Fisheries Management in the South Pacific

The Role of the Forum Fisheries Agency

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Tuna is the major commercial fisheries resource harvested in the South Pacific.¹ The region's stocks of tuna are prolific and geographically widespread, forming the basis for an important international fishery.² Each year 650,000–700,000 tonnes of tuna of all species is taken in the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of South Pacific countries. In addition, significant quantities of tuna are caught on the high seas areas adjacent to these zones. However, most high seas catches are taken by distant-water fishing nation (DWFN) fleets, and with the exception of the US fleet, these catches are not reported systematically to South Pacific countries or fisheries organisations in the region.

Catches taken in the EEZs of South Pacific countries account for 30–40 percent of the world's total annual catch of tuna. Depending on reigning market prices, these catches have a value of US $1–1.3 billion. Most of the tuna taken in the South Pacific is destined for processing in canneries in Asia and the United States or sold on Japan's lucrative sashimi (raw fish) market.

DWFN tuna fleet catches dominate catches in the EEZs of South Pacific countries. These fleets, primarily from Japan, Taiwan, Korea, the Philippines and the United States, harvest an estimated 90 percent of the region's total catch. The remaining catch is taken by several small domestic fleets based in the region. DWFN fleets that operate in the South Pacific tuna fishery use five gear types: longlining, pole-and-lining, purse seining, trolling, and

¹ The views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forum Fisheries Agency nor of any of its 16 member-countries.
driftnetting. The fleets normally operate from ports outside the region and have little economic interaction with the countries that license them to fish in their EEZs. At the end of each fishing trip, vessels usually return to their home ports to discharge catches, though for economic reasons trans-shipment of catches at intermediate points is becoming more common.

The South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) member-countries (Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Western Samoa) generally encourage DWFN activity in their EEZs. This is because they derive revenue from the sale of fishing licences and this practice enables countries to fulfil obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) with respect to the utilisation of surplus fish stocks (Article 62.2).

DWFN vessels are licensed to operate in the zones of FFA member-countries on terms and conditions of access agreed in advance. Some of the terms and conditions have been sanctioned by the South Pacific Forum (SPF) as being minimum terms and conditions that must be included in all access agreements concluded with DWFNs. In addition to this requirement, the minimum terms and conditions are non-negotiable because they have been sanctioned by the region's supreme political body.

In return for fisheries access, DWFNs pay access fees. Fees are usually determined on a per vessel basis, with the payment being related to the expected value of the catch of the vessel during the period that it is licensed to fish. Revenue received by FFA member-countries from DWFN access fee payments is channeled to their respective consolidated revenue funds and as such is used to support public expenditure programmes. In several FFA member-countries revenue generated by DWFN access fee payments accounts for more than 50 percent of the national government's budget.

Most access agreements in the South Pacific are concluded on a bilateral basis, though there is a treaty covering access for US vessels. While bilateral arrangements will remain important, the advantages of multilateral access arrangements are recognised by FFA member-countries. The success of the US treaty has fostered interest in this type of arrangement with other countries and organisations. Currently, multilateral fisheries arrangements with Japan and the European Community are being considered by FFA member-countries. The Soviet Union has also proposed a subregional multilateral

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3 FFA member-countries have recently moved to strengthen and extend the minimum terms and conditions of fisheries access. SPF endorsement of proposed changes will be sought at the 1990 Forum meeting in Vanuatu.