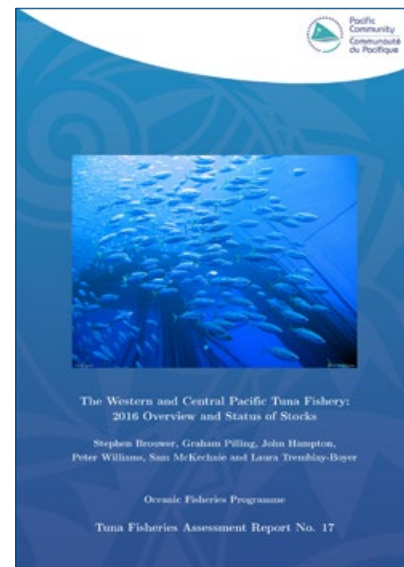


## TFAR 17: The latest on tuna catches and stock status in the WCPO

SPC's Oceanic Fisheries Programme has recently published its 17<sup>th</sup> annual Tuna Fisheries Assessment Report (TFAR 17).<sup>1</sup> Tuna fisheries assessment reports provide information on tuna fisheries in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) and on fish stocks (mainly tuna) that are impacted by them. TFARs focus on the main tuna stocks targeted by the fishery: skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*), yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*), bigeye tuna (*T. obesus*) and South Pacific albacore tuna (*T. alalunga*). Information on non-target species is also provided in TFARs.



The main highlights of TFAR 17 were:

- The provisional total tuna catch in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Convention Area in 2016 was estimated at 2,686,203 tonnes, a small drop relative to the record high catch in 2014. Total catches have been fairly stable over the past five years. As in previous years, the total catch was dominated by the purse-seine fishery (68%) and by skipjack (67%).
- The most recent tuna stock assessments indicate that all four tuna species are likely to be currently fished at levels that are less than the precautionary upper limits, and have stock levels that are above agreed on lower limits. In particular, the skipjack spawning stock is near the agreed on target of 50% of the unexploited level. The other tuna species have somewhat lower relative stock sizes, between 30% and 40% of unexploited levels. These levels of spawning stock depletion are considered moderate by international standards and do not pose a biological concern. Some fisheries, however, notably those targeting South Pacific albacore, are struggling to operate profitably at current levels of fishing intensity. The 2017 stock assessment for bigeye tuna indicated a substantial change in assessed stock status from previous assessments due to the availability of new biological information.<sup>2</sup> The stock is now considered to not be overfished nor experiencing overfishing, although follow-up work is being undertaken to confirm this change in estimated status.
- Updated estimates of overall catch composition for the various categories of both purse-seine and longline fisheries are presented. For purse-seine fisheries, catch from both unassociated (i.e. free-school) and associated purse-seine sets are dominated by tuna species (99.7% and 98.2% of the total catch, respectively). Longline estimates are provided for the four longline fisheries operating in the WCPO: the western tropical Pacific (WTP) shallow-setting longline fishery; the WTP deep-setting longline fishery; the western South Pacific (WSP) albacore fishery; and a small WSP shark fishery. The main tuna species account for 50.5%, 75.8%, 72.5% and 43% of the total catch (by weight) of the shallow-set, deep-set, albacore and shark target longline fisheries, respectively, with the remaining catch consisting of non-tuna species. The WTP shallow fishery has a higher proportion of non-tuna species in the catch, principally shark and billfish species, while mahi mahi and opah (moonfish) represent a significant component of the WSP albacore longline catch. Silky sharks are the most common shark species in the shallow-set and shark targeted longline fisheries, while blue sharks are the most common in the deep-set and albacore targeted shark fisheries.

### For more information:

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<sup>1</sup> The full TFAR 17 document is available from: <http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/jcf7u>

<sup>2</sup> John Hampton, manager of SPC's Oceanic Fisheries Programme, wrote a detailed article in the previous issue of the *Fisheries Newsletter* to explain the new bigeye tuna stock assessment: <http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/76mjb>