

Pacific bluefin (or *Thunnus orientalis*) is a highly migratory species found predominantly within the north Pacific Ocean. The only known spawning ground for Pacific bluefin is between Japan and the Philippines in April, May, and June, spreading to the waters off southern Honshu in Japan in July and to the Sea of Japan in August. It is believed there is a single stock for Pacific bluefin tuna based on “morphometrics” (e.g. counts of fin rays etc.), tagging, distribution by size, and because no other area has been found where eggs and larvae of Pacific bluefin tuna occur. Pacific bluefin caught in the southern hemisphere, including those caught in New Zealand, are primarily adults indicating they have moved from elsewhere.

Overall landings throughout the Pacific range from 10,000 tonnes to 14,000 tonnes in recent years. The majority of this catch is of pre-adult fish and includes troll fisheries off Japan and an increasing purse seine fishery off Mexico. In comparison recent landings within New Zealand (20 to 50 tonnes per year reported by commercial fishers over the past five years and 10 tonnes for the gamefish and spear fisheries reported by charter boats for 2007 to date) are probably not that important in determining the overall status of the stock.

The life history of these fish is quite impressive, from being spawned in the Sea of Japan, many juveniles migrate across the Pacific and spend their adolescent years off Baja, California. Some of the adults move down to the South Pacific. It is this behaviour which has sparked considerable interest in what ‘our’ fish do and where they come from. It is this interest which has led to the recent tagging work.

The Ministry of Fisheries and the New Zealand Marine Research Foundation along with Stanford University is currently undertaking a satellite tagging program. It is early days in this work (many of the fish are still swimming around with the satellite tags in them), but preliminary results indicate that the large adult fish seen off the west coast of the South Island between August and September, remain in New Zealand waters until at least February.

Although new stock assessment information will not become available until next year, the species is considered fully exploited at current levels of fishing in the northern and central Pacific. Under the Law of the Sea the Northern Committee of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Management Commission is tasked with ensuring the conservation and management of Pacific bluefin tuna.

New Zealand introduced Pacific bluefin tuna stocks into the Quota Management System during 2004. At that time a total allowable catch of 120 tonnes was set for Pacific bluefin tuna (in tonnes greenweight) with the following allowances: Recreational - 1 tonne, Maori customary - 0.5 tonne, other fishing related mortality - 2.5 tonnes and total allowable commercial catch - 116 tonnes. Recreational and Maori customary allowances were set on a nominal basis as there was no fishing reported prior to 2004. Pacific bluefin commercial catch limits were based on current catch with some opportunity for development. These allowances may be reviewed over time as more information emerges on how different sectors use the resource.

International obligations may require New Zealand to review its overall management of Pacific bluefin over time. To better estimate the level of recreational catch in relation to the allowance made under any current or proposed national allocations,

will require monitoring during the next couple of seasons. Accordingly, the Marine Transport Association and the Ministry of Fisheries have developed a web based system for monitoring gamefish catches of bluefin tuna. Charter vessel operators are asked to report the number of fish and individual weights (including estimated weights of those fish released) after each fishing trip to the Ministry of Fisheries.

The Ministry is displaying summary results on its website (<http://www.fish.govt.nz/en-nz/Recreational/Gamefish+Catches>).

Adopting these projects to report charter vessel catches and to satellite tag recreationally caught fish reinforces the charter boat industry, game fisher, and Government interest in Pacific bluefin tuna. The satellite tagging will assist in determining stock structure, and gamefish catch records are important for documenting New Zealand's ability to monitor its entire fishery of this highly migratory stock. These data assists in achieving a viable and sustainable world class game fishery for bluefin tuna in New Zealand waters.