



OPRT

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Sankaido Bldg. (9th Floor)
 1-9-13 Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan
 107-0052
 Tel: 03-3568-6388; Fax: 03-3568-6389
 Website: <http://www.oprt.or.jp>

FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF TUNAS

Joint RFMO meeting

KOBE III makes progress in tackling the fishing capacity issue

Kobe III – the third joint meeting of Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) – was held in La Jolla, California, USA, 12-14 July, 2011. It discussed the common issues of RFMOs in order to harmonize approaches and actions of five Tuna RFMOs for the purpose of ensuring more effective and efficient measures to conserve and manage tuna resources.

Over-fishing capacity, which was recognized by Kobe II in 2009 as the global problem needed to be urgently addressed, was seriously discussed by participants. The discussion was initiated by Japan, which stressed the urgent need to reduce over fishing capacity, in particular of super purse seine fishing vessels increasing in recent years. One super purse seine fishing vessel can catch 10,000 tons of tunas in a year.

Japan proposed to freeze the fishing capacity by developed nations as a first step and transfer of capacity from developed nations to developing nations. The proposal gained strong support by a number of participants, while some participants commented that reduction of capacity is sensitive and should be dealt with careful consideration.

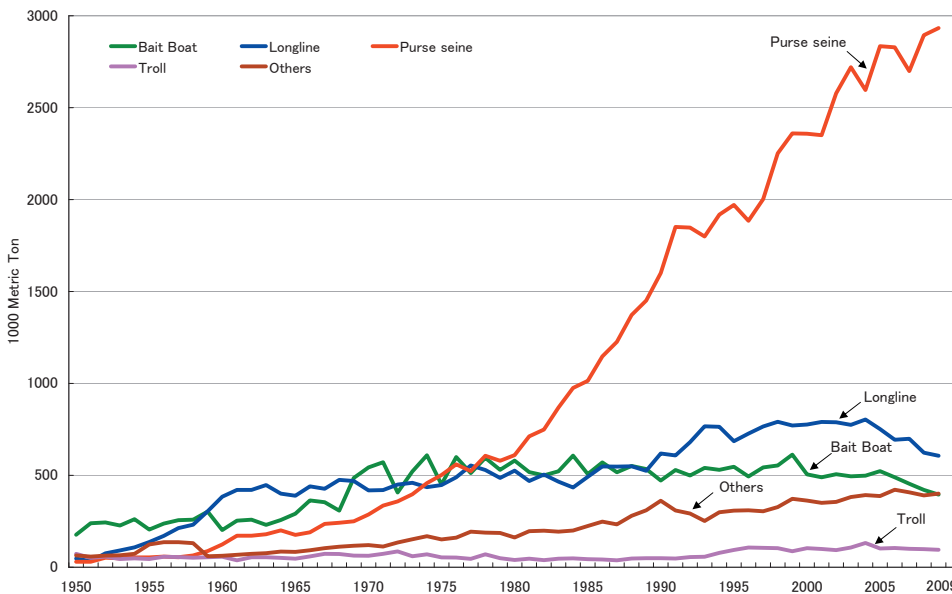
Recommendation was adopted that developed fishing members freeze large scale purse seine capacity under their flag. Also recommended (in gist) are as follows.



- a. Reduction of over capacity in way that does not constrain the development of sustainable tuna fisheries by developing coastal states.
- b. Transfer of capacity from developed fishing members to developing coastal fishing members within its area of competence where appropriate.

The recommendation will be reviewed by each RFMO at its annual meeting as the one requiring action.

World Major Tuna Catches by Fishing Gears (1950~2009)



Tuna Catches include Bluefin tuna, Southern bluefin tuna, Bigeye tuna, Yellowfin tuna, Albacore and Skipjack. Data compiled by Miyake based on RFMOs bases.

Cooperation between IATTC and WCPFC will be promoted

Kobe III confirmed that both IATTC and WCPFC, which are responsible for management of tunas in the Pacific, begin to study development of cooperation in stock assessment, management, compliance and enforcement. Cooperation of the two RFMOs is essential to ensure effective management of tuna resources migrating across the Eastern and Western Pacific.

IUCN Red List

The IUCN Red List on Tunas. Is it scientific?

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) released the Red List of Threatened Species on July 7, appealing the urgent need for the recovery of tuna stocks. IUCN reported that five of eight major species of tunas are in the threatened or near endangered IUCN Red List Categories. These include: Southern Bluefin: Critically Endangered; Atlantic Bluefin: Endangered; Bigeye, Albacore and Yellowfin: Vulnerable.



