

Plundering the Pacific

How transshipping at sea by Philippine
fleets facilitates the launder and plunder
of West and Central Pacific tuna



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image Greenpeace
activists from Fiji and
Papua New Guinea in the
hold of Philippine fish
carrier Kenken 888

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Defending our oceans

Greenpeace proposes that three pockets of international waters between Pacific Island Countries – the Pacific Commons – be closed to all fishing activities and designated as marine reserves. These areas of international waters appear relatively small in comparison to the huge areas falling within the Economic Exclusive Zones (EEZs) of some of the Pacific states; even so, they have great biological and ecological importance. Currently, foreign fishing vessels use them as an escape route to launder fish out of the region and provide a safe haven for pirate fishers because of the lack of regulation and enforcement in these areas.

During its nine-week expedition in the West and Central Pacific Ocean, the Greenpeace ship Esperanza documented both legal and illegal Philippines flagged and owned fishing vessels fishing and transshipping skipjack and yellowfin tuna catches in the high seas pocket (see map) between Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, the Federal States of Micronesia, Palau, Indonesia and the Marshall Islands.

Transshipments at sea by foreign purse seiners are prohibited under the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), but a special exemption is granted to the Philippine fleets. The majority of Pacific Island Countries do not allow transshipment at sea inside their respective Exclusive Economic Zones and require all vessels to come into port for transfer of catch.

It is widely recognised that, worldwide, transshipments of fish at sea facilitate illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing. Unfortunately, it seems that the exemption given to the Philippine purse seine fleet is exploited and taken advantage of by illegal Philippine vessels. The lack of monitoring, control and surveillance measures and resources in the region provides incentives for illegal vessels to operate side by side with legally registered vessels plundering the Pacific high seas.



Pacific Commons: the site of large-scale launder by large-scale fleets

From the information gathered at sea, the Philippine fleet appears to consist of regular 492 GRT purse seiners capable of fishing on their own without the company of a mothership. Conversations with the Captain of the Kenken 888¹ revealed that the vessel had conducted six separate transshipments with other vessels from the same fleets, in the past month. These transshipments all took place in the high seas pocket north of Papua New Guinea.

This high seas pocket was declared as a no-fishing zone by the surrounding coastal states in May 2008. The eight countries party to the Nauru agreement² (PNA countries) took this measure in an attempt to more efficiently regulate the overfishing taking place in the region and to halt the decline of the Pacific bigeye and yellowfin stocks.

It is of great concern that the Philippine fleets seem to target this high seas area in particular, as this has potential to undermine the effectiveness of the PNA effort in the recovery of the tuna stocks and the protection of the health of the broader marine environment in the region.

During the nine weeks the Esperanza spent in the west and central Pacific 18 fishing vessels were contacted solely in the Pacific Commons. A number of vessels were also observed that could not be identified and documented properly.

The limited monitoring, control and surveillance of vessels accessing the Pacific Commons is a major loophole that allows the unseen and unreported plunder of the region's tuna stocks. As demonstrated here, tuna vessels exploit the unregulated nature of transshipment at sea. This is likely to account for enormous amounts of tuna leaving the region.

The fishing pressure on stocks in the Pacific Commons as witnessed by Greenpeace demonstrates the highly unregulated nature of these Pacific Commons and, away from the watchful eyes of authorities, the continued pillage of the region's already troubled bigeye, yellowfin and other highly migratory fish stocks.

¹ Greenpeace campaigners were granted permission to go onboard the vessels to document and interview the crew by the Captain.

² Papua New Guinea, Solomon's, Palau, Nauru, Tuvalu, Federal States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Kiribati

Fishing vessels documented by Greenpeace in the high seas on 9 May, 2008:

These Philippines-flagged vessels are all* owned by the Philippine company TSP Marine Industries Ltd.

Queen Evelyn 168 Illegal Philippine Purse Seiner

The Queen Evelyn 168 is an illegal vessel, neither authorised nor registered to undertake any fishing activities in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). The vessel was observed in close contact with her sister vessels at the transshipment site. It is likely that a transfer of fish at sea involving the Queen Evelyn 168 was about to occur, but the arrival of Greenpeace prevented it from taking place. The vessel fled immediately.



Queen Evelyn 889 Philippine Purse Seiner

The Queen Evelyn 889 was documented by Greenpeace transferring fish at sea with the refrigerated fish carrier, Kenken 888. Both vessels are legally authorised to be in the region and their transshipment activity is legal under the special exemption granted by the WCPFC.

Kenken 888 Philippine Fish Carrier

Greenpeace activists were later able to board the Kenken 888 with the permission of the ship's Captain. The hold predominantly contained juvenile yellowfin and skipjack tuna. Activists obtained information from the Captain about six other transshipments carried out during the last month in the Pacific Commons. The captain confirmed that the Kenken 888 regularly received fish caught by the Queen Evelyn 168. Greenpeace crew were able to document evidence provided by the Captain confirming transshipments with the illegal vessel the Queen Evelyn 168 including records in the log book.

These transfers added up to 675 tonnes of tuna onboard and were mainly from boats flagged to the Philippines belonging to the same company, TSP Marine Industries.



