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GREENPEACE MEDIA BRIEFING

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Pacific Tuna - Stolen Fish, Stolen Futures

Ironically, the fleets that are destroying the tuna stocks in the Pacific are often the same nations that are signatories to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, or Tuna Commission – a body set up with a mandate to protect tuna stocks.

The Western and Central Pacific, home to over 20 island nations and coastal states, is the world's largest tuna fishery. More than half of the tuna consumed worldwide comes from here. Of all the fish stocks in the Pacific, tuna is by far the most important, bringing income to over 30,000 people, and worth at least seven times as much as any other. But it is not only a key income for the Pacific.

Fish is vastly important for Pacific island countries, where average consumption is 55kg/year, four times higher than the global average.

But the Pacific tuna are in trouble. A recent report published by Greenpeace found that unless drastic action is taken then Yellowfin and Bigeye tuna will be critically overfished within three years. The majority of the Pacific catch is Skipjack, while this stock is not yet overfished, young Bigeye and Yellowfin vital for breeding and future stock growth, get caught indiscriminately in the skipjack nets.

The industrialisation of the fishing industry has put an enormous strain on the oceans. Three quarters of all fish stocks worldwide are in trouble and the big industrial fleets, which make up only 1% of the global fishing fleet, are netting 50% of all the fish caught. With many oceans already fished out, they are turning their attention to the Pacific and an increasing number of foreign industrial ships and pirate boats are filling targeting the precious tuna stocks.

The vast majority, 90 %, of the Pacific tuna is caught by such fleets from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, USA, Philippines and the EU. Having depleted their own waters they are now making a killing in the Pacific. Those that bother to buy a licence pay only a fraction of the value of the catch. The region earns in licences a mere 5% of the US\$2 billion the fish is worth on the market.

Many simply don't even bother to pay that. Pirate fishing - illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing - is rife in the Pacific. Pirates leave communities without much needed food and income and the marine environment smashed and empty. Globally US \$9 billion a year is lost to pirate fishing and estimates in the Pacific range from

US\$134 million to US\$400 million. This is up to 400% more than Pacific Island states earn in access fees and licenses.

Transshipment – offloading catches – at sea, is also a major problem, as it avoids scrutiny of catches and catch sizes and locations go unreported.

The vast majority of tuna are caught by purse seining and long-lining. Long-lining uses fishing lines over 100 km long, baited with up to 3,000 hooks, pulled behind the boat. Sharks, turtles and albatrosses, get caught on the nets and are thrown back into the sea, dead or dying. Purse seiners use a small boat to go out with one end of a massive net, the big boat then circles the shoal of fish, with the net returning to the small boat. The net is drawn tight or “pursed” at the base and hauled alongside.

Increasingly, large-scale purse seiners, more than 70 m long and known as super seiners and their even bigger monster older brothers super-super seiners are sucking up the oceans. Large scale seiners can take in two days what it would take the local fishermen a year to catch – and in a year will net up to 11,000 tonnes of fish. A super-super seiner can haul 60 tonnes every day, taking 20,000 tonnes of Pacific fish every year.

Ironically, the fleets that are destroying the tuna stocks in the Pacific are often the same nations that are signatories to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, or Tuna Commission – a body set up with a mandate to protect tuna stocks. From the USA, to the EU and Asia, consumers are eating stolen fish from the Pacific. It's time to make piracy history.

In order to save the Pacific from an empty future, the following measures must immediately be implemented:

- Take serious and stronger action against pirate vessels
- Fairer returns must be paid by foreign nations for the fish they take from the Pacific
- Foreign nations must immediately reduce by half the amount of fish they catch
- An immediate end to all transshipments at sea
- Immediately stop all building of large longline and purse seine vessels
- Ban super-super seiners from entering Pacific waters
- Increase support for enforcement and surveillance missions in the Pacific
- The immediate establishment of a marine reserve in an enclosed high-seas area bound by Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia, and a firm commitment to establishing a second fully protected marine reserve to the east in the near future.
- Establish and enforce 40% of Pacific marine habitats as marine reserves . Globally, 40% of the world's oceans must be made into properly enforced Marine Reserves
- The Tuna commission must set quotas for tuna stock based on the health of the stock, taking into account the uncertainty that exists.

Media contacts:

Louise Clifton Greenpeace Media Officer (in Sydney) +61 438 204 041
Jo Kuper Greenpeace Media Officer (in Fiji) +44 7939 245 864