Tunas are managed by the regional tuna fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) based on the best and most recent scientific recommendations made by their own scientific committees. We wonder if the IUCN Red List on tunas is scientifically consistent with the view of tuna scientists of the RFMOs. We asked Dr. Peter Makoto Miyake regarding

the validity of IUCN's decision. Dr. Miyake worked for a long time as the Assistant Executive Secretary (the scientific coordinator) for the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and is now participating in various scientific committees and working groups of various tuna RFMOs as a Visiting Researcher at the National Research Institute of Far Seas Fisheries of Japan. He is one of the tuna scientists who have an extensive view on the latest status of tunas in the world.

Dr. Miyake stated:

"IUCN again issued very strange warnings. The organization, which had so far included tuna species, one after another, in its Red List, added the Atlantic bluefin tuna to the listing this time.

Looking at its past history, IUCN had included even Eastern Pacific bigeye and yellowfin tuna in its Red List, regardless of the fact that scientists had agreed that the stock sizes of these species are above the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) level and fishing mortality rates are below the MSY level, i.e. the stocks have not been overfished or no overfishing is taking place. Contrary to these scientific conclusions, IUCN is still keeping those species in the Red List, although on somewhat at lower levels.

Why does such a contradicting decision go unchallenged? It is probably because, at the IUCN, there are only a few experts specializing in the fish population studies. Most of the member experts involved in such decisions are taxonomists or ecologists and can be more vulnerable to the influence of environmental groups. Furthermore, those experts had to base their judgments simply on the established criteria, routinely applying them to all animals.

Their established criteria are the proportion of the current stock size relative to the initial population level.

Although the criteria are complicated, let's see how they work with a simplified example. If a rare animal species, for which only 100 individuals exist on the earth, decreases to 50, then everyone would agree to protect them as an endangered species. However, if a tuna stock, say with one million fish in its initial status, decreased to a half million fish, then the stock is considered to be just at the right level of MSY, according to the population dynamics theory. According to the IUCN criteria, however, both cases represent the endangered status.

Many specialists on tuna population dynamics pay little attention to the conclusions based on such criteria. I am very concerned, that if IUCN continues to make its judgment based on such criteria, it would be not tunas that may be in risk but the very authority and credibility of IUCN itself.

Pacific Bluefin Tuna Issue

IATTC fails to introduce management measures for PBT

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) discussed management measures of Pacific Bluefin Tuna (PBT) at its annual meeting held in La Jolla, California (USA), 4-8 July 2011.



Based on scientific advice by the International Science Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species (ISC) recommending decrease of fishing mortality in recent years and followed by the IATTC Scientific Advisory Committee, it was essential for IATTC to adopt sound conservation and management measures for PBT. However, Commission Members failed to reach consensus on measures, resulting in a complete absence of conservation measures for PBT in the eastern Pacific Ocean. The failure significantly undermines the effectiveness of the measures in the Western Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) because PBT migrates throughout the North Pacific Ocean and the management measures have to be introduced throughout the entire Pacific Ocean. In WCPO, the fishing mortality of PBT is already decreased below the 2002-2004 levels, particularly on juveniles (age 0-3).

The absence of management measures in the Eastern Pacific Ocean will result in detrimental impacts to PBF. Concern is growing in the international community.

Meantime, it was agreed that management measures for bigeye tuna and yellowfin tuna for 2011 applied to 2012.

Topics

First Landing of Skipjack in Kesennuma --Sign of Recovery from the East Japan Great Earthquake--

On June 28, 35 tons of skipjack was landed at Kesennuma Port in Miyagi Prefecture. It was the first landing of fish after the earthquake and tsunami which completely destroyed the port and the city. Eighty percent of the skipjack landed was of middle size weighting about 2 - 3 kilos.

The highest price fetched Yen 3,230 per kilo, which was a symbolic price celebrating the start of recovery of the fishing community. The average price was Yen 553 per kilo.



Photo by Mr. Taikai Kumagai

Fisheries Agency surveying distribution of Pacific bluefin juveniles

The Fisheries Agency of Japan is now carrying out research on the distribution of Pacific bluefin tuna juveniles in the Sea of Japan, by using eight research vessels in cooperation with the Fisheries Research Agency, the National Fisheries University and other institutions.

The research started on June 30 and is to be continued through October.

Appropriate management of spawning parent fish is essential for the proper management of the Pacific bluefin tuna, and there is a need to grasp the situation of spawning ground and spawning period.

Research and studies to date have shown that the Sea of Japan constitutes spawning ground, but there has been very little knowledge on the factors of fishing ground formation and the ecology of juvenile fish.

In the current research, sampling of juvenile fish is conducted, together with oceanographic observations of the environment including sea currents.

Tuna Festival in Taiwan attracts many visitors

The Taiwan Tuna Association held until July 3 its 11th Annual Tuna Festival in Donggang, a port town in southern Taiwan.

Tunas have high popularity in Taiwan, as in Japan, and the festival attracted many tourists from all over the island, who enjoyed the taste of fresh bluefin tunas.

