Yellowfin tuna | Western and Central Pacific Ocean

**IDENTIFICATION**

- **Scientific Name**: Thunnus albacares
- **Species Name(s)**: Yellowfin tuna
- **Stock Identification**: Yellowfin tuna are considered a single population in the western and central Pacific Ocean for stock assessment purposes. There is the potential for some mixing between eastern and western stocks to occur (Davies et al. 2014).

In 2012 there were four longline vessels operated by the Marshall Islands that primarily fish in EEZ waters north of the equator (OIFAD 2013).

**RELATED LINKS:**
- Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)

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**ASSESSMENT**

**Strengths**

- Yellowfin tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean are managed at the international level by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).
- The Secretariat of the Pacific Community conducts regular assessments of tuna and tuna-like species.
- The biomass is above target levels and fishing mortality rates are sustainable.
- There are limit reference points in place for this species.
- The Marshall Islands recently banned the capture and retention of all sharks. Dockside monitoring program monitors close to 100% of longline unloadings in the Marshall Islands.
- The Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) tuna longline fishery initiated a national observer program in 2016 that apparently met the 5% minimum coverage (in 2016 and 2017) required by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

**Weaknesses**

- In recent years, there has been an increased lack of transparency with regard to the WCPFC decision making process.
- Significant amounts of juvenile yellowfin tuna are caught in fish aggregating device (FAD)-based purse seining fisheries.
- No harvest control rule is imposed and there are no target reference points.
- Timely submissions and data accuracy from some member countries, including Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines, has been identified as an issue by the WCPFC Scientific Committee.
- Mandated observer coverage rates by the WCPFC in the longline fishery is low (5%) compared to other fisheries (e.g. purse seine, 100%) and many fleets still do not reach this threshold.
- Bycatch of ecologically important species such as sharks, sea turtles and sea birds continues to be a problem in many fisheries targeting yellowfin tuna.
- Bycatch of ecologically important species such as silky sharks, longfin mako sharks, and blue sharks, as well as several species of sea turtles occurs in this RMU longline fishery.
- Mandated levels of longline observer coverage (5%) is lower than other fisheries (e.g., purse seine, 100%) and many fleets still do not reach this threshold.
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- Mandated levels of longline observer coverage (5%) is lower than other fisheries (e.g., purse seine in same fishing area), and the IMI longline fleet – like many others – fails to meet even this low threshold; observers only started monitoring RMU longline vessels in 2016, and the proportion of the total longline effort that is currently observed is not provided in country reports to the WCPFC. Assessment of population-level impacts of bycatch in this fishery is impossible with such low to non-existent bycatch documentation and reporting.
- Electronic monitoring is being trialed in the RMI longline fishery, but is not yet a viable substitute for onboard observers.

**SCORES**

**Management Quality:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Strategy</th>
<th>Managers Compliance</th>
<th>Fishers Compliance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≥ 6 / 8</td>
<td>≥ 6 / 8</td>
<td>≥ 6 / 10</td>
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**Stock Health:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Health</th>
<th>Future Health</th>
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<td>8.8 / 91</td>
<td>91</td>
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**FIPS**

No related FIPs

**MSC**

No related MSC fisheries

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Retailers & Supply Chain**

- Work with WCPFC Members, Cooperating Non-Members, and Participating Territories to:
  - Implement catch limits to prevent harvest from increasing beyond 2012 levels.
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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 action, 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.

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