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Group Seine Operations of Philippine Flagged Vessels in High Seas Pocket Number 1 (HSP1)

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I.C. Tanangonan¹, M.B. Demo-os¹, J.S. Jara¹, R.V. Ramiscal² and A.C. Dickson²

¹ Marine Fisheries Development and Vessel Operations Center

² Capture Fisheries Division, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource (BFAR), PCA Bldg., Elliptical Road, Quezon City, Philippine

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Isidro C. Tanangonan¹, Marlo B. Demo-os¹, Jeric S. Jara¹, Rafael V. Ramiscal² and Alma C. Dickson²

ABSTRACT

This paper reports the operations of Philippine group seine operations in High Seas Pocket 1 based on Observer reports in 2020. It covers twenty-nine (29) operational catcher vessels during the period January-June and October-December 2020. It describes catch, effort and operation (catch-per-unit-effort, species and size composition, number of catcher and support boats, number of sets and the number of days) of the fleet in high seas pocket 1.

I. Introduction

High Seas Pocket No. 1 (HSP1) was closed to purse seine fishing for 2 years effective January 1, 2010 as a result of the implementation of Conservation and Management Measure 2008-01 (CMM 2008-01) adopted by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). The CMM is intended to reduce fishing mortality of bigeye and yellowfin tunas. HSP1 is bounded by the exclusive economic zones or EEZs of Federal States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea.

In March 2012, the 8th Regular Session of the WCPFC adopted CMM 2011-01 as a temporary extension of CMM 2008-01 and giving access to Philippine traditional fresh/ice chilled seining vessels operating as a group in HSP1 until February 2013. Subsequently, CMM 2012-01 provided the measures for this fleet in the high seas until February 2014, CMM 2013-01 for 2014-2017, CMM 2017-01 for 2018 and CMM 2018-01 for 2019-2021. The measures involved several conditions including access limit to 36 catcher fishing vessels, mandatory use of automatic location communicator (ALC) and regional observer onboard.

¹*Marine Fisheries Development and Vessel Operations Center*

²*Capture Fisheries Division*

*Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource (BFAR)
PCA Bldg., Elliptical Road, Quezon City,
Philippines*

Consequently, Fisheries Administrative Order 245 (FAO 245, 245-1, 245-2, 245-3 and 245-4) was issued by the Department of Agriculture through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to prescribe regulations and implementing guidelines on the operations of 36 fishing vessels in HSP1. In addition, Fisheries Administrative Order 240 (FAO 240) was adopted for the implementation of the National Fisheries Observer Program (NFOP) covering high seas. Further, Fisheries Administrative Order no. 241 (FAO 241) was issued to strengthen VMS operations in the high seas.

This report was based from the reports of Observers, covering the catch of 29 vessels that were able to conduct fishing in HSP1 in 2020. The majority of fleet opted to operate only for 9 months (January-June; October-December) in adherence to paragraph 14 of CMM 2018-01 but Philippines allowed 5 vessels to conduct free school fishing operation in August and September during the FAD Fishing closure. Only 2 of 5 vessels were able to successfully conduct free school set during the entire FAD Closure period.

II. Methods

A. Catch Estimation

Observers total catch estimates were derived from two methods. The main procedure was made by counting and estimating the capacity of brails as fish catch was transferred from the bunt to wells or fish holds of awaiting carriers. The other method was based on capacity and fullness of wells/fish holds. Catch rate was estimated as mT/fishing day. In general, only one set was made in one fishing day. In the brail count/capacity method, total catch was estimated using the following method:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Volume (V)} &= \pi r^2 h \\ \text{Brail capacity} &= \text{Volume} \times 80\% \\ \text{Where;} \\ \pi &= 3.14 \\ h &= \text{Brail height} \\ r &= \text{Brail diameter (d)/ 2} \end{aligned}$$

The volume of fish catch was estimated at 80% of the volume of the brail to account empty/water space. By using this method, a margin of +/- 2% error was observed (dela Cruz, 2010).

