



GREENPEACE

Defending Our Pacific 2009



Summary of findings by Greenpeace Esperanza “Defending Our Pacific” Expedition

23 August – 19 October 2009

1. BACKGROUND

The Western and Central Pacific ocean is now the source of more than half the world’s tuna catch. Having fished tuna stocks in other oceans to the point of serious decline or even collapse, countries are increasingly sending their fishing fleets to the Pacific to exploit the region’s stocks. Unless urgent steps are taken, Pacific tuna stocks will be the next casualties of rampant global overfishing. The loss of Pacific tuna will have an immeasurable impact on Pacific Island countries, which rely upon tuna as an essential source of food, livelihoods and revenue.

The pressure now facing Pacific tuna stocks is immense. It has been widely known since 2001 that Pacific bigeye and yellowfin tuna stocks are in decline, and fishing effort must be cut. Yet, the catch for 2008 was revealed as the highest on record – close to 2.5 million tonnes. For the first time, scientists also warned that fishing effort must be cut by up to 50% to reduce pressure on overfished bigeye stocks, a measure that Greenpeace has promoted since 2006¹.

In order to secure sustainable fisheries and protect the marine ecosystem of the Pacific, Greenpeace proposes that the four pockets of international waters between Pacific Island countries be closed to all fishing activities and designated as marine reserves. These areas appear relatively small in comparison to the huge areas falling within the Economic Exclusive Zones (EEZ’s) of Pacific states; even so, they have great biological and ecological importance. The value of these areas in terms of habitats and marine biodiversity and as migratory, breeding and feeding areas was outlined in a report² presented by Greenpeace at the October 2009 Experts Workshop of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Currently, the minimal regulation and surveillance of these areas is also threatening Pacific tuna stocks, and undermining the conservation and management measures being applied by Pacific Island states to ensure a future for the region’s fisheries. Foreign fishing vessels use the high seas as an escape route to launder fish out of the region, and a base from which to make forays into the waters of Pacific Island countries. Under their current management, these areas are a safe haven for illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing activities, when they should be a safe haven for marine life. An essential step for the Pacific to safeguard its tuna fisheries and its future food security is to designate these areas as marine reserves.

During the 2009 “Defending Our Pacific” expedition, the Greenpeace ship Esperanza spent most of the eight-week expedition in these four pockets of international waters. These areas are shown on the map on page 6.

The work at sea included documenting vessels by ship and by helicopter, identifying and confiscating fish aggregating devices (FADs) during the two month ban period, and undertaking peaceful protest against overfishing by vessels from the distant water fishing nations (DWFNs), Korea, Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines and the United States, as well as a Taiwanese-built bunker vessel flagged to Panama. Four cases of IUU fishing were also documented and reported to the relevant authorities.

¹ <http://www.greenpeace.org/australia/resources/reports/overfishing/tuna-science-report-2006>

² <http://www.greenpeace.to/publications/Pacific-CBD-report-August-2009.pdf>

2. KEY FINDINGS

The expedition revealed that the areas of international waters in the Pacific Ocean continue to harbour illegal activity, and that the agreement to close high seas areas 1 and 2 to purse seine fishing will leave these areas vulnerable to longline fishing, and other international waters vulnerable to continued overfishing. In order to eliminate these threats, the four pockets of international waters must be closed to all fishing.

Five key findings:

