

STANDING COMMITTEE ON TUNA and BILLFISH

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National Tuna Fishery Report for Vanuatu

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1. Introduction

The Republic of Vanuatu is not as fortunate as other member Pacific Island States in terms of having an established or well-developed tuna fishery. Vanuatu's involvement in the tuna fishery more or less began in the 1950s when a trans-shipment base was established on Espiritu Santo by a Japanese company. This saw the trans-shipment of tuna from Japanese, Taiwanese and Korean fishing vessels (mainly longliners). However, in 1987, the base closed down and all activities being transferred to Pago pago and Leveka.

Tuna fishery is still being practiced but most the activity is off-shore and there is no local processing of any sort. It is The fishing has still continued within the Vanuatu EEZ

In 1996/97 there existed, the local basing of one foreign vessel. This saw local processing and moderate export of tuna. Due to unresolved interests within the company itself, operations closed down.

The small-scale tuna fishery comprises the artisanal and sports/charter fishery. This is very small but significant in terms of rural development, the tourism industry and generally subsistence.

Vanuatu currently benefits only from the license fees and crewing arrangements. The current view is that this benefit is undervalued and that measures should be taken to ensure that social and economic returns accrued to this regional resource is maximised, but within sound sustainably exploitable limits of the resource.

2. Total Aggregated catch (in metric tons) for tuna & billfish species and gears combined for the period 95 – to present.

Table 1.

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Foreign Fleets	6374	3174	2593	2462	254	27.87 ¹
Domestic	69	129	8	-	-	-
Sports/Charter	6.92	16.2	10	22	na	na
Artisanal	2.76	1.3	Na	na	0.9	na

3. Fleet Structure

3.1 Foreign Fleet (Off-shore)

The tuna industry in Vanuatu is dominated by off-shore development. The fleet operating off-shore are principally from distant water fishing nations and in particular Taiwan despite the fact that some fly a flag of convenience. Access to fish in Vanuatu waters stems from a Bilateral Fishing Access Agreement established since 1989 between the Government of Vanuatu and the Kaosuing Fishing Association of Taiwan.

Vanuatu has currently licensed about 35 foreign fishing vessels. 12 of these were licensed in the 98/99 licensing period. The rest were licensed just recently for the 99/00 period. 6 of these vessels are of Korean origin and are based in Fiji, and which bilateral arrangements are still being formalized.

The gross tonnage (GRT) of vessels fall within the range of 70 – 430 GRT.

¹ As of June

3.2 Domestic Fleet (Foreign Locally-Based)

There is currently only one vessel. However no information has been received from the vessel since it departed to fish two months ago, apart from a report last month indicating that the vessel had unloaded it's catch (details unknown) in the Solomon Islands. The matter is currently being dealt with.

3.3 Vanuatu Flagged Fishing Vessels

The Vanuatu Maritime Authority of Vanuatu has indicated that the number of Vanuatu fagged vessels stands around 80. Two of these are purse seiners fishing in the western central pacific and the others elsewhere, particularly in the Eastern Pacific – IATTC² zone. The Fisheries Division does not have any say in the current administration of this subject. These vessels come under the Vanuatu's international vessel registry, which has been contracted out to a private entity in New York. They have considered the subject of fishing vessel matters as not priority, especially collection of fish catch data. This matter is currently being dealt with by the Vanuatu Maritime Authority to ensure that this responsibility be undertaken.

3.4 Local fishing Fleet

With respect to tuna fishery, this comprises basically the artisanal and sports/charter fishery vessels.

There is however currently, 6 local multipurpose fishing vessels which we could say as being proper fishing vessels and are very much commercial. They are licensed to fish for tuna and tuna like species but haven't explicitly done so yet as they are currently concentrating on deep sea fish. All have been provided with appropriate pelagic log sheets (SPC type) and are obliged to submit catch data on a monthly basis.

3.4.1 Artisinal fleet

The fleet numbers about 90. These are based throughout Vanuatu and operate in such a manner that they would not be classified as commercial operators, in the sense that it is very much part-time and usually involves fishing when the need for cash arises or selling off surplus production.

The Vanuatu Fisheries Division currently collects catch data broken down by species. In practice this is not representative of all production as only those entities having obtained duty-exemption privileges are obliged to submit data which would be impossible otherwise.

3.3.1 Sports/Charter fleet

There is currently about at least 15-30 vessels which undertake pelagic fishing whether for recreational gain or money-wise. 7 of these undertake charterers. These aren't required to submit catch data to the Fisheries Division. The impending review of the Fisheries Act seeks to ensure that these type of operators will be obliged to operate a fishing license. For fishing tournaments any other vessel would require a permit. The bottom line is that the data would be forthcoming unlike now.

Fortunately one operator is very cooperative and has supplied information for years 1994 – 1998. The information is not in proper log sheets but the Fisheries Division plans to provide an appropriate log sheet to the willing sports/charter operators before the end of the year.

4. Catch by species (Albacore, Yellowfin, Bigeye and Billfish) by gear type

² IATTC –Inter-American Tropical Tuna Convention

(See tables 2, 3, 4, 5 for longline, purse seining and trolling methods)

5. Final market destination/disposal of catch

All of the pelagic fish caught by local vessels are currently consumed locally.

