

Management of southern bluefin throughout its range is the responsibility of the Commission for Conservation of Southern bluefin tuna (CCSBT). Members of the Commission include Japan, Australia, Taiwan, Korea and New Zealand. Determination of stock wide catch limits and provision of a national allocation to New Zealand is done by the CCSBT. The stock is currently well below the level necessary to produce the maximum sustainable yield. Accordingly, last year the regional catch limit was reduced to a level considered to reduce the possibility of further decline in the stock and lead to a rebuild. Notwithstanding this reduction due to a disproportionately small initial allocation New Zealand has retained its historical allocation.

To assist in effecting the New Zealand national allocation southern bluefin tuna was introduced into the Quota Management System (QMS) on 1 October 2004. The TAC of 420 tonnes is allocated to commercial (413 tonnes), recreational (four tonnes) and customary fishers (one tonne), and other sources of fishing-related mortality (two tonnes). The introduction to the QMS has been associated with a consolidation of the commercial longline fleet.

The most recent fishing season recorded a commercial catch of 379 tonnes that continues the trend of under catching the catch limit every year since 2002. This is attributed to two main factors: the absence of new recruitment into the New Zealand fishery leading to decreased vulnerable biomass (as illustrated in the continued low catch per unit effort reported by the charter fleet); and the decline in longline effort from the domestic fleet and charter fleets.

Recreational fishing for southern bluefin in New Zealand waters is limited. Recreational catch is known to occur from time to time in both the North and South Islands. Charter vessels based in Milford Sound are known to have targeted this species historically, and it is taken as bycatch in the newly developed Pacific bluefin tuna fishery off the South Island west coast. The landed catch of southern bluefin was estimated at slightly less than 4 tonnes for the past season that is within the recreational allowance.

In summary, overall catch limits throughout the range of southern bluefin tuna have been reduced to 11,530 tonnes. In comparison recent landings within New Zealand (240-260 tonnes per year reported by commercial fishers over the past three years and 4 tonnes for recreational fishers) are probably not that important in determining the overall status of the stock.