Anticipated future developments

The 1998 Fisheries Act is anticipated to be reviewed next year and this basically is to streamline the licensing procedures and to enhance further domestic investment in onshore tuna processing and to accommodate the legal requirements of the Western Central Pacific Tuna Convention. The empowering of local communities to manage their inshore resources will be covered under the review also. A review of the National Tuna Management and Development Plan has been completed and the implementation of its recommendations will bring more benefit to the country from its tuna resources. Other future tuna development proposals and including those onshore development

investment proposal will be follow through in the future to ensure that these materialize and bring tangible benefits to the country and its people.

Soltai Fishing and Processing Company will launch its two newly build pole-and-line vessels in December this year in Japan and it is anticipating to bring two purse seiners under its operations through charter arrangements or to purchase the vessels outright in order to increase its onshore processing of various tuna products.

The National Fisheries Development Company (NFD) has also purchased its fourth purse seine vessel this year and this is now in the process of having the vessel re-flagged to Solomon Islands and to have it licensed under the regional FSM Arrangement also.