As far as foreign fleets are concerned most of their catch is not landed in Vanuatu but in foreign ports particularly in American Samoa and Fiji. Vanuatu is not aware whether or not other destinations or markets are being used, apart from this two.

6. Onshore developments

There is currently no on-shore development at least on the industrial scale. It is the reason why most of the tuna fishing vessels are fishing in the zone and offloading their catches elsewhere.

7. Future prospects and developments

7.1 Onshore development: One of the recently established local company intends to initiate a fish export trade. It's two vessels are multipurpose and they will target tuna as well. The vessels are 20 and 100+GRT. Both are of Australian origin but are currently registered in Vanuatu.

7.2 Vanuatu Flagged Vessels: The newly established Vanuatu Maritime Authority (VMA) is taking measures now to ensure that the Vanuatu Maritime Services, which handles the Vanuatu vessel registry, take the full responsibility of ensuring fishing vessels conform to terms and conditions of their access and license agreements. The VMA will closely liase with Fisheries Division on matters relating to flag fishing vessels.

7.3 Tuna Management Plan (TMP): Currently being drafted and should be ready for Government approval by end of year. The TMP is necessary and is vital towards the overall long term management of valuable tuna stocks and the tuna industry. It is focuses on the tuna industry within Vanuatu's jurisdictions, but also captures other important elements from the regional and international perspectives within the overall plan. These includes conventions and agreements to which Vanuatu is a party or signatory.

The short to medium goal would be to maximise net revenue for the government from foreign vessels fishing in Vanuatu waters or flying Vanuatu flags and fishing in other waters, and to increase crew.

The medium to longer term is for Vanuatu to reserve the ability for a locally based fleet where all tuna can be harvested and processed locally with value adding as much as possible.

7.4 Fisheries Act Review: To ensure that it is improved so that it can provide the necessary legal instrument or framework for all local, regional and international contemporary issues, especially matters pertaining to Vanuatu's duties, responsibilities and obligations, as far a fisheries matters are concerned. With respect to tuna resources, the review will essentially take into consideration all aspects of the tuna management plan.

7.5 National Observer Program: The Fisheries Division currently has 2 FFA trained observers. One is experienced and the other is fresh. Both have been trained to particularly observe aboard purse seiners. The Division has plans to build an observer coverage capability for fishing operations by domestic and foreign fleets within the Vanuatu EEZ.

Table 2. Catch of tuna species and billfish species by *longline* for the period 1995 to present

<u>Year</u>	<u>ALB</u>	<u>YFT</u>	<u>BET</u>	<u>Billfish</u>	<u>Total</u>
1995	5685	363	119	208	6374
1996	2558	441	76	92	3167
1997	2103	333	65	92	2593
1998	2068	233	57	99	2458
1999	196	34	9	14	254
2000					-
					27.87

Table 3. Catch of tuna species and billfish species by *purse seining* for the period 1995 to present

<u>Year</u>	<u>SKJ</u>	<u>YFT +BET</u>	<u>Total</u>
1995	0	0	0
1996	11	7.3	18.2
1997	0	0	0
1998	68	5	73
1999	0	0	0

Table 4. Catch of tuna species and billfish species by *troll* (*sports/charter*) for the period 1994 to present

		1994	1995	1996	1997
		MT	MT	MT	MT
SPECIES	YFT	2.1	3	6.9	2.5
	SKJ	0.04	0.2	0.06	0.08
	DTT	0.7	0.7	0.1	0.5
	MIS	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1
	BIZ	2.2	0.2	5.5	3.9
	BLM	0.2	0.7	0.4	1.1
	SAIL	0.2	0.5	0	0
	SWD	0	0	0	0
	OTHERS	1.06	1.52	3.14	1.82
	TOTAL MT	6.8	6.92	16.2	10
	MT BY TUNA SPP	2.84	3.9	7.06	3.18
	MT BY BILLFISH	2.9	1.5	6	5.1

Abbreviations:

ALB: Albacore, BET: Bigeye, BIZ: Blue Marlin, BLM: Black Marlin, DTT: Dogtooth, MIZ: Striped Marlin, SAIL: Sailfish, SKJ: Skipjack, SWD: Swordfish, YFT: Yellowfin

Table 5. Catch of tuna species and billfish species by *troll artisanal* for the period 1995 to the present.

	1994		1995		1996		1997		1998		1999
	MT	MT	MT	MT	MT	na	MT	na	MT	na	MT
YFT		4.3		0.6		0	na		na		0.1
SKJ		1.5		1.6		0.3	na		na		0.1
WT		1.1		0.06		0	na		na		0
ALB		0.1		0		0	na		na		0
MLN		0.1		0.3		0	na		na		0
OTHERS		0.33		0.2		1	na		na		0.7
TOTAL		7.43		2.76		1.3	na		na		0.9
TOTAL TUNA		7		1.26		0.3	na		na		0.2
TOTAL BILL		0.1		0.3		0	na		na		0