

Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery

CURRENT STATUS

Southern bluefin tuna **overfished**.

MANAGEMENT TARGETS

Rebuild adult biomass to internationally agreed target; currently the global catch is too high to achieve this.

TOTAL CATCH (AUSTRALIA)

2000–2001: 5247 t; A\$264m (includes value-adding from 'farming')

2001–2002: 5263 t; A\$261m (includes value-adding from 'farming')

TARGET SPECIES

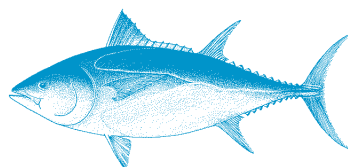
Southern bluefin tuna: Domestic quota 5265 t; catch 5263 t

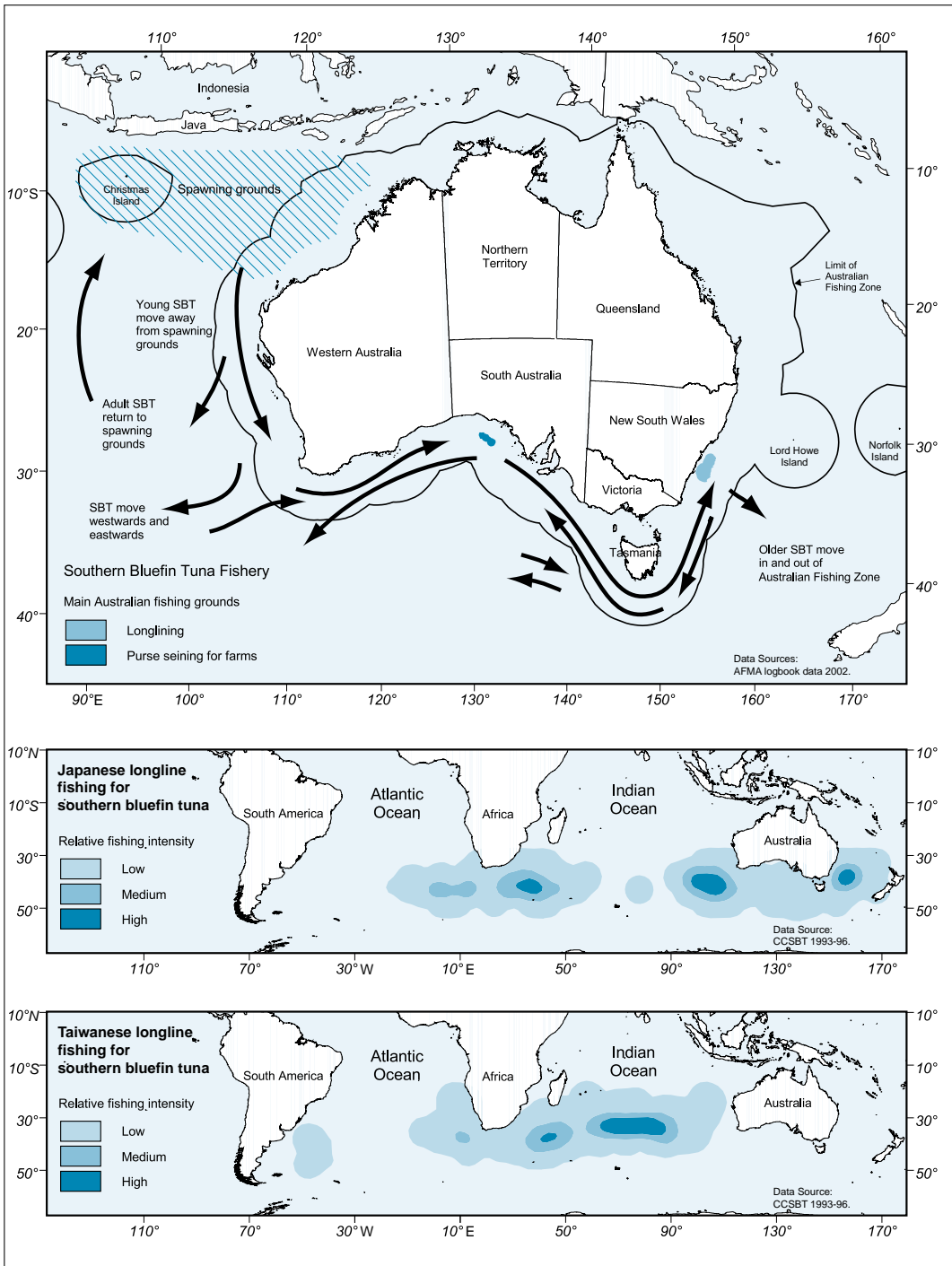
BYPRODUCT

The Southern Bluefin Tuna Management Plan prohibits the taking of other species.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Shark species occasionally purse-seined are usually released alive. Bycatch of seabirds during longline fishing is an issue.





EFFORT

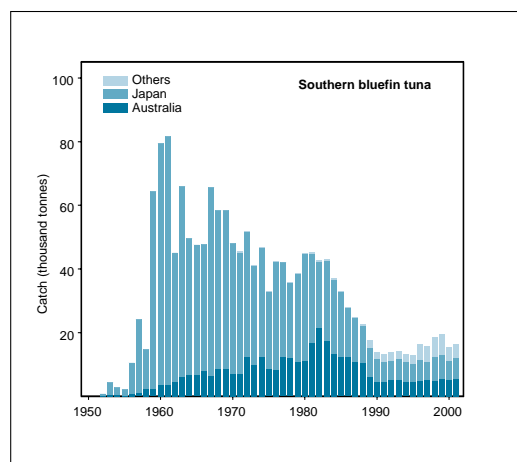
Japanese longline effort increased dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s, but was stable by the 1990s. Effort in the Australian surface

fishery (pole and purse seine) peaked in the early 1980s, decreasing after the introduction of a total allowable catch that was implemented through individual transferable quotas. Effort in