B. Catch Sampling

Spill sampling using the sampling bin specified by SPC was used as sampling protocol. The bin has a capacity of around 300-500 kilograms, depending on the size and species of fish caught. Samples were sorted according to species whenever possible

and weighed to the nearest 0.1 kg. The lengths of all tunas and mackerel scad from the sample were measured to nearest cm (fork length for tuna and large pelagic species and total length for mackerel scad).

The large size tunas, billfish and other species that were separated as brails were emptied into the wells. These were weighed and measured separately.

C. Species identification

Species identification was done by Observers based on available identification guides. Special attention was given on the distinctive characteristics of small size yellowfin and bigeye tunas.

D. Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive presentation of data using Microsoft Excel to illustrate a general status of operation in HSP1. These include species composition, Effort, CPUE and length frequency.

Information on the number of days the vessels stayed at HSP1 was based VMS data on time/date of entry and exit from HSP1.

III. Results

A. Catch and fishing effort

The group seine fleets that were able to fish in HSP1 in 2020 were composed of twenty-six (26) purse seine and three (3) ringnet catcher vessels. The fleet opted to operate only for 9 months (January-June; October-December) in accordance to paragraph 14 of CMM 2018-01. During the FAD Closure period, Philippines allowed 5 vessels with free school fishing capacity to continue their operation. 2 of 5 vessels were able to successfully conduct a free school set with combined 18 total number of sets and 100.96mT of total catch.

Overall, the 29 vessels spent a total of 6,308 days in HSP1 and actual 2,635 fishing days, or just about one (1) fishing day for every 2.4 days spent by each vessel in the HSP1. FAO 245 which provides regulation and guidelines for the operation of Philippine group seine operation set the annual catch limit not to exceed an equivalent of 9,846 fishing days for the 36 vessels, or corresponding to 273.5 fishing days per vessel.

In addition, of the total 2,635 fishing days, only 2,391 sets were successful or an efficiency rate of 91%. Unsuccessful fishing days were attributed to damaged gear, machinery malfunction, unfavourable sea condition and other factors, which resulted to no catch to be retained whole weight.

Table 1. Summary of catch and effort of Philippine group seine operation in HSP1, 2020

Month	No. of Catchers	Days @ HSP1	Fishing days	Set/HSP 1 days	Total catch (t)	Catch rate (t/set)	Catch rate (t/HSP1 day)
JAN	22	725	94	7.71	436.35	4.64	0.60
FEB	20	725	81	8.95	318.53	3.93	0.44
MAR	23	747	186	4.02	2,065.45	11.10	2.76
APR	23	690	340	2.03	4,611.38	13.56	6.68
MAY	23	699	378	1.85	5,439.60	14.39	7.78
JUN	22	593	451	1.31	6,814.05	15.11	11.49
JUL	4	4					
AUG	1	16	13		43.69	3.36	2.73
SEP	2	65	5		57.27	11.45	0.88
OCT	24	641	361	1.56	4,987.82	13.82	7.78
NOV	24	690	411	2.19	6,253.57	15.22	9.06
DEC	24	713	315	0.27	2,849.70	9.05	4.00
TOTAL		6,308	2,635	2.39	33,877.40	12.86	5.37

