Bigeye tuna Western and Central Pacific

Fishery: Western and Central Pacific, WCPFC, United States, Drifting longlines

IDENTIFICATION

SCIENTIFIC NAME: Thunnus obesus
SPECIES NAMES: Bigeye tuna
COMMON NAMES: Bigeye tuna

STOCK IDENTIFICATION:
Western and Central Pacific Ocean bigeye tuna is caught by four U.S. longline fisheries: (i) West Coast – State of California, (ii) Hawaii deep-set (tuna-targeting), (iii) Hawaii shallow-set (swordfish-targeting), and (iv) American Samoa. Each of these fisheries operates in the US EEZ and on the high seas.

This profile is for (ii) the Hawaii pelagic longline deep-set fishery, which targets primarily bigeye tuna, at grounds in the western and central Pacific. Note that this fishery also operates in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, where it catches the bigeye tuna stock – which is not covered in this profile.

ASSESSMENT

Strengths
Bigeye tuna in the western and central Pacific Ocean are managed at the international level by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). The WCPFC has an agreement with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) to undertake regular assessments of target tuna and tuna-like species. Therefore, the status of the stocks is known and regularly monitored. Catch limits have recently been put into place for six countries (United States, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Taiwan) longline fisheries operating on the high seas.

The most recent assessment (2017) indicates that bigeye tuna stocks are not overfished in any region. The observer program is in place to monitor compliance and bycatch issues.

Weaknesses
There is no formally adopted harvest control rule or target reference points. Information on compliance and monitoring by member countries has historically not been available. In recent years, there has been an increased lack of transparency with regard to the WCPFC decision-making process. Timely submissions and data accuracy from some member countries, including Indonesia and the Philippines, has been an issue. Despite this, the United States and other member countries have agreed to implement observer coverage rates by the WCPFC in the longline fishery (5%) compared to other fisheries (e.g., purse seine) and many fleets still do not reach this threshold. The WCPFC does not allow for the international exchange of observers, which is considered best practice and needed to maximize data quality. Smaller countries may lack resources to achieve adequate observer coverage. Bycatch of ecologically important species such as sharks, sea turtles and sea birds continues to be a problem in many fisheries targeting bigeye tuna.

The biomass is below sustainable levels and fishing mortality rates are above sustainable levels. Fishing mortality rates need to be reduced by 38% to be sustainable. The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) has recently implemented catch limits for bigeye tuna caught in longline fisheries operating within the Convention Area for the years 2014-2017. Catch limits for 2014 have been set at 70% of the average catches from 2001-2004 or from 2004 (identified in a previous WCPFC management measure (2008)). Six countries, including the US have been given individual catch limits under this management measure. Prior to this, the WCPFC required a phased in reduction (10-30%) of bigeye tuna longline catches to occur between 2009-2011 (based on same average catches identified above). There are no target reference points or harvest control rule at the international level by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). The United States has identified “status determination criteria” to determine the status of bigeye tuna and whether they are subject to US mandated rebuilding plans. The US has not implemented any additional measures due to the current status of the stocks. There is no formally adopted harvest control rule or target reference points for bigeye tuna in longline fisheries have recently been put into place (2013) for six countries (United States, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Taiwan) longline fisheries operating on the high seas.

FISPS

- Hawaii tuna and large pelagics - longline:
  Stage 5, Progress Rating B, Type Fip, Evaluation Start Date: 1 Feb 2017

MSC

No related MSC fisheries

RECOMMENDATIONS

RETAILERS & SUPPLY CHAIN

- Work with WCPFC Members, Cooperating Non-Members, and
Participating Territories to:

- Develop and implement comprehensive, precautionary harvest strategies with specific timelines for all tuna stocks, including the adoption and implementation of limit and target reference points, harvest control rules, monitoring strategies, operational objectives, performance indicators, and management strategy evaluation.
- Strengthen compliance processes and make information on non-compliance public and continue to provide evidence of compliance with all WCPFC Conservation and Management Measures in a timely manner.
- Implement a 100% observer coverage requirement for at-sea transshipment activities, as well as other measures that ensure transshipment activity is transparent and well-managed, and that all required data are collected and transmitted to the appropriate bodies in a timely manner.
- Increase compliance with the mandatory minimum 5% longline observer coverage rates by identifying and correcting non-compliance.
- Implement a 100% observer coverage requirement – human and/or electronic – within five years for longline fisheries. Adopt a 100% observer coverage requirement for purse seine vessels where it is not already required and require the use of the best available observer safety equipment, communications and procedures.
- Adopt effective measures for the use of non-entangling FAD designs as a precautionary measure to minimize the entanglement of sharks and other non-target species, and support research on biodegradable materials and transition to their use to mitigate marine debris.
- More effectively implement, and ensure compliance with, existing RFMO bycatch requirements and take additional mitigation actions, such as improving monitoring at sea, collecting and sharing operational-level species-specific data, and adopting stronger compliance measures, including consequences for non-compliance for all gear types.
- Ensure all products are traceable back to legal sources. Verify source information and full chain traceability through traceability desk audits or third party traceability certification. For fisheries without robust traceability systems in place, invest in meaningful improvements to bring the fisheries and supply chain in compliance with best practices.