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Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



Findings from New Zealand High Seas Patrols in the South Pacific

**New Zealand
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CCSBT Compliance Committee (CC11)

Executive Summary

This report provides Members with preliminary findings from New Zealand's most recent high seas patrol and discusses the management implications of those findings.

Evidence gathered by the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries indicates that deliberate targeting and misreporting of southern bluefin tuna is taking place in the Tasman Sea. This evidence may equate to 166 tonnes in unreported southern bluefin tuna. These incidents reinforce the need for precautionary management that reflects the potential for significant levels of unreported mortality in this fishery.

Although the findings presented here are not enough to fully estimate the global (or even regional) trade in unreported southern bluefin tuna, they do provide a data point that New Zealand believes can be used in the development of those estimates as part of the work being undertaken by the Extended Scientific Committee. The global scale of the operations involved in these illegal activities also demonstrates the need for a Commission-wide approach to counter it.

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1 Background

The purpose of this report is to summarise recent findings in relation to vessels fishing for southern bluefin tuna without CCSBT authorisation, provide a quantifiable estimate of the volumes involved in the operations identified, and consider the wider implications of these findings for the Commission.

As part of its commitments to fisheries management in the Pacific, New Zealand undertakes yearly patrols on the high seas. The high seas boarding and inspection activities carried out by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) under Operation Zodiac provides one of the few opportunities for New Zealand to get an independent source of information on fishing activities taking place in the region.

Operation Zodiac is an annual operation carried out in the area adjacent to the New Zealand Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). MPI is the lead agency on this operation and is supported by the Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN) and Royal New Zealand Airforce (RNZA).

This year's patrol took place from 14 July to 6 August with inspections carried out on vessels targeting a combination of albacore, yellowfin, bigeye and swordfish.

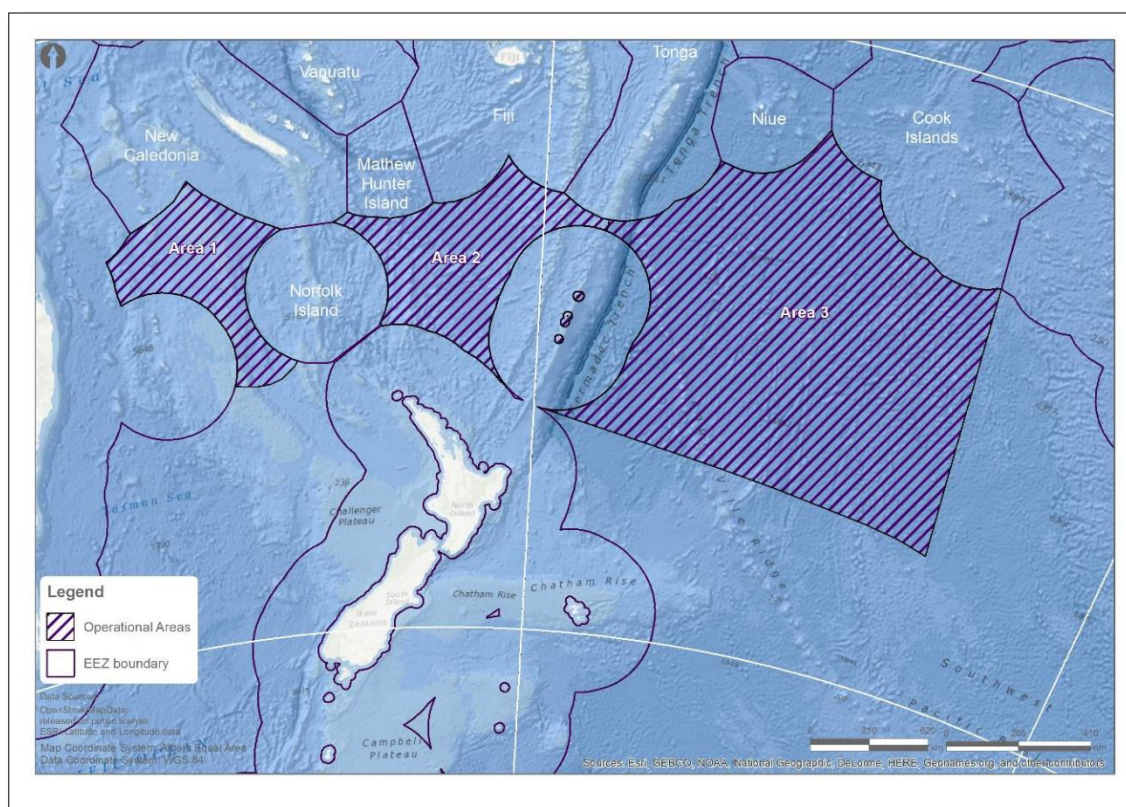


Figure 1. The Royal New Zealand Navy Offshore Patrol Vessel patrolled Area 2 and Area 3 during Operation Zodiac 2016.