- 1** The two month ban on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) is inadequate to reduce fishing effort on tuna stocks. During the ban period, ten FADs were spotted by the Esperanza in high seas areas 1 and 2. Even without active fishing, if left in the water these devices continue to draw in marine life, which will then be fished after the ban ceases. Greenpeace also documented the ban being flouted by a Philippine fishing support vessel tending a fish aggregating device during the ban period, and Japanese fishing vessels exploiting their exemption to the ban, fishing with FADs while all other countries had instructed their fleets to cease this practice.
- 2** Transshipment continues to leave Pacific Island countries vulnerable to the theft of tuna from the region. An illegal transshipment between two Taiwanese longliners was documented in high seas area 1, close to the border of the Federated States of Micronesia. This transshipment violated the terms of the fishing license held by one of the vessels with Micronesia. The second vessel held no fishing licenses with any Pacific Island countries, and was not on the Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) good standing list of vessels.
- 3** Even with the closure of high seas areas 1 and 2 to purse seine fishing from January 2010 these waters, and those of bordering countries, will remain vulnerable to the impacts of longline fishing. Impacts include the theft of fish from Pacific Island country waters, high seas only vessels that do not contribute economically to the region and continued bycatch issues and finning of sharks. With no measures agreed for areas 3 and 4, these are in an even more vulnerable position, and will remain at risk from overfishing and illegal fishing as well as continuing to threaten neighbouring Pacific Island countries through incursions by unlicensed vessels, as was documented in Cook Islands waters.
- 4** New fishing vessels continue to be added to the already over-capacity fishing fleet in the region. In high seas area 2 a newly-built super seiner was documented refueling from a tanker, both built in the same shipyard in Taiwan and linked to the Chen Family group of companies. The flags of the vessels (United States and Panama respectively) were a thin guise for additions to the Taiwanese fleet. Furthermore, two of the high seas only longliners encountered in area 3 were recently built in 2006, when the declining status of Pacific tuna stocks was already well known.
- 5** The huge Taiwanese longline fleet of over 1,300 vessels is threatening Pacific tuna stocks. The many high seas only vessels are contributing minimally to Pacific Island economies. In addition to Taiwanese-flagged vessels, several other vessels encountered revealed links to Taiwanese companies. Koyu Maru 3 is flagged to Japan but its only Pacific license, with Kiribati, is registered under a Taiwanese company. American Legacy, flagged to the USA, and Fong Seong 888, flagged to Panama, were built in the same Taiwanese shipyard and both have links back to the Taiwanese Chen Family network of companies. Neither the United States nor Japan is normally considered a flag of convenience.

3. CASE STUDIES

Champion 72 (Philippines)

High seas area one, 31 August 2009

The Philippine fishing support vessel Champion 72 was encountered in high seas area 1 where it was tending a fish aggregating device during the two-month FAD ban. Upon documentation by the Greenpeace ship Esperanza, Champion 72 left the FAD and fled the area. The vessel was documented while moored to the FAD, and this was reported to the WCPFC, the FFA, Philippines (as flag state) and Papua New Guinea (as licensing state). Champion 72 does not appear on the FFA good standing list. The vessel, owned by Frabelle Fishing Corporation, was added to the Greenpeace IUU blacklist www.blacklist.greenpeace.org.

Jia Yu Fa (Taiwan)

High seas area one, 2 September 2009

Jia Yu Fa, a Taiwanese longliner, was documented by the Esperanza's helicopter transferring its catch to a second Taiwanese longliner, Her Hae, in the high seas just beyond the waters of Federated States of Micronesia. Jia Yu Fa holds a Micronesian fishing license, which specifically prohibits the transfer of fish at sea, and when the activity was reported to local authorities Greenpeace received confirmation that no permission had been granted for the transshipment. This illegal transshipment was reported to Federated States of Micronesia, Taiwan, the WCPFC and FFA. Jia Yu Fa, owned by Horng, Chinq-An, has been added to the Greenpeace IUU blacklist.

Her Hae (Taiwan)

High seas area one, 2 September 2009

This Taiwanese longliner holds no fishing licenses with any Pacific Island countries, and does not appear on the FFA good standing list, but was present in high seas area 1. Her Hae was documented by helicopter receiving frozen tuna from Jia Yu Fa in an IUU transshipment (see above). Her Hae, owned by Kung Kuen Tung, was reported to Taiwan (its flag state), Micronesia (whose fishing license was being violated by the transshipment), the WCPFC and the FFA, and was added to the Greenpeace IUU blacklist.

Fukuichi Maru No.85 (Japan)

High seas area two, 11 September 2009

The Japanese purse seiner Fukuichi Maru No. 85 was documented making a catch of tuna using a FAD during the two-month FAD ban period. This was allowed under an exemption to the ban granted to Japan. As the only country not following the ban, Japan's continued use of FADs demonstrates the inadequacy of the limited and incomplete ban. Japan is the world's largest consumer of tuna, and Japanese vessels account for over one quarter of the Pacific tuna catch. Greenpeace activists peacefully protested the legal but unsustainable plunder by Fukuichi Maru No. 85 with banners reading "Marine Reserves Now" and "No Return from Overfishing".

