

We are “burning both ends of the candle”

Source: “View from the Industry”. A blog from the Pacific Islands Tuna Industry Association (PITIA):
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“There are just too many boats”, is a phrase PITIA has used multiple times before in reference to the southern longline albacore fishery. However the same sentiment is equally true when it comes to the concerns repeatedly raised over the state of the bigeye stock.

In 2008, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) was commended for reaching consensus and adopting a measure that would address growing concerns over the state of the bigeye (*Thunnus obesus*) stock.

Each year since then, the stock situation has grown worse, whilst at the same time the measure to manage this stock has grown more rigorous. Parallel to this, the number of boats continue to increase and with greater efficiency. There is something wrong with this equation!

For a number of annual sessions now, the work of WCPFC has been dominated by the negotiations of this very conservation and management measure (CMM) for the bigeye tuna. For the most part, members behind closed doors debate for hours on end, the content of the measure to put into effect the following fishing year.

Each year, the measure grows to be more about accommodating allocation, and less about conservation.

This growing dominance of discussions concerning bigeye tuna has come at a serious cost. Other crucial fisheries issues are marginalised in order to make way for the discussions on this endangered stock, leaving little time for the management of other fisheries.

Although appreciating the complexity in managing a stock that gets plundered by both the longline and the purse-seine fisheries, WCPFC has failed to impose enough reduction in fishing effort to bring about the conservation that the science calls for.

The SPC assessment of the fishery being presented to the Scientific Committee of the WCPFC meeting in Majuro this week, paints a very clear picture. “We continue to burn both ends of the candle”.

The agreed FAD closure, where juvenile bigeye is almost exclusively caught, has not quite met the anticipated outcomes; the assessment shows purse-seine catches have exceeded the catches of longliners.

PITIA would like to urge members of WCPFC’s Scientific Committee currently meeting in Majuro, to bring to the Annual Session in December, clear and robust recommendations that addresses the situation.

PITIA encourages WCPFC members to come to the table in December ready to make the necessary sacrifices, to give the bigeye stock room to recover.



Tuna longliners (original image: M. Hosken)