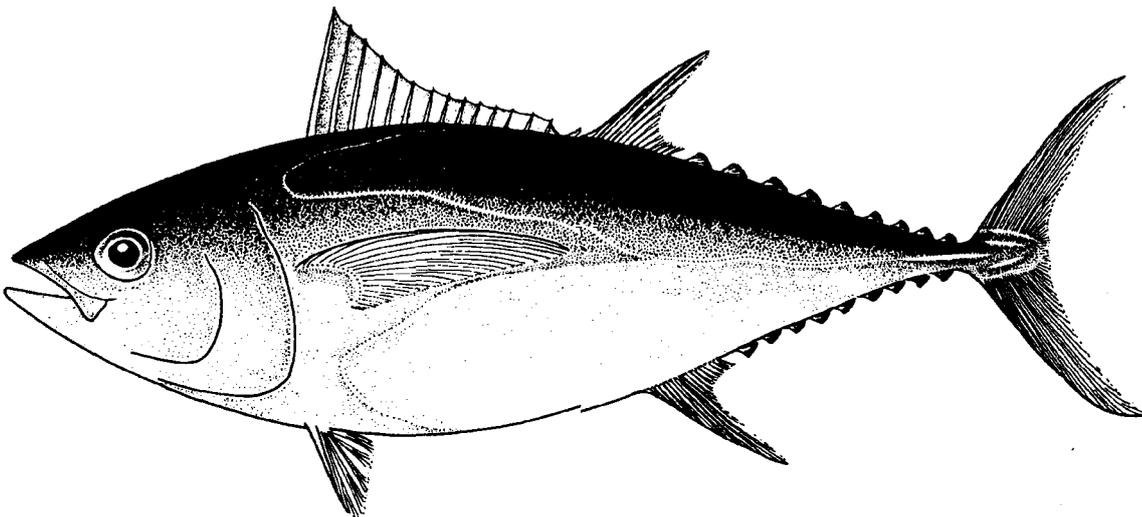




Northern Marianas Islands National tuna fishery report

Floyd Masga



Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
Northern Marianas Islands

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BACK GROUND

The U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) has experienced rapid growth since it established political union with the United States of America in 1976. Rapid growth in tourism, the CNMI's leading industry, parallel with the present economic success is gradually changing the pace of commercial fisheries development as well as the local and federal governments' perception of the need to develop this industry.

Japanese tourists, the majority of the Northern Marianas visitors (70% of the approximately over 500,000 visitors that visited the Northern Marianas in 1999 are Japanese) are partly responsible for the growth in this industry. The demand for seafood caused by the influx of tourists, has opened a bright market for locally caught fishes.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) of the Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR), is the agency of the Northern Marianas Government mandated by law to protect, conserve, manage, and develop the fisheries and wildlife resources. The Fish and Game Regulations promulgated under the same law that created the DFW, was set up for the purpose of fulfilling these responsibilities. The division is presently involved in projects aimed at meeting its goals through research/ surveys, infrastructure developments, and other fisheries developments. This report covers activities the CNMI government through the Division of Fish and Wildlife has undertaken in the past five years (from 1995 - present).

STATUS OF FISHERY

The fishing industry in the Northern Marianas is slowly growing out of its infancy and continues to develop into the year 2000. Our industry may be described as *Artisanal* (small scale commercial production / landed fish sold locally); *Subsistence* (landed fish for self consumption with occasional sale of surplus catch); and *Part Time Commercial* (fish part time basis and sell catch locally). Charter boat fishery has gained huge popularity among local boat owners and has also gained tremendous growth in its success with our visitors.

The number of full-time commercial, part-time, and charter boats are increasing each year. In 1999, there were over 700 registered vessels, of which 25% were engaged in full or part-time commercial fishing. Fish landed by local fishermen are sold locally at fish markets or numerous hotels and restaurants on island. Exports of fish products have not been established in the CNMI yet, even though there has been a small scale bottomfish exporting operation in existence.

With the recent enactment of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Commonwealth, along with the Territory of Guam and American Samoa, a Pacific Insular Area Fishery Agreement to authorize foreign fishing within the exclusive economic zone may be negotiated and entered by the Secretary of State, with the concurrence of the Secretary of Commerce. With this in place, the CNMI has developed and submitted applicable requirement of this act in order to take advantage of this act provision. The CNMI is hopeful that a larger scale commercial fishery will develop.

To date, there have been various inquiries of this foreign fishing opportunity from Japan, Thailand, South Korea, and Taiwan.

FISHERY MANAGEMENT

Local Management: The CNMI legislature has introduced a bill for enactment, the *Northern Mariana Islands Fisheries Act*. When enacted, it will provide CNMI the policy to protect and implement the rights of its inhabitants to explore, exploit, conserve, and manage all fish and fisheries resources within its internal waters, archipelagic waters, territorial sea, and exclusive economic zone in cooperation with the United States and consistently with the interest of the United States in foreign affairs and defense.

In addition, a proposed *Commercial Fishing Regulations* has been developed and is now being prepared for public hearing for comments and recommendations. Once implemented, it will promote best use of the fishery resources and orderly conduct of commercial fishing activities within the CNMI, while maintaining and protecting the resource for future generations.

Federal Management: The CNMI is a voting member of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WPRFMC). As a member, it jointly manages those fish species listed in its Fishery Management Plan (FMP) inside federal waters and recognizes the provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

FISH LANDINGS

<u>Species</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>
Skipjack Tuna	105,422	132,154	106,756	133,818	85,186
Yellowfin Tuna	16,824	30,410	17,121	11,656	19,598
Billfin (Marlin)	5,372	7,419	5,754	3,444	2,873
Mahi-Mahi	18,657	28,524	25,021	20,529	10,305
Wahoo	4,556	8,626	6,064	5,040	6,395
<u>Other Pelagics</u>	<u>9,704</u>	<u>16,943</u>	<u>13,648</u>	<u>17,478</u>	<u>16,189</u>
Total landings	160,535	224,076	174,364	191,965	140,548

These landings are based on data collected and compiled through a **Commercial landings monitoring system** that operates a "trip ticket" invoicing system for all fisheries landing fish for sale. Invoice receipt forms are provided to and collected from all businesses which buy fish directly from fisherman.

SPORT/GAME FISHING

Annual international fishing tournaments are held each year in the CNMI. Each year in August, the Saipan Sport Fishermen Association organizes the CNMI's biggest fishing event, the Annual Saipan International Fishing Tournament, which consistently offered single cash prize in excess of ten thousand dollars. This year's two-day event is scheduled for August 12 & 13, of which anglers from Japan, Korea, Guam, Palau, and the Marshalls are expected to participate. Neighboring islands of Rota and Tinian also organizes similar events each year.