Oryong 717 (Korea)

High seas area two, 14-15 September 2009

The Korean longliner Oryong 717 was documented fishing with a 61 mile longline in high seas area 2, and was contacted in Korean with no reply. Activists removed part of the vessel's longline from the water, and released a stingray from one of the hooks. Placards reading "marine reserves now" were left on the line. When the vessel approached the Esperanza, activists spoke with the captain of the vessel and asked him to leave the high seas and return to the waters of a Pacific Island state where the Oryong 717 holds a current fishing license (Solomon Islands or Kiribati). The line and hooks were returned to the vessel once they agreed to return to Kiribati waters and headed there.

American Legacy (USA)

High seas area two, 17 September 2009

American Legacy, a brand new super seiner equipped with a helicopter, only left a shipyard in Taiwan on its maiden voyage in 2008. The vessel is flagged to the US which allows this unsustainable addition to an already over-capacity fleet under the US South Pacific Tuna Treaty. The vessel was documented refueling from the tanker Fong Seong 888, which was built in the same Taiwanese shipyard and is also linked to the Chen Family network of companies, though flies the flag of Panama.

Fong Seong 888 (Panama)

High seas area two, 17 September 2009

The Panamanian-flagged tanker Fong Seong 888 was documented refueling the purse seiner American Legacy. Refueling allows vessels to remain at sea for extended periods, and along with practices such as transshipping is commonly used by pirate fishing vessels to launder tuna from the Pacific region. Activists from the Esperanza protested the role of this tanker in facilitating tuna overfishing in the Pacific by painting “Fueling Plunder” and “Tuna Plunder” on the hull of the vessel.

Chung Yong 73 (Korea)

High seas area two, 18 September 2009

Korean longliner Chung Yong 73 was documented by helicopter while hauling its longline in the high seas near the border of Kiribati waters. By the time the Esperanza arrived it had finished hauling its line. Activists spoke to the captain, asking that he stop fishing in the high seas and return to Kiribati waters where Chung Yong 73 has a license to fish. The captain replied that it was not his intention to fish in the high seas, he started setting his line in Kiribati waters and had drifted into the high seas. The Esperanza escorted the vessel back to Kiribati waters. The Chung Yong 73 is on the WCPFC vessel list, but appears on the FFA good standing list under another name; An Yang 53.

Koyu Maru 3 (Japan)

Cook Islands EEZ, 7 October 2009

Japanese longliner Koyu Maru 3 was documented by helicopter fishing illegally within the Cook Islands EEZ. Photographic evidence of the vessel, its position and its fishing activity was gathered and transmitted to the Cook Islands Ministry of Marine Resources, who confirmed the position as within their EEZ and that the vessel was not licensed by them – making its fishing activity illegal. Though the vessel is flagged to Japan, the Pacific Island license it holds (with Kiribati) is registered under a Taiwanese company, and radio conversations heard in the vicinity of the vessel were in Taiwanese. It is suspected that the vessel’s sister ships Koyu Maru 1 and 2 may have been fishing in the area (either in the high seas or within bordering EEZs) at the same time.

Kai Jie No.1 (Taiwan)

High seas area three, 14-15 October 2009

This Taiwanese longliner was encountered as it hauled its longline in high seas area 3. It has no fishing licenses with Pacific Island countries, and is therefore only authorised to fish in the high seas. Activists delivered campaign materials, and protested with a placard and banner reading “marine reserves now”. The captain said they had left port in Pago Pago, American Samoa, on 25 August and intended to be at sea for another two months. This was the same departure date as a second longliner fishing in the vicinity “Nine Lucky No. 6” (Vanuatu flagged) gave from Pago Pago. Both vessels used to hold Cook Islands fishing licenses but no longer do. Kia Jie No. 1 is not on the FFA good standing list. The following day, journalists aboard the Greenpeace ship Esperanza visited Kia Jie No. 1 and documented their fishing.

Chu Huai No. 368 (Taiwan)

High seas area three, 15 October 2009

Taiwanese longliner Chu Huai No. 368 was documented by helicopter in high seas area 3. It has no fishing licenses with Pacific Island countries, is not on the FFA good standing list and is only authorised to fish in the high seas.