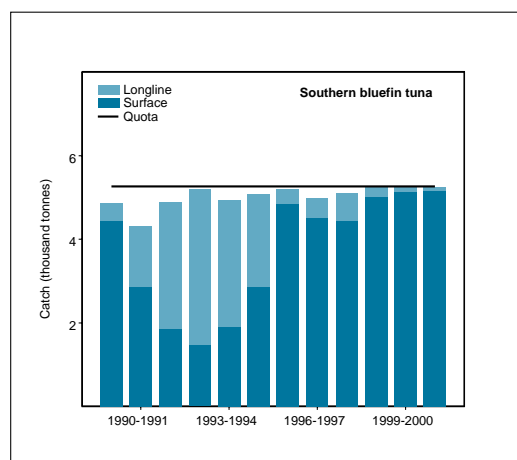
the Australian longline component of the fishery has depended since the mid-1990s on the availability of quota, nearly all of which is now committed to purse-seine operations to stock ‘farms’ in South Australia.

CATCH

Vessels fishing under six flags—Australia, Japan, Indonesia, Fishing Entity of Taiwan, Korea and New Zealand—have historically taken significant quantities of southern bluefin tuna (SBT). Australia and Japan have always been the major catching nations.



The global catch of SBT peaked in 1961 at 81 605 t. Since 1990 it has ranged between 13 231 t (1994) and 19 588 t (1999). In 2001, it was 16 459 t.



The annual Australian catch of SBT peaked in 1982 at 21 501 t. Since the 1989–90 season, it has been below 5265 t, which is Australia’s long-standing national allocation by the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT).

MANAGEMENT REFERENCE POINTS

The Commission’s recovery objective for the SBT stock is to increase the parental biomass of SBT to the 1980 level by 2020. When the parental biomass went below the 1980 level, there were significant declines in recruitment.

Stock assessments by Australian and Japanese scientists suggest that the parental-biomass remains at a very low level, but has been relatively stable through the 1990s. They estimate the level in 2000 to be less than half the 1980 level. The most recent assessments by Australian scientists estimate the current parental biomass to be 4–19% of its unfished size.

For the years during the 1990s when the global TAC for SBT was formally set by the Commission, it remained at 11 750 t; however, it did not restrain the catch of non-members. In 2002 the TAC was increased to 14 030 t to include allocations to Korea and Taiwan on their joining the Commission.

Catches since the mid-1990s are considered to have been approximately equal to the surplus yield of the stock. As catches have not decreased there is little chance that the recovery objective will be achieved; Australian scientists within the CCSBT Scientific Committee estimate that there is a less than 10% chance of meeting the CCSBT recovery objective if current catches are maintained.

The CCSBT established a Scientific Research Program in April 2001 to improve catch-and-effort-data collection, deploy observers across the global fleet, and undertake a broad-scale tagging program.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

There is insufficient verified data on interactions with non-target species in the Australian SBT fishery.

Sharks are occasionally taken during purse-seine operations, but are usually released alive.



The first step in the preparation of sashimi is to fillet the tuna—a task for specialists!

Longliners targeting SBT are associated with significant incidental kills of seabirds across the Southern Ocean. Since the late 1990s, longlining for SBT has diminished in the Australian Fishing Zone because almost all of the quota is used to purse seine SBT for farms.

MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE

International

Non-member catches, compounded by some CCSBT-member catches in excess of allocations, are considered to be responsible for the SBT parental biomass continuing to be severely overfished.

Since 1997, the CCSBT has failed to reach agreement⁷ on the global TAC for members. All except Japan have agreed to abide by their previous national allocations.

In 1999, the global catch approached 20 000 t when non-member catches increased and the Japanese catch, in the second year of Japan's unilateral experimental fishing program, surpassed Japan's previously agreed national allocation.

In 2001, faced with increasing non-member catch, the CCSBT Scientific Committee recommended efforts to decrease global catch (then approximately 15 500 t) or at least prevent further increase. It advised that catch

reductions may reduce the risk of further stock declines and help safeguard sustainability of the SBT industry.

The CCSBT is currently developing a management procedure for adoption in 2004. It includes objectives, indicators, reference points and decision rules to improve management decision-making for the global fishery.

While Indonesia and other more recent SBT fishers operate outside the Commission, they remain a threat to successful management and recovery of the stock. In 2000, the CCSBT implemented a Trade Information Scheme to improve the global-catch data available for stock assessment.

To reduce the impact of the SBT fishery on ecologically related species, the CCSBT:

- requires CCSBT members to use bird-scaring Tori lines in all SBT longline fisheries south of 30°S
- urges non-members to mandate the use of Tori lines in SBT longline fisheries south of 30°S
- publishes education pamphlets on sharks and seabirds for fishers involved in the SBT fishery.

Domestic

In 1984, a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and individual transferable quotas (ITQs) were introduced in the Australian SBT Fishery. Since 1989, the TAC has been set at 5265 t, which is less than one-quarter of the peak Australian catch taken in 1982.

From 2001, to reduce the risk of incidental capture of SBT without quota, Australian longliners have been required to hold a minimum amount of SBT quota before fishing in specified areas during specified times.

In March 2003, two observers were deployed in the purse-seine fishery in the Great Australian Bight to collect information and verify logbook data during both catching and farm-pontoon towing operations.

Recreational and charter catches of SBT are managed by the States and Territories, but not under the quota system. Several States have imposed bag limits on fishers.

⁷ In October 2003, CCSBT agreed on a TAC of 14 030 t for members, and set provisional limits for cooperating non-members.