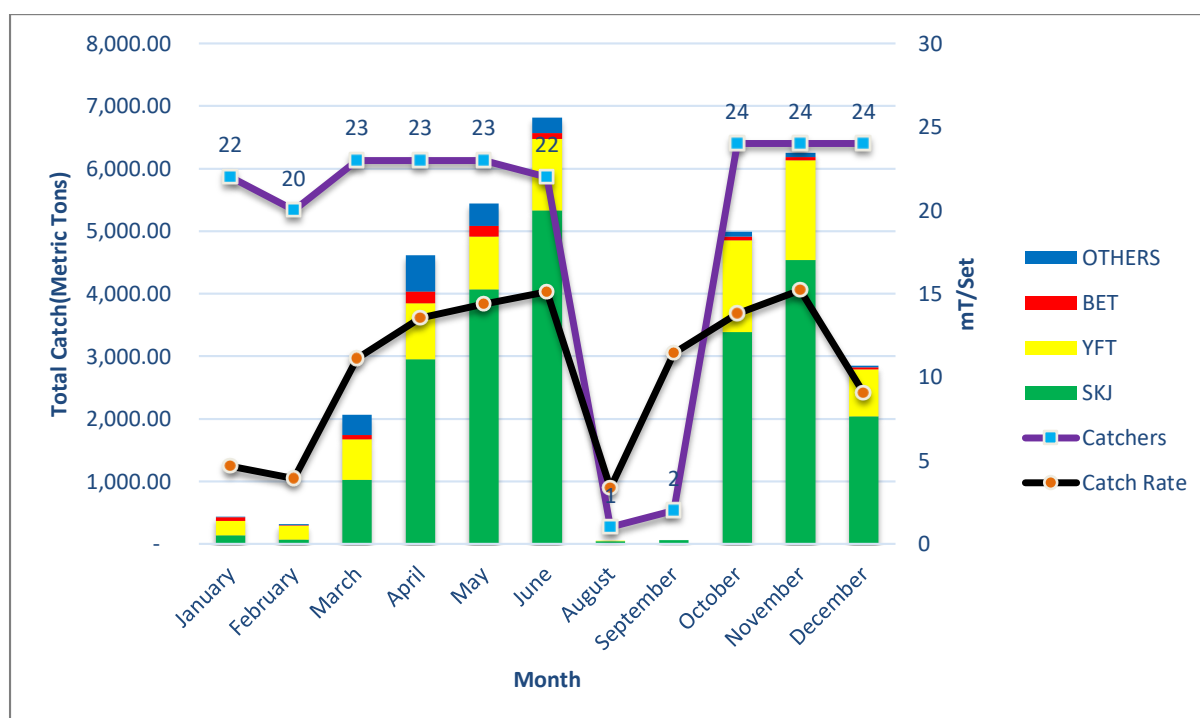


Figure 1. Catch and effort of Philippine group seine operations in HSP1, 2019

B. Catch and species composition

A total of 33,877 tons of fish was caught in HSP1 for 2020, translating to a catch-per-unit effort of 12.86 tons/vessel/fishing day or 5.37 tons/vessel/day in HSP1. The bulk of the catch was composed of skipjack (69.81%) and yellowfin (23.03%). Bigeye was at 2.19% while the remaining 4.97% was comprised of other species including mackerel scad, kawakawa, frigate and bullet tuna, bigeye scad, dolphin fish and triggerfish (Table 2, Fig. 1).

Sharks and other species of special interest were also occasionally caught during the operation, including 201 sharks, 8 whale shark, 5 whales, 188 dolphins, 14 sea turtles, 1 giant manta ray and 9 devil rays. These species were handled in accordance to the relevant Conservation and Management Measures (CMM-2019-04, CMM 2010-07, CMM 2011-04, CMM 2012-06, CMM 2013-08, CMM 2014-05, CMM 2011-03, CMM 2018-04 and CMM 2019-05).

Table 2. Catch of major species by month

Month	SKJ	YFT	BET	OTHERS	TOTAL
JAN	133.74	233.42	63.49	5.70	436.35
FEB	67.20	227.87	6.72	16.75	318.53
MAR	1,027.98	647.22	69.27	320.97	2,065.45
APR	2,951.84	900.16	180.21	579.18	4,611.38
MAY	4,071.63	841.67	170.76	355.53	5,439.60
JUN	5,329.73	1,141.73	95.47	247.12	6,814.05
AUG	42.33	1.36	-	-	43.69
SEP	57.27	-	-	-	57.27
OCT	3,389.66	1,467.60	58.78	71.78	4,987.82
NOV	4,535.25	1,594.42	59.24	64.66	6,253.57
DEC	2,041.58	745.75	39.28	23.08	2,849.70
TOTAL	23,648.21	7,801.19	743.23	1,684.78	23,877.40

