

OPRT study echoes PITIA concerns over rapid increase in small tuna longliners

In late 2011, concerns were raised by the Pacific Islands Tuna Industry Association (PITIA) with Japan's Organisation for the Promotion of Responsible Tuna (OPRT), regarding the rapid expansion in the number of small tuna longliners (50–150 gross registered tonnage). OPRT responded by commissioning a study on the issue, conducted by Japan's National Resource Institute of Far Seas Fisheries. The results of this study were presented at OPRT's fourth annual seminar in Tokyo on 10 February 2012 by Mr Jiro Suzuki.¹

An investigation into the state of the industry in all oceans indicated that, with the exception of the Indian Ocean, the real status of the small-scale longline fishing industry is currently not well understood by regional fisheries management organisation. Mr Suzuki estimated that up to 5,400 small longline vessels could be operating globally, with 1,800 of these operating within the waters of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. An additional 50–60 Taiwanese small longline vessels with onboard super-refrigeration status are reportedly currently under construction in Taiwan.²

According to Mr Suzuki, the burgeoning of small-scale vessel numbers stems from several factors:³

- various Pacific Island countries are accommodating additional fishing vessels, in conjunction with their growing drive to develop their tuna fishing industries;
- former Taiwanese shark-finning vessels are converting to albacore vessels due to prohibitions introduced on sharkfin fishing;
- vessel construction and operation of small- and medium-sized longliners is far more economical than operating large-scale longliners, which by comparison are in decline; and

- traditional refrigerated carriers are being gradually replaced with more versatile individual super-refrigerated (-60°C) cargo containers, which are well suited to accommodating small catch consignments; super-refrigerated storage capacity has also been developed on vessels.

Concerns were raised in the study about the sustainability of bigeye and yellowfin stocks — the mainstay species of Japan's sashimi industry and also the target species for longline vessels. The Japanese fishing industry, like PITIA members, are concerned about the growing catch capacity of small-scale vessels and subsequent competition for its already suffering longline industry. In his presentation, Mr Suzuki appealed to the Japanese government to show initiative in regulating the growth of small-scale longliners to protect tuna resources from overexploitation,⁴ in the hope that other regional fisheries management organisation members will also follow suit.

Source: Adapted from FFA Fisheries Trade News volume 5, Issue 1, January–February 2012⁵



Carefully checking the line being hauled on a small tuna longliner in Vanuatu (Image: William Sokimi).

¹ Suisan Keizai 2012, "Measures required to prevent over-fishing", 14 February 2012.

² Minato Newspaper 2012, "Sudden increase in small tuna long-liners", 14 February 2012.

³ ibid. Suisan Keizai 2012, Minato Newspaper 2012.

⁴ Suisan Tsushin 2012, "Refridgerated containers changing the tuna industry", 14 February 2012.

⁵ <http://www.ffa.int/node/600>