The theme of the festival this year was "to visit temples and mausoleums and eat tasty tunas with the sense of happiness after prayer."

An association official said he welcomes tourists from abroad to visit Donggang after the festival as well to taste bluefin tuna and at the same time come in touch with the culture of Taiwan.

(This article is based on the report of the SUIKEI, July 22, 2011)



Photo by Taiwan Tuna Association

OPRT 10th Anniversary

OPRT Head Pledges Further Effort for Sustainable Tuna Fisheries

Yoshio Tsutsumi
President

Since its establishment in December 2000, with all stakeholders related to tuna fisheries, including tuna long line fishing organizations, traders and distributors organizations as well as consumers organizations, as founding members, OPRT has been

carrying out its activities for 10 years in line with its stated mission, namely, "contribution to the development of tuna fisheries in accordance with international and social responsibility through promoting responsible tuna fisheries."

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and deep respect to all people who have made strenuous efforts to establish and support OPRT during the past decade.

In the initial stage, OPRT concentrated its energy on eliminating uncontrolled flag of convenience (FOC) long line fishing vessels which then numbered about 250.

Thanks to the enduring efforts by Regional Tuna Fisheries Management Organizations and their member governments, the international mechanisms to eliminate IUU tuna fisheries, such as the positive list of the authorized vessels, Catch Documentation Scheme, were introduced, thereby nearly eliminating IUU FOC tuna fishing vessels.

In recent years, however, new problems have occurred, such as over-fishing of Atlantic bluefin tuna, increase of number of super purse seine fishing vessels in the Western and Central Pacific as well as FADs operations damaging juvenile tunas. Conservationist movement calling for the reduction of bycatch in tuna fishing is active. In order to fulfill OPRT's objectives, further efforts are needed to address those problems.

Fortunately, almost all of large scale tuna long line fishing organizations in the world have become members of OPRT during the past decade, and therefore, the basis has been established for OPRT to act as an international organization with extensive support of the international community. I, therefore, pledge that OPRT will continue effort to achieve its original objectives. I sincerely hope that we will continue to have your kind support for us in the coming years.

Thank you.



OPRT highly evaluates this move at Kobe III.

The essence of the recommendation can be boiled down to two points: The first is that developed states freeze large scale purse seine capacity under their flag, and the second is that RFMOs should consider a scheme for reduction of over capacity.

For the consideration of the scheme, the recommendation pointed explicitly to the need to consider the willingness of developing coastal states toward development of their tuna fisheries. Specifically, the recommendation presented clearly the method of reduction of over-fishing capacity, namely, by transfer of capacity from developed states to developing states.

At previous joint meetings, a general approach has been supported that the overcapacity issue should be resolved as soon as possible. However, when it came to concrete measures of over-fishing capacity reduction, no decision has been reached in the absence of agreement with regard to interests of states concerned. Especially, the differences in positions between developed and developing states remained wide apart, and it appeared the solution of this issue may not be achieved for some time to come. Under the circumstances, many participants in the joint meeting have been increasingly concerned that it would be difficult to ensure sustainable utilization of tuna resources. It can be said, however, that the recommendation adopted at the recent meeting has dissipated such a concern.

An especially positive step taken at the meeting was the decision to freeze the capacity of large scale purse seine tuna fishing vessels in advanced states. The ever-expanding fishing capacity of large scale purse seine tuna fishing vessels, if left unattended, will make it impossible to ensure sustainable commercial catch of tuna, regardless the fishing methods employed, including the issue of bycatch of under-sized bigeye and yellowfin through the use of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs). This situation had been well understood by parties concerned but no one was able to stop the expansion.

OPRT has been promoting the control of the increase of the number of large scale longline fishing vessels through cooperation by its members from various states. It highly values the joint meeting's recommendation this time because the control of tuna fishing capacity can be made effective with the restraint of the capacity of purse seine tuna fishing vessels as well.

Under any circumstance, it is the wish of OPRT that each RFMO will develop its own scheme to reduce over-fishing capacity expeditiously, and actually implement it. We believe that freezing the capacity of large scale purse seine tuna fishing vessels by developed states, at least, can be implemented immediately because all the developed states that participated in the meeting agreed to that specific goal.

Further, speedy implementation of the recommendation will not only accelerate the recovery of overexploited tuna resources, but also enable each RFMO to demonstrate to the international community its effective tuna conservation and management capability. OPRT sincerely hopes that RFMOs will take quick actions for the implementation of the recommendation, with cooperation of its member states.

Editorial

Large scale purse seine fishing capacity can freeze now

At the third joint meeting of Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) (Kobe III) held in July in La Jolla, California, U.S.A., a recommendation was adopted, calling on members to tackle head-on the issue of over-fishing capacity and decidedly put a process into motion to resolve this issue.