Ming Jyh Fwu No. 16 (Taiwan)

High seas area three, 16 October 2009

Taiwanese longliner Ming Jyh Fwu No. 16 was encountered in high seas area 3. It has no fishing licenses with Pacific Island countries, is not on the FFA good standing list and is only authorised to fish in the high seas. The vessel was only recently built, in 2006. Journalists aboard the Esperanza visited Ming Jyh Fwu No. 16 to document their fishing. Greenpeace activists protested fishing in the Pacific Commons by this recently-built longliner with a banner reading “marine reserves now” in Chinese.

Yu Long Fa No. 36 (Taiwan)

High seas area three, 16 October 2009

Taiwanese longliner Yu Long Fa No. 36 (also recently built in 2006) was encountered in high seas area 3. Again, it has no fishing licenses with Pacific Island countries and is only authorised to fish in the high seas. The vessel had previously not been on the FFA good standing list, but was added on 12 October 2009. Greenpeace activists attempted to remove bait and marine life from the longline of the Yu Long Fa No. 36, but heavy weather and poor visibility prevented this.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), set up in 2004 to manage and protect the region's tuna stocks, is currently failing in its key objectives. Despite progress in 2008 with the agreement to close high seas pockets one and two purse seine fishing from 2010 onwards, these areas are still vulnerable to overfishing by the regions large long-line fleets and other fisheries. The two smaller areas three and four have no protection at all. Other agreed measures including the three-year phase-in of effort reductions to reach a 30% cut, and the limited two-month ban on fish aggregating devices, are patently inadequate to achieve conservation and management objectives. There is no excuse for fisheries management organisations in any ocean to ignore or water down the advice of their scientists: There is no negotiating with biology. The revised warning to cut fishing pressure by up to 50% demonstrates the continued worsening of fish stock status when scientific advice goes unheeded year after year.

During the 2009 expedition vessels were encountered that had been built as recently as 2008, an extremely irresponsible increase in fishing pressure when countries know that fishing must be reduced to allow stocks to recover. In only three days spent in the high seas pocket bordered by Kiribati, the Cook Islands and French Polynesia (area 3) five longliners, four of them high-seas-only Taiwanese flagged vessels, were found fishing. Two of these were only built in 2006. These longline vessels are the tip of a dangerous iceberg: Taiwan alone has a fleet of more than 1,300 longliners licensed by the WCPFC to fish in the region. If the high seas closures come into effect in January 2010 without being extended to include longline fishing, and expanded to cover areas 3 and 4, this threat to the region's fisheries will continue unchecked.

The expedition has revealed how vulnerable the Pacific high seas pockets are to overfishing, and how the high seas are utilised by fishing vessels making a negligible contribution to Pacific economies. The continued threat from longline fishing was demonstrated, and this will not be addressed by the WCPFC's 2008 agreement to close high seas areas 1 and 2 to purse seine fishing only. Furthermore, high seas areas 3 and 4 will remain at the mercy of foreign fishing fleets unless these areas are closed to all fishing. The ease with which vessels can slip from the high seas into countries' EEZs was demonstrated, and the role of transshipment (both legal and illegal) and bunkering in facilitating the plunder of Pacific resources was shown. The inadequacy of the two month ban on fish aggregating devices was made clear, as was the fact that this ban is being undermined by exemptions and disregard by fishing fleets.

The measures so far agreed by the WCPFC are not enough to turn this situation around before it is too late. At their meeting in December, WCPFC member states can make one of two choices: Continue with the status quo and watch the world's final tuna fishing ground plummet into crisis, or agree strong measures to halt the decline and allow stocks to recover. Should the WCPFC agree to strong and effective measures, the Commission will establish itself as a world leader in oceans management.

Greenpeace calls on the member states of the WCPFC to agree the following measures at the meeting in December 2009:

- To permanently close all four high seas enclaves to all fishing and removal of that fishing effort.
- To be firmly guided by the precautionary approach and account for the high levels of unknown and uncertainties in fishing data due to the high level of IUU fishing in the region by supporting and adopting a 50% reduction in tuna fishing effort across the entire WCPO sector based on the average 2001-2004 levels.
- To ban all at-sea transshipments with no exemptions granted to any vessel. CCMs should also adopt compatible measures as outlined under article 8 of the Convention and prohibit all in zone at-sea transshipments.
- To permanently ban the use of FADs in association with purse seine fishing in order to protect juvenile tuna and other marine life.
- Include IUU vessels Champion 72, Jia Yu Fa, Her Hae and Koyu Maru 3 and their owner and operating companies on the WCPFC IUU record.



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