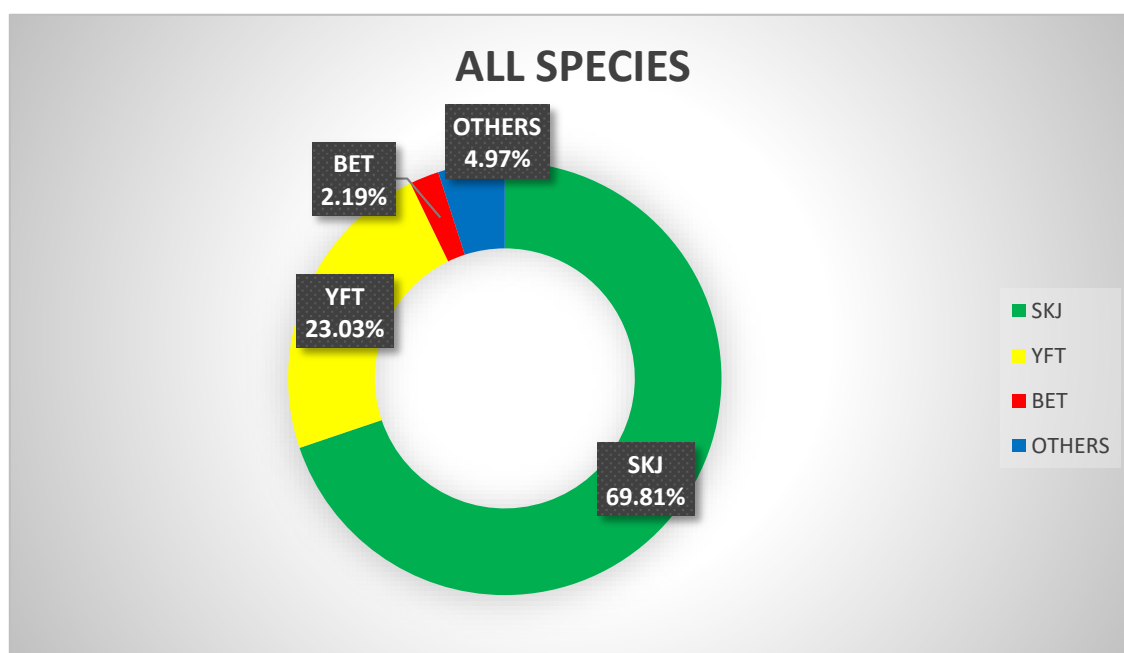


Figure 2. Catch composition of Philippine group seine in HSP1, 2020

C. Size composition

Table 3 illustrates the length frequency of SKJ, YFT and BET indicating average length of 38.45, 42.57, and 42.79 centimeters respectively. Skipjack tuna shows an upward trend starting from February to December. This is contrasting with the trend of Yellowfin and Bigeye tuna that shows a downward direction from January to March. Skipjack tuna and Bigeye Tuna indicated modal peak at 40 centimeters (Fig 3, Table 3) while Yellowfin Tuna form mode at 43 centimeters. The average size of the Skipjack Tuna and Bigeye Tuna were found to be smallest at under 27 and 36 centimeters in the month of February and March respectively while Yellowfin Tuna found to be smallest in June at 37 centimeters (Fig 4).

Table 3. Average length of SKJ, YFT, BET and MSD caught in HSP1

Species	SKJ	YFT	BET	MSD
n	444,541	118,521	8,777	162,016
Ave (cm)	38.45	42.57	42.79	24.82
Min (cm)	11	17	16	10
Max (cm)	86	133	160	81
Mode(cm)	40	43	40	24

