GREENPEACE Briefing

End The High Seas Heist

BRIEFING TO: The Fifth Regular Session of the Western & Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Scientific Committee (WCPFC-SC5)

The Fifth Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC5) in Busan, Korea failed to act on the scientific advice of this committee at its meeting in December, leaving the regional tuna stocks, especially bigeye and yellowfin, in an ever-deepening status of crisis that threatens the future of the region and its tuna industry. This briefing outlines some critical measures which Greenpeace believes that the Scientific Committee should recommend to the WCPFC6 (French Polynesia, 7-11 December 2009) to protect the valuable tuna resources and marine environment of the Pacific and in order to increase returns from the fishery.

Following the success of the WCPFC to close the two largest high seas pockets to purse seining, Greenpeace reaffirms the power of regional solidarity in managing the shared marine resources of the Pacific. The declared catches from the two largest high seas enclaves are approximately 11% of the total tuna catch in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO).[1] A recent report estimated the amount of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the WCPO at 21-46%[2]. Greenpeace expeditions have confirmed the high seas enclaves as havens for IUU fishing, giving reason to believe that the closures will contribute to the recovery of the regional tuna stocks and marine life beyond the given estimates if properly enforced. We encourage all Members to work together to close all the four high seas enclaves to all fishing activities and urge the Scientific Committee to recommend a 50% effort reduction in tuna fishing effort across the entire WCPO sector, based on the average 2001-2004 levels, to the WCPFC.

The decline in skipjack stock[3] and overfishing of two important large predators in the WCPO, bigeye and yellowfin, threatens both the stability of trophic dynamics and the productivity of the entire Pacific marine ecosystem. As the majority of the world's tuna is sourced from the WCPO,[4] the food security of both local communities and of millions of people across the globe is compromised by the failure of the WCPFC Parties to provide accurate data and to adhere to scientific advice, minimize impacts on non-target species and combat all three parts of IUU fishing.

Pirate fishing undercuts all current stock estimates. To curb IUU fishing, Greenpeace calls for an immediate ban on all transshipments of fish at sea. As lower stocks sizes drive higher catch per unit of effort (CPUE) and rising fuel costs force fleets to fish more economically, Fisheries aggregation devices (FADs) are an increasingly attractive fishing tool for the large purse seine fleets. However, the high bycatch of vulnerable species, including endangered sharks and turtles and overfished immature tuna, along with the uncontrolled effort increases and compliance complexities accompanied by FADs are reason to eliminate FADs permanently from the Pacific in association with purse seine fisheries.

Climate change and population dynamics

As signatories to the Manado Declaration in May 2009, members of the Western and Central Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) will be aware of the role of climate change in altering the population dynamics of species including tuna and billfish. With an estimated 90% decline in tuna and billfish stocks since 1952[5], and 10-50% loss in their diversity[6] climate change impacts such as shifts in age to maturity, size, death rates and shifts in the carrying capacity undermine effort and yield calculations upon which management and governance of these fisheries depend.[7] WCPFC Members are obliged by Articles 5 and 6 of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, supported by Article 192 of the Law of the Sea Convention, to conserve these highly migratory stocks using both the precautionary and ecosystem approach.

Ecosystem based management is a resiliency-based approach to climate change that aims to protect ecosystem features, reduce human impacts, maintain species and ecosystem diversity and establish functional refugia for stock recovery.[8] For the Pacific Island nations, resiliency-based approaches are crucial to maintain the integrity of marine ecosystems to withstand climate change such as the mangrove and coral communities that buffer these vulnerable small island States.

Marine reserves

Protecting biodiversity

Marine reserves are a powerful tool for achieving both conservation and fisheries management objectives for highly migratory stocks. The four high seas enclaves meet the criteria for ecologically significant marine areas under the Convention on Biodiversity. These include vulnerable, fragile and sensitive habitats such as tropical corals, shallow seamounts, upwelling zones and potential hydrothermal vent locations. Human impacts on this open ocean system are largely the result of the industrial tuna fishing industry. Bycatch on tuna longliners account for a significant proportion of the longline catch at approximately 35%[9] and includes threatened, vulnerable and declining species including oceanic sharks, turtles and cetaceans. Additionally, FAD fishing by purse seiners also catches large quantities of juvenile bigeye, yellowfin, sharks and turtles. By catching immature tuna of overexploited tuna stock purse seining on FADs jeopardize the sustainability of the tuna fishery and like longlining constitute a fatal threat to non-target species.

The use of FADs to attract and retain tuna in the WCPO has increased steadily, and now majority of all skipjack is caught in association with FADs. This has taken place with very little monitoring or control over the impacts on the use of FADs and has resulted in a situation where nobody knows how many FADs are in use, how much fishing effort they are exerting into the fishery.

Every time FADs are used in fishing, about 10% of the catch is not skipjack tuna but other juvenile tuna species.[10] The volume of this bycatch is significant, particularly given the smaller size and greater vulnerability of the bigeye and yellowfin stocks and the endangered status of many species of sharks and turtles in the region.

The overcapacity and increased efficiency of the purse seine fleet through the use of FADs is jeopardizing the sustainability of the entire fisheries. In the high seas enclaves, bycatch includes threatened endangered or declining species such as leatherback, green, olive ridley and hawksbill seaturtles, bigeye and yellowfin tuna, sperm whales, beaked whales and oceanic sharks such as oceanic whitetip and blue sharks. Marine reserves are the most powerful tool for preserving marine diversity

and maintaining vital ecosystem functions and so enhance the resilience of the Pacific Ocean ecosystem to the impacts of overfishing and climate change.

