



## NEW CALEDONIAN TUNA FISHERIES IN 1995

New Caledonia's domestic tuna fleet is composed solely of longliners.

In 1995, seven vessels of this type – two freezer longliners and five sashimi longliners – were involved in fishing operations with trips lasting less than two weeks at a time.

Catches are sent to three different markets :

- Japan: sashimi-grade tuna and marlin, i.e. yellowfin and bigeye tuna and striped marlin; it should be noted that during the cool season, albacore is also exported as lower-quality sashimi-grade tuna;
- canneries throughout the Pacific: low-quality tuna;
- the New Caledonian market: any non-exportable by-catch (e.g. king mackerel, spearfish, marlin, opah, swordfish, sailfish, mahi-mahi, shark, etc.), as well as all yellowfin, bigeye or albacore tuna not sold on the sashimi market (e.g. fish which are too lean or which have been damaged).

To date, almost all catches have been marketed unprocessed, except for the gutting in the case of yellowfin or bigeye tuna and striped marlin intended for export. The only attempts at processing have involved a few dozen metric tonnes of fish intended for the local market.

There is little delay in sending fish to their final destination; chilled catches are unloaded only a few hours before shipment and freezer longliners time their fishing trips to match the reefers' schedules.

In terms of tonnage, catches registered in 1995 amounted to about 1420 mt, including:

- albacore: 330 mt
- yellowfin: 750 mt
- bigeye: 90 mt
- other species: 250 mt.

These figures were obtained from:

- the Customs Service's statistics on exports;
- the quantities recorded on the local market.

The overall tonnage recorded on logsheets (362 mt) provides an estimated coverage of 25% which is very low.

What does the future hold for New Caledonia's tuna fisheries?

Experience has shown that longlining which targets species for the Japanese sashimi market is the prime area for tuna fisheries, in particular since ships equipped with mono-filament longlines have begun operations.

However, the viability of more advanced processing is not certain, as the level of production necessary to make such operations cost-effective is not yet known.

A large-scale study is currently being designed to provide that information and to define new avenues which will lead New Caledonia's tuna fisheries to a new stage in their development.