

Overfishing of western Pacific bigeye tuna continues

Overfishing of bigeye tuna continues in the western and central Pacific tuna fishery, the world's biggest tuna fishery, according to the [2010 tuna fishery assessment report](#) released in January 2012 by the [Secretariat of the Pacific Community \(Oceanic Fisheries Programme\)](#) (SPC).



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Using fisheries and biological data, some going back to the 1950s, SPC has assessed the trends and current stocks of the four tuna species mainly targeted by fishers: skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye and south Pacific albacore.

Although bigeye tuna is not at risk of extinction, the assessment found that bigeye fishing effort needs to be reduced by at least 32 per cent from average levels for 2006–2009 to ensure long-term profitability and security of the fishery into the future. The bigeye spawning population is the most depleted of the four tuna species.

The report says the 2010 catch for all four species of tuna is estimated at 2 421 113 tonnes, the second highest annual catch on record. It represents 83 per cent of the total Pacific Ocean catch and 60 per cent of the global tuna catch (by weight).

Bigeye represents just 5 per cent of total tuna catch in the western and central Pacific tuna fishery. Most of the bigeye is taken in equatorial areas of the fishery by purse seine and longline methods. In purse seine fishing the boat drags a wall of net around the school of fish, scooping up more fish in one operation.

‘There has been an upward trend in total tuna catch for many years, mainly due to increases in purse-seine fishery catches, which accounted for 75 per cent of the 2010 catch,’ says SPC’s Oceanic Fisheries Programme Manager, John Hampton.

The assessment report states that yellowfin, skipjack and south Pacific albacore tuna stocks are being fished at a

moderate level and stocks are reasonably healthy. But Hampton cautions against complacency and stresses the need for responsible management actions to keep the stocks healthy.

Source: Secretariat of the Pacific Community (Oceanic Fisheries Programme)

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