

**SIXTH SOUTH PACIFIC ALBACORE RESEARCH GROUP MEETING
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COUNTRY STATEMENT

SOLOMON ISLANDS

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Introduction

The Solomon Islands, consisting of a chain of archipelagic islands, lies between latitudes 5 and 13 degrees south and longitudes 155 and 171 degrees east in the western tropical Pacific. It has within its 1978 declared 200 miles EEZ a total sea area of approximately 1.3 million square kilometers. Tuna fisheries have dominated the activities within these waters. The country has relied and will continue to rely on tuna resources as one of its major export earners. Since the establishment of domestic fisheries in the early seventies, the tuna fishery has been based on the domestic pole-and-line and purse seine fisheries which have been targeting mostly surface swimming yellowfin and skipjack.

Because of the tropical climate, longline fishery continues to be the only fishery that harvests albacore tuna in the Solomon Islands waters. A catch allocation of 8,500 mt has been set aside for longline fishing in the Solomon Islands. In this allocation, no reference has been made to species composition.

Foreign Longline Fishing Vessels

The longline fishery has a long history in the Solomon Islands that has depended very much on foreign fishing vessels. Since the declaration of 200 miles EEZ, bilateral arrangements have been negotiated with Japan, Taiwan and on one occasion Korea. The longline fishery continued to depend on the bilateral arrangements with Taiwan and Japan since then.

Catch summary (1993 - 1996) for this fishery is given in table 1. Total average catch for the last 3 years was about 3,000 mt. Yellowfin has always been the predominant species in the catches. Albacore and bigeye catches were more or less similar in pattern.

The Solomon Islands has not renewed the bilateral arrangement with Taiwan pending clearance of some outstanding issues regarding Taiwanese compliance with the minimum terms of licence conditions, notably in the area of catch data provision and the reviewed increased access fees. Only Japanese longliners have been providing catch reports.

Foreign Longliners Chartered to Locally Based Fishing Companies

During 1995, five(5) locally based fishing companies chartered 35 foreign longline fishing vessels to fish in the Solomon Islands waters. Currently a total of 28 longline vessels have obtained licence under such charter arrangements. Their total albacore catch for 1995 was 499.8 mt. This is summarised in table 1(a) together with their catches for 1995. Except for Makira Tuna Company, no longline catch data are available as yet for the first two months of 1996. Makira Tuna Company's catch for the first two months (Jan. and Feb. 1996) was 104 mt albacore, 56 mt bigeye, 44 mt yellowfin.

Unlike the Japanese foreign longliners, the predominant species in all of the catches was albacore which represented almost 50% of the total catches. This is followed by yellowfin (approx. 25%) and then bigeye (15%). About 50% of the catches were taken by Japanese chartered longliners as shown in table 2(b).

These vessels were mostly of Korean origin although few were Japanese and about 3 from Vanuatu and 2 from Panama. The sizes of these vessels vary between 20GMT and 756GMT but most falls within the range of 300 - 500 GMT.

One of the Companies, having been established since 1994, has been exporting its fish directly to the Japanese sashimi market since its establishment. Data for this are currently been compiled.

Domestic Longline Fishery

A domestic longline fleet operated in the Solomon Islands waters between 1981 to 1985 but has to be discontinued because of economical difficulties. No effort has been made since then to start a domestic longline fishery although it is encouraged.

Catch Statistics

The highest albacore catch in Solomon Islands waters of 2,674 was recorded in 1971. The highest albacore catch in the last 15 years was 1,337.8 mt (FFV:838.0 mt and FCFV: 499.8 mt) and this was recorded in 1995.

Currently all foreign longline catch data (logsheets) are being sent to the Oceanic Fisheries Programme of the South Pacific Commission for compilation and processing. It is hoped that a database will be developed to enable the Fisheries Division directly enter longline catch data.

Research

No research work has been done on albacore tuna in the waters of Solomon Islands yet. The status of albacore resource in the Solomon Islands waters is therefore little known.

Future Direction

Solomon Islands has no immediate plans in relation to albacore tuna resource research and management. Because of the increase of foreign chartered longliners to fish in Solomon Islands waters, the Fisheries Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries plans to improve and strengthen its monitoring and data coverage capabilities. This will include making efforts to have the Taiwanese foreign longliners (and any others) to provide their catch statistics.

Table 1. Catches for Japanese Foreign Longline vessels, 1993 -1996

YEAR	Japanese Longliners	Taiwane Longliners	Albacore	Bigeye	Yellowfin	Other	Total
1993	66	22	526	533	1,861	187	3,108
1994	68	18	838	377	1,504	288	3,007
1995*	65	20	486	484	1,660	318	2,801
1996**	36	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note: Taiwanese catches are not included

* Data for October to December not included.

** No catch data for 1996 is available

Table 2: 1995 Catches for Foreign Longliners Chartered to Locally Based Fishing Companies

a) by company

COMPANY	No. of Vessels 1995	No. of vessels Feb. 1996	Catch (mt)			
			Albacore	Bigeye	Yellowfin	TOTAL
Solgreen	10(3)*	3	103.4	39.6	69.2	212.2
Solssa	16(7)*	16	296.4	108.1	145.5	550.0
Makira Tuna	4 (2)*	4	100.0	38.4	45.6	184.0
Mako	3	3	0	0	0	0
SI Import and Export	2	2	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	35(12)*	28	499.8	186.1	260.3	946.2

* number of vessels covered are in brackets

b) by flag

Flag Country	Vessels Covered	Catch (mt)			
		Albacore	Bigeye	Yellowfin	Total
Japan	8	312.1	145.4	180.6	638.1
Korea	1	19.1	10.7	22.1	51.9
Vanuatu	2	143.8	21.2	43.4	208.4
Panama	1	24.8	8.8	14.2	47.8
Totals	12	499.8	186.1	260.3	946.2