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**ANNUAL REPORT – PART 1
INFORMATION ON FISHERIES, RESEARCH, AND STATISTICS**

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COOK ISLANDS

WESTERN AND CENTRAL PACIFIC FISHERIES COMMISSION

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**COOK ISLANDS
National Fisheries Report**

1.1 Annual Fisheries Information

The Cook Islands has two sub-fleets operating within the EEZ. Vessels operating north of 15° south latitude¹ target albacore tuna to be unloaded to canneries in Pago Pago, American Samoa. Vessels operating in the southern part of the zone set shallower, targeting swordfish and other associated species either for export or to be sold on the local market.

Total Cook Islands fleet catches within the WCPO peaked in 2005 (see table 1) when the Cook Islands longline domestic fleet was at its largest. Since then annual catches have declined mainly due to a reduction in the number of vessels in the fleet, with high operational costs contributing to this.

Very little exporting was done in 2007 mainly due to exchange rates and demand for the local market where selling on the local market was sometimes more profitable for fishing companies. The main export markets however are New Zealand, Japan and the USA.

Table 1. Annual catch estimates by species taken within the WCPFC.

Catch (metric tonnes)										
Year	Effort (hhks)	ALB	BET	YFT	BLM	BUM	MLS	SWO	OTH	TOTAL
2001	266	1.8	0.6	1.0	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.4	1.7	5.8
2002	11,371	490.0	55.9	42.3	0.3	13.6	13.8	12.5	75.1	703.5
2003	52,940	1,358.2	203.5	178.5	5.8	47.7	40.7	157.3	277.6	2,269.3
2004	78,248	1,868.8	394.5	506.0	9.9	54.3	37.4	160.7	333.7	3,365.3
2005	79,238	2,371.2	220.2	412.7	8.3	140.9	42.9	102.8	251.0	3,550.0
2006	61,529	2,222.7	165.7	262.1	6.5	20.1	14.5	83.1	228.9	3,003.6
2007	54,763	2,099.1	188.3	250.8	15.1	37.1	12.5	42.8	112.9	2,758.6

(Source: Cook Islands longline vessel logsheets)

A total of 35 longline vessels and 1 troll vessel were licensed to fish in the WCPFC in 2007, with the majority of the longline vessels concentrating their efforts within the Cook Islands EEZ.

Table 2. Number of longline vessels by size class licensed by the Cook Islands.

Vessel size (GRT)				
0-50	51-200	201-500	500+	TOTAL
4	22	9	0	35

¹ This is generally the lower reach of vessels operating in the northern Cook Islands albacore fishery. They seldom fish this far south.

1.2 RESEARCH AND STATISTICS

Observer and port sampling programmes

In the past, retaining observers to the Cook Islands national programme was difficult, due to better jobs being offered onshore. With no observer trips carried out in 2007, the Cook Islands tried the approach of recruiting observers from other Pacific Islands. The observer programme was successfully re-established this year with an observer recruited from the Solomon Islands. Plans are underway to recruit more observers' in-country.

More emphasis was placed on the port sampling programme based in port Avatiu with a dedicated port sampler recruited to MMR² in March 2007. Since then coverage of vessels operating and unloading in to Avatiu has increased to approximately 60% compared to the previous year where less than 5% of vessels unloading in port Avatiu were sampled. Efforts are being made with the intention to further increase coverage.

Swordfish tagging

Current plans are in place for a collaborative swordfish tagging programme between CSIRO and MMR, using pop-up satellite archival tags in the southern Cook Islands, beginning in the fourth quarter of 2008. The Cook Islands will also be assisted by SPC.

Legislative developments

In July 2008 the Cook Islands Longline Fishery Plan 2008 was passed by cabinet. With the recent development of the Cook Islands Marine Resources Act 2005 and the fishery plan now in place, the Cook Islands Government are ensuring that the management of the fishery resources are sustainably managed with the tools to monitor and control all aspects of it.

Statistical data collection systems

Currently the Cook Islands collects operational catch and effort data using regional (SPC/FFA) logsheet, unloadings, trip completion report forms, observer and port sampling data forms. Logsheets coverage is almost 100% and therefore is the basis for most of the annual catch estimates. Improvements are being made to increase coverage of all other data forms collected with particular interest in observer and port sampling data and vessel unloadings data.

² Ministry of Marine Resources