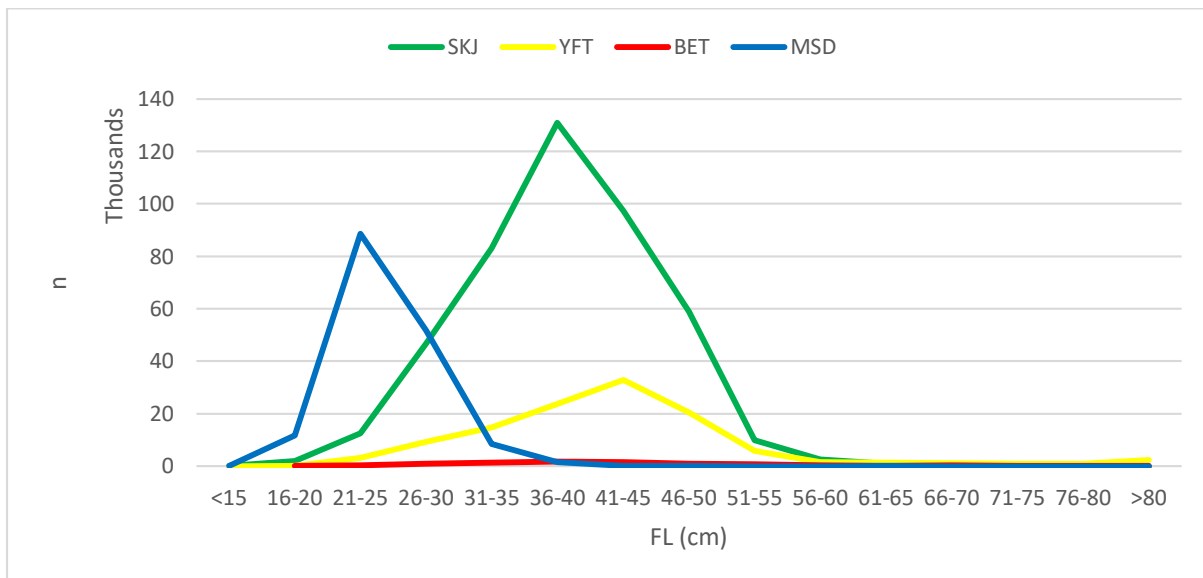


Figure 3. Size composition of SKJ, YFT, BET and MSD caught in HSP1

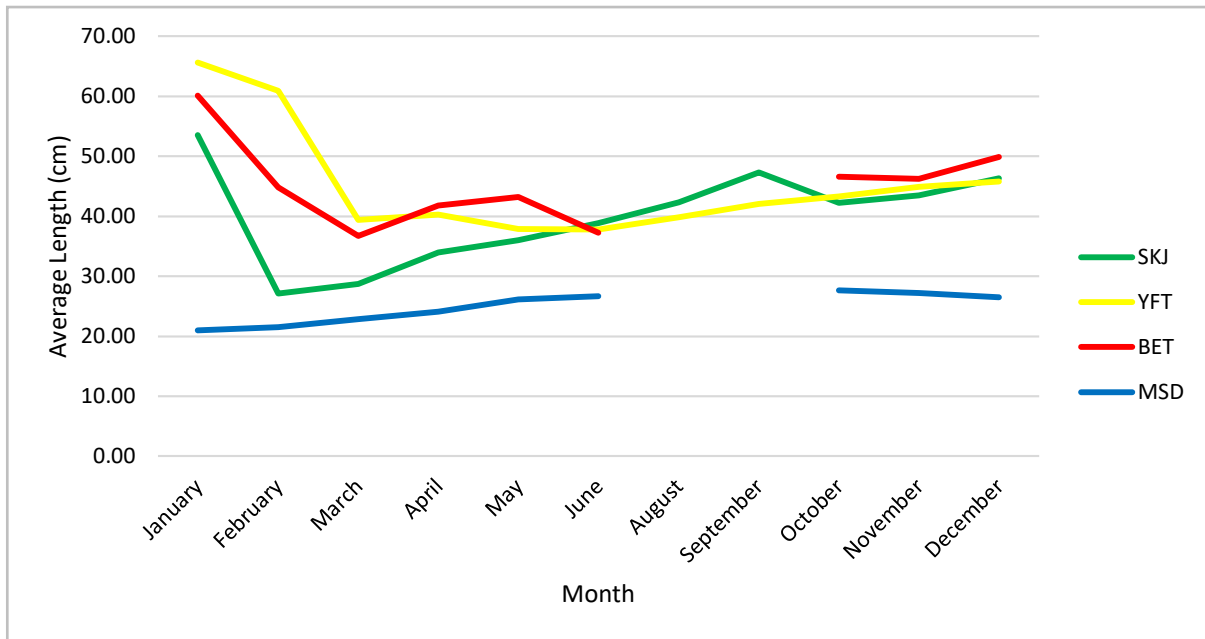


Figure 4. Average size of SKJ, YFT, BET and MSD caught in HSP1

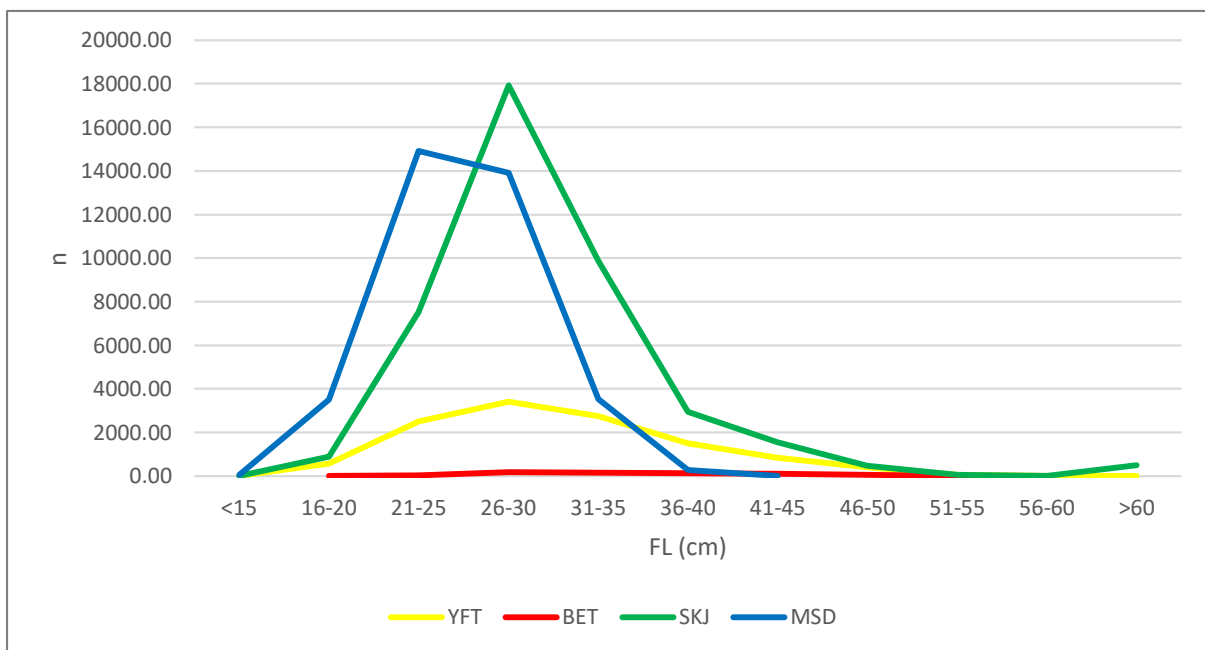


Figure 5. Size composition of SKJ, YFT, BET and MSD caught in Philippine EEZ (FAD Closure 2020)

In contrast with fish caught within Philippine EEZ in 2020, the lengths for the three tuna species (SKJ, YFT and BET) were relatively smaller with modal lengths at 29, 30 and 30 centimeters and average lengths of 29.71, 30.85 and 35.75 centimeters respectively (Fig 5, Table 4).

Table 4. Range and size of SKJ, YFT, BET and MSD caught in Philippine EEZ (FAD Closure, 2020)

Species	SKJ	YFT	BET	MSD
n	41,373	12,086	707	36,230
Ave (cm)	29.71	30.85	35.73	25.61
Min (cm)	12	15	19	12
Max (cm)	66	82	57	59
Mode (cm)	29	30	30	25

Table 5. Comparative Summary of HSP1 and Philippine EEZ Catch in 2020

Species	HSP1 Catch Composition(%)	PHIL EEZ Catch Composition(%)*	HSP1 Average Size (cm)	PHIL EEZ Average Size (cm)*
SKJ	69.81	56.72	38.45	29.71
YFT	23.03	18.11	42.57	30.85
BET	2.19	1.34	42.79	35.73
MSD(OTHERS)	4.97	23.83	24.82	25.61

*based on observer estimate during FAD Closure

D. Catch variation by depth of net

Initial analysis on the variation of catch with depth of net was made. The actual stretched depths of nets were measured during inspections as a condition to their license to fish in HSP1. Depth of nets ranged from 103-180 fathoms (Table 6) and were classed by 20 fathoms, in particular ≥ 161 , 141-160, 121-140 and 101-120 fathoms.

