

Background of the Report

This report highlights the dependence of the Pacific Islands countries¹ on their tuna in order to show the importance of this resource and possibly to help justify allocation arrangements and assistance related to its management.

Several recent fisheries treaties have dealt with the dependence of Pacific Islands countries on tuna. The Multilateral High-Level Conference, in a series of sessions from December 1994 to September 2000, drew up and eventually adopted a convention providing for the conservation and management of highly migratory fish stocks in the western and central Pacific. The convention states:

In developing criteria for allocation of the total allowable catch or the total level of fishing effort the Commission shall take into account, *inter alia*,...the needs of small island developing States, and territories and possessions, in the Convention Area whose economies, food supplies and livelihoods are overwhelmingly dependent on the exploitation of marine living resources;...[and] the needs of coastal communities which are dependent mainly on fishing for the stocks.

Dependence on tuna resources was also brought out at the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, which adopted in August 1995 an agreement implementing the relevant provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982. That agreement clearly binds developed nations to provide management assistance to developing countries, particularly small island developing states that depend on the exploitation of living marine resources. Under the terms of the agreement, countries of the Pacific Islands that depend on the exploitation of their tuna resources would qualify for assistance in developing tuna conservation mechanisms and participating in tuna fisheries. This assistance could take the form of regional management arrangements, direct financial assistance, technical assistance, transfer of technology, and consultative services.

¹ Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Kiribati, Marshall, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

The present study relies on published information, reports from fisheries organizations representing the region, the regional tuna database of the Secretariat for the Pacific Community, and relevant unpublished data. Interviews were held with fisheries officials from the various Pacific Islands countries and with staff of the Forum Fisheries Agency, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Asian Development Bank, World Bank, and Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, as well as other knowledgeable individuals. The main part of the report gives generalized information and examples of the importance of tuna to the Pacific Islands region. The appendixes provide more detailed information for three countries: Federated States of Micronesia (Micronesia region), Samoa (Polynesia region), and Papua New Guinea (Melanesia region).

The discussion in this report of the benefits that Pacific Islands countries derive from their tuna resources excludes associated development assistance and all comments on the value or merit of this type of aid. As Van Santen and Muller (2000) suggest, the real value of aid and payments in kind for access is often substantially less than the total amounts may seem to indicate.

Mention must be made here, though, of the ill-defined geographical boundaries of the area in question. The fishery area is variously taken to be the following, more or less in descending order of size: the western and central Pacific Ocean, the US South Pacific Tuna Treaty area, the statistical area of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), statistical area 71 of the Food and Agriculture Organization, the SPC area, and the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of Pacific Islands member countries of the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). The fishery area is also sometimes interpreted as the zone(s) of concentration of surface and longline tuna fishing, which can change considerably from season to season and from year to year. In this report, unless otherwise stated, the Pacific Islands tuna fishery area referred to is the SPC fisheries statistical area, which consists of the EEZs of SPC member countries and territories and the adjacent high seas (Figure 1).

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