As part of this year's patrol, New Zealand was able to board and inspect a total of 37 longline vessels.

2 Results from Operations

Reporting in relation to Operation Zodiac between 2013 and 2016 has documented the activities of unauthorised vessels, with reporting and analysis confirming ongoing breaches across a range of measures primarily relating to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

This year's patrol, however, identified a number of breaches that are of particular concern to the CCSBT, as they relate to the misidentification and misreporting of southern bluefin tuna.

2.1 Initial Aerial Sightings

During May and June 2016, there was concentrated fishing effort by authorised SBT vessels in the Tasman Sea between 38°S and 41°S approximately 300 nautical miles East of Australia. It was during this period that the RNZAF aerial surveillance patrols located two longline vessels operating in this area. These vessels were registered on the WCPFC Register of Fishing Vessels but were not transmitting on the WCPFC Vessel Monitoring System (VMS).

The two longline vessels were identified during two separate aerial patrols which took place in May. Communications in Chinese were established with the vessels during the second flight. Those communications confirmed that the vessels were actively fishing and targeting "tuna".

MPI strongly believes that the "tuna" in question was highly likely to involve southern bluefin, based on the catch composition of other vessels operating in the area at that time.

As one of the vessels had been reporting on AIS, the location of this vessel was able to be monitored. That AIS data was also consistent with longline fishing activity.

On 10 June 2016 one of the vessels left the fishing grounds and headed North-East to the high seas area North of New Zealand. AIS track analysis identified a change in course and speed on 12 June 2016, but the vessel resumed its course towards Fiji around 18 hours later.

2.2 Contact in Fiji Exclusive Economic Zone

On 15 June 2016 one of the vessels was confirmed via AIS data to be inside the Fijian EEZ. On 16 June 2016, at approximately 1630hrs, the New Zealand Offshore Patrol Vessel OTAGO made contact and obtained imagery of the vessel. The captain of the vessel responded to radio contact reporting "*Engines no good, go to Suva to dock*".

RNZN Officers identified that the vessel was under tow from an unidentified longline vessel. The unidentified vessel appeared to have removed its call sign and port of origin details. The vessel's Flag State was also unknown as the vessel was 'silent' (not operating AIS or radar). Due to the adverse weather conditions, a boarding team was unable to board either vessel. The OTAGO noted the unidentified towing vessel was displaying Chinese markings.

Subsequent analysis of partial vessel markings and superstructure positively identified the vessel which was found to be licensed for the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) area, but not the WCPFC.

2.3 Further Aerial Sighting

On 1 July 2016, an additional RNZAF aerial surveillance patrol located one of the original longline vessels still fishing in the Tasman Sea approximately 35 nautical miles from the Australian EEZ (the second remained in Suva for repairs). A third longline vessel was located and confirmed as being the vessel which was sighted by the RNZN without a callsign in the Fijian EEZ. A fourth longliner, from the same company, was also located fishing in the area. These two longliners were not reporting on AIS (or VMS) and were not licensed to fish in the WCPFC area, but held current licenses for the IATTC area.

Radio contact was established in Chinese and these vessels both confirmed they were fishing with between 1 to 7 tonnes of tuna on board. A New Zealand Fisheries Officer instructed the vessels to remove their fishing gear and leave the WCPFC area.

2.4 At Sea Boarding

On 31 July 2016, the New Zealand Offshore Patrol Vessel OTAGO boarded and inspected vessels on the high seas north of the New Zealand EEZ as part of Operation Zodiac and detected two radar contacts not reporting on VMS or AIS. The RNZN visually identified the vessels as being the two non-WCPFC licensed longline vessels previously sighted in the Tasman Sea. These were subsequently boarded by the