Table 6. Number of observations by depth of net (class)

Depth of net (Class)	No. of sets
101-120	824
121-140	755
141-160	341
≥ 161	715
Grand Total	2,635

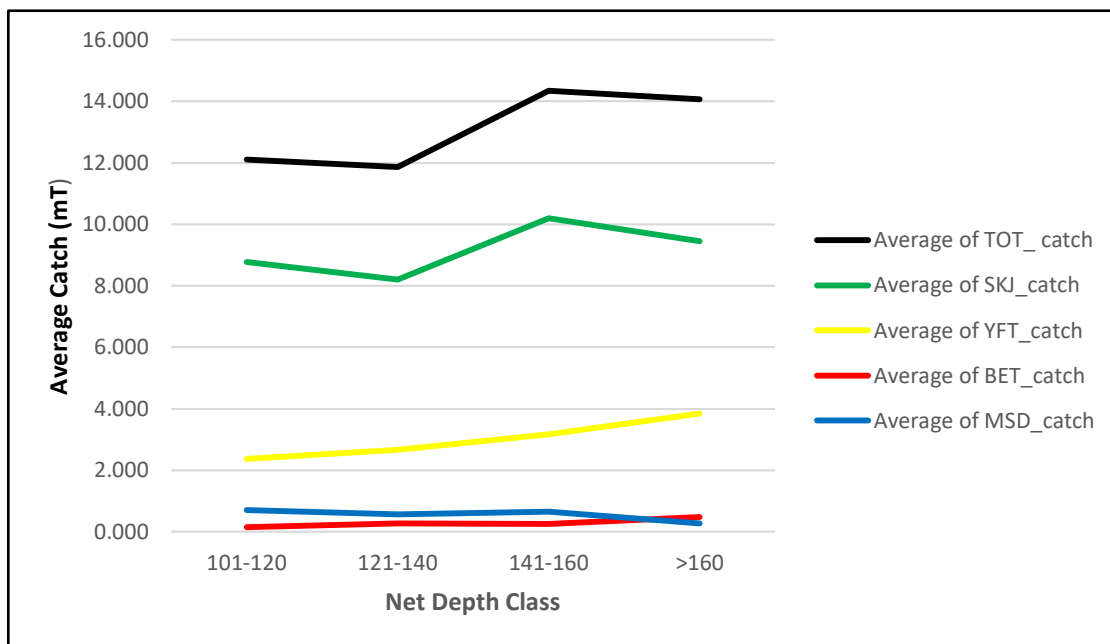


Figure 6. Average catch by species by net depth

Catch variation across gear depths is shown in Fig. 6, indicating increase on the average catch of BET and YFT with increasing depth of net. It was also observed that deeper nets had the lowest MSD catch.

Attempt was made to determine decrease of BET catch by depth of net class by forecasting (linear regression) indicating decrease of about 48%-49% for every 20 fathoms decrease in net depth except for net depth range of 141-160 to 121-120 fathoms where there is an increase of 13% in average BET catch..

Table 7. BET catch reduction by linear regression (forecast)

Net depth range (fm)	Average catch (t/set)	% BET Decrease
≥161	0.473	
141-160	0.244	48%
121-140	0.275	-13%
101-120	0.140	49%

IV. Summary / Recommendations

1. The catch in 2020 of the Philippine group seine fleet in HSP1 totaled to 33,877 metric tons of which 32,192 mt were SKJ, YFT and BET or comprised about 17% of the production of these tuna species that were caught within Philippine EEZ.

2. The average catch was catch-per-unit effort of 12.86 tons/vessel/fishing day or 5.37 tons/vessel/day in HSP1.
3. The average length of SKJ, YFT and BET caught in HSP1 were relatively bigger than tunas caught from Philippine EEZ.
4. Reduction of net depth to reduce the catch of BET should be evaluated and considered as an alternative measure to reduce BET and YFT catch in purse seine fishery.

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