



New Zealand leads on rebuild of Southern Bluefin Tuna

Ministry of Fisheries officials are leading the development of a strategic plan which targets a rebuild of southern bluefin tuna stocks and aims to make the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) a more effective organisation.

Stocks are currently well below the biomass that will support maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and the Ministry is working closely with the CCSBT to ensure adequate information is available to guide better decisions for the future of the fishery.

The upcoming CCSBT meeting in October will mark a key milestone for agreement on appropriate action that includes a work programme for the next few years.

Manager of Highly Migratory Species (HMS) and Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (RFMO), Arthur Hore, says the Ministry recently outlined New Zealand's position to other CCSBT members at a special meeting held in Japan.

"We made it clear that we would require a high level of confidence that the catch limit to be set in October 2009 will lead to stock rebuilding.

"We also went to some lengths to ensure that there was a common understanding among CCSBT members that an existing decision of the CCSBT to resolve New Zealand's outstanding allocation claim in the fishery will take effect in 2010 – and will need to be taken account of in decisions on national allocations and catch limit at the next annual meeting.

"In addition, we asked for further development of coordinated monitoring control and surveillance arrangements, managing the impacts of southern bluefin tuna fishing and streamlining CCSBT processes.

"New Zealand already has a number of controls in place, but there is a need to support additional measures that will apply to the fleets of all CCSBT members, in order to monitor international catches and markets for this valuable species."

Arthur Hore says better controls for southern blue tuna are vital to deter illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing for this species which in turn will contribute to a rebuild of the stock. For New Zealand, it is a highly valuable fishery which occurs within our waters and is fished by a fleet of relatively small domestic longline vessels.

Fresh catches are airfreighted to Japan and fetch premium prices on the markets there. There are also large Japanese-owned longline vessels which fish under charter to a New Zealand company and they export frozen southern bluefin tuna direct to Japan.

"A rebuilding of the stock is important to New Zealand fishers because it will result in improved catch rates, improving the economic performance of the fishery. The national allocation is of particular importance because it determines how much can be caught in the domestic fishery."

MFish will provide an update on this following the October meeting.

From 1985, Australia, Japan and New Zealand – the main nations fishing SBT at the time – began applying strict quotas to fleets as a management and conservation measure to enable the southern bluefin tuna stocks to rebuild. What was a voluntary management arrangement between the countries then became a binding agreement, when the CCSBT was formed on 20 May 1994.

Other fishing nations were also active in the southern bluefin tuna fishery, which reduced the effectiveness of the members' conservation and management measures. The principal non-member nations were Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia. There were also a number of other fishing vessels flying flags of convenience which operated in the fishery. As a matter of policy, the CCSBT has encouraged these countries to become members.

The Republic of Korea and Indonesia joined the Commission on 17 October 2001 and 8 April 2008 respectively.

The Fishing Entity of Taiwan's membership of the Extended Commission became effective on 30 August 2002.

Cooperating non-members of CCSBT also exist. These are countries which participate fully in the business of the CCSBT but cannot vote. Acceptance as a cooperating non-member requires adherence to the management and conservation objectives of the CCSBT and agreed catch limits.

The Philippines, South Africa and the European Community were formally accepted as Cooperating non-members on 2 August 2004, 24 August 2006 and 13 October 2006 respectively.