Based on these concerns and the urgent need to reduce the mortality of bigeye and yellowfin tuna, Greenpeace believes that the use of FADs for industrial tuna purse seine fisheries should be totally banned from fishing. A two month seasonal FAD prohibition approved by the last Tuna Commission meeting will coincide with this meeting. A total ban is needed on FADs associated with purse seine fishing in the region to ensure that the two tuna stocks return to sustainable level.

Protecting stocks

Marine reserves have recently been proven to provide protection for stocks against ineffective or inadequate fishery management.[11] They are an appropriate tool given that according to the WCPFC data climate change alters the population dynamics upon which stock estimates are based; the vagaries of IUU fishing and outright non-reporting of data by fishing nations further undercut all management attempts; and FADs undermine the assumptions of purse seine CPUE and render these calculations inaccurate. In July 2009, the North Sea marine research institute IMARES published the report 'Marine Protected Areas and commercial fisheries'.[12] The most important conclusion of the study was that closing 25 percent of the North Sea would already increase the number of fish by 50%, double the average weight of fish, and increase the biomass by 200%. They recommended that an even larger area would yield even more positive results.

Greenpeace recommends a global network of marine reserves covering 40% of the world's oceans. The closure of the high seas enclaves would complement regional conservation initiatives such as the Phoenix Islands Protected Area, Papahanaumokuakea Marine National Monument, recent declaration of the Marquises Islands marine reserve of French Polynesia, and the proposed Coral Sea Heritage Park as well as initiatives on the way within the coral triangle area.

Ending the high Seas Heist

Pirate fishing

Greenpeace has been defending Pacific tuna stocks from plunder for many years. Our expedition and partner patrols with Pacific Island Countries have exposed criminal activity in the form of IUU pirate fishing activity on each ship tour. The high (estimated at 21-46%) level of IUU fishing in the region compromises all data used in scientific modeling and projections. Furthermore, the inadequate reporting of catches by coastal States, coupled with the lack of monitoring, control and surveillance measures and resources in the region, enables illegal vessels to operate side by side with legally registered vessels as well as facilitates unreported fish laundering.

Many opportunities exist for cheating the Pacific Island Countries of their marine resources. The high seas enclaves present a major loophole in the regulation of fishing for the WCPO. Transshipments at sea allow vessels to launder their catch unreported. In our 2008 ship tour we defended the high seas enclaves from both legal and IUU over fishing and exposed the continuing tragedy of the commons. The scarce resources available to monitor and control fishing activities cannot prevent the mining of tuna stocks from these high seas enclaves. The declared catches of only two of the largest high seas enclaves represent approximately 11% of the total catch from the WCPO.[13] Closing the high seas enclaves would make it significantly harder for IUU fishing vessels to operate and trade their products. It would also deny IUU fishers the ability to disguise illegal catches taken from the bordering EEZs. Their

closure would be a significant step in meeting the precautionary 50% effort reduction to ensure the sustainability of the regional tuna stocks.

Valuing the resource

The plundering of fish stocks by distant water fishing nations (DWFNs) threatens not only the sustainability of our valuable natural tuna resources. The economic and political stability of the region depends upon a reliable and continuous income from fishing licenses and local fisheries. Diverse and flourishing marine ecosystems are also core to the culture of each Pacific Island country. Overcapacity in the Pacific distant water industrial tuna fleets, in addition to unsustainable pressure on stocks, is both undermining the fleets' economic viability and the potential returns to coastal states in the form of increased revenue from access fees. A precautionary approach must be fast tracked for Pacific tuna fisheries to protect the vulnerable stocks, the industry and Pacific economies.

Radically reducing fishing effort would both improve the economic performance of the fleets and returns to coastal states from the licensing arrangements. A study by Kompas et al[14] shows that an effort reduction in the Pacific purse seine effort amounting to 68 per cent of effort levels in 2004 and smaller reduction in the frozen and fresh long-line fisheries in the short term would increase the profitability of the fishery by 30% over a 50-year planning horizon. The total amounts often as low as 6% of the value of that catch, received by coastal States are inequitable and not commensurate with the impacts and risks of resource depletion. Collective action by Pacific Island Countries to develop their own domestically owned and operated sustainable industries, using methods such as pole and line, that are suited for the use of coastal communities and negotiate equitable access fees for the remaining limited foreign fleets, is the best means of reaping sound socio-economic benefits from the resource.

Better financial and environmental outcomes could be achieved if all fishing States collectively reduce fishing effort across the region. A precautionary 50% reduction in fishing effort provides an opportunity to negotiate access agreements that value the resource and transfer the food security and socio-economic and political risks associated with overfishing to flag States. These reductions need to be allocated equitably giving the coastal States the opportunity to also enter the fishery.

Recommendations

To ensure the sustainability of stocks, the Scientific Committee should recommend the following measures to decision makers attending the WCPFC6:

1. Establish fully protected marine reserves in the four high seas enclaves between the Pacific Island states (see map).

2. Implement an immediate precautionary cut in all tuna fishing effort of 50% (based on 2001-2004 levels) across the entire WCPO tuna fisheries.

3. Implement an immediate ban of transshipments at sea and use of FADs in association with purse seine fishing.

4. Implement the ecosystem based approach to the management of tuna resources and adhere to and police their exploitation within tightly defined precautionary limits.

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