*Unidentified Pole-and-Line vessel

unknown nationality

An unidentified pole-and-line vessel was documented by Greenpeace and information passed on to the relevant authorities. Under international law, all vessels must have their names and international radio call sign (IRCS) displayed at all times. There were no visible markings anywhere on this vessel, which in itself would make the vessel illegal. The only visible marking that Greenpeace and authorities were able to identify was a small logo reading "TSP" at the back of the vessel, potentially linking the vessel to other TSP Marine vessels present in the area on the same day.

Based on the evidence gathered at sea, Greenpeace is calling for:

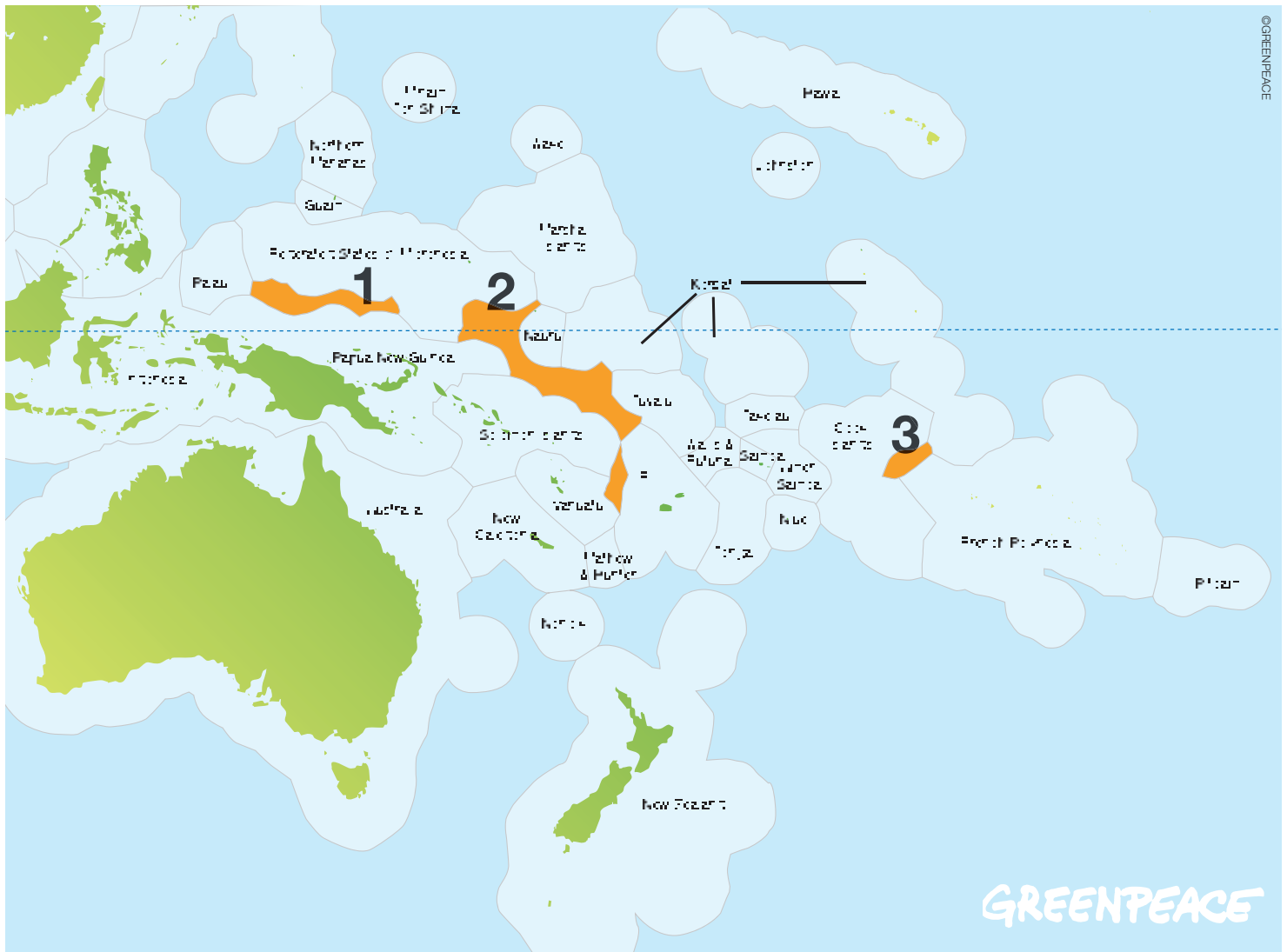
- the listing of the Queen Evelyn 168, Queen Evelyn 889 and Kenken 888 on the WCPFC registry of IUU fishing vessels.
- the WCPFC to ban all transshipments at sea, with no exemption to be granted to any member states including the Philippine fleets.
- the WCPFC to close all three high seas enclaves as permanent no-take marine reserves.



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image Yellowfin tuna destined to Honiara market. Tuna is a staple in the diet of Pacific Islanders.

Figure 1 Map showing the locations (in orange) of the three high seas pockets also known as the Pacific Commons proposed as marine reserves by Greenpeace. The Philippine fleets were encountered in high seas pocket number 1.



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