

Gender information in AsiaPacific-FishWatch: Preparing tuna species profiles

M.J. Williams¹

Over the last two decades, the Asian Fisheries Society² has stood out among mainstream fisheries and aquaculture professional societies by hosting women and/or gender and fisheries events and publishing symposia proceedings (Williams et al. 2012). Therefore, when the Society began developing an online system profiling Asia-Pacific key fisheries and aquaculture species — AsiaPacific-FishWatch³ — it determined that the social dimension of the value chains, including gender, should be addressed in the species profiles. The first full pilot species has now been completed — skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*⁴) — and the preparation of the species profile reveals some of the challenges of social and gender information.

I should clarify that AsiaPacific-FishWatch is designed to explain about Asia-Pacific fish products eaten locally and in major world markets. The region supplies not only much of its own fish but also much of that for other countries, particularly in Europe and North America. The information is aimed at informing the public about the production, conservation and social angles of fish. Its original model was the USA FishWatch⁵ system, but the design has been amended to suit our region.

The project will cover key species in Asia and the western and central Pacific regions, with an initial priority on edible species from aquaculture and fisheries. We estimate that the top 100 species or groups cover about two-thirds of world fish production. Thanks to support from the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation we have made a start with the four main canned tuna species: skipjack (*Katsuwonus pelamis*), yellowfin (*Thunnus albacares*), bigeye (*Thunnus obesus*) and albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*). These are all species of major interest to the Pacific Islands region.

Skipjack, the pilot species, is a “political species”, being of major economic and food importance to Pacific Island countries. Therefore, the AsiaPacific-FishWatch profile is potentially sensitive. Skipjack is also in the top 10 aquatic species by production in the world and in Asia-Pacific, and the largest amount of production comes from Asia-Pacific, especially the western and central Pacific, including Indonesia and the Philippines. It is fished by national and international fleets, and is traded in a multitude of markets. Two regional fisheries management organisations (the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission) and national governments manage the stock. Conservationists are very interested in this fishery, especially through campaigns against fish aggregation devices, catches of juveniles, and for pole-and-line certification.

The profile covers: Quick Facts (an overview summary of all information), and detailed pages on Sustainability, Production, Supply Chain and Markets, Environment and Climate, and Biology, plus full references and links, and attribution and recognition of contributors and reviewers. We also have good graphics, thanks to the openness of contributors to share their work (including the photos accompanying this article). Indeed, the graphics are potentially a useful resource in their own right because all materials are fully authenticated by experts and outrank, for example, photos of skipjack on Wikimedia Commons.

In terms of what information is available for skipjack, we have good sources on fish stock assessments, biology, biogeography, and climate links, thanks to the work of Pacific scientists, especially those at the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. When it comes to social, economic,

¹ 17 Agnew Street, Aspley, Queensland, 4034, Australia. Email: meryljwilliams@gmail.com

² See: www.asianfisheriessociety.org

³ See: www.asiapacfish.org

⁴ See: www.asiapacfish.org/index.php/species/item/5-skipjack-tuna

⁵ See: www.fishwatch.gov

⁶ See: <http://iss-foundation.org/>

labour, and post-harvest aspects, the information is sparse and many reports are negative (e.g. on cases of maltreatment of fishing crew as reported to the International Labour Organization). Because these are the areas where gender is a factor, the available gender-related information is minimal (see: <http://www.asiapacfish.org/index.php/species/item/5-skipjack-tuna#supply-chains>) and supported by few studies and statistics.

Who has information and what information is available are linked. With regard to tuna species, information mainly resides with regional agencies and their scientific advisors and regular consultants, and is thus concerned more with the resource and its environment. This information is regularly assessed by review bodies advising on fisheries resource management. Other information, such as on social aspects, is more likely to be compiled by occasional special studies, often through the same agencies, with the work by the regional DEVFISH and SciCOFish projects being good examples (Tuara Demmke 2006; Tuara and Passfield 2011). Key certification schemes (e.g. the Marine Stewardship Council) do not require social responsibility criteria although the new Aquaculture Stewardship Council does include social responsibility within enterprises (to a degree). United Nations social and legal agencies, and welfare non-governmental organisations, however, are showing more interest in these topics.



Vendor at the Honiara (Solomon Islands) fish market selling “salt fish” or tuna stored in brine on board a purse-seine vessel. Salt fish is an important supply of relatively cheap fish in certain Pacific ports and includes small and other low-value (e.g. damaged), tuna and bycatch. Photo by Johann Bell, SPC.



Roadside vendor of skipjack tuna in Kiribati. Photo by Johann Bell, SPC.

Questions remain. How can the region's universities be persuaded to undertake more social science research in fisheries and aquaculture? How can development assistance agencies be persuaded to support more such research and development? Should certification and sustainability programmes be more conscious of social dimensions? My conclusion is that national, regional and international efforts — including conservation efforts — to understand the region's pre-eminent fisheries and their long-term sustainability are unbalanced with regard to knowing the people who work in and rely on the value chains that feed the world. Skipjack tuna provides just the first example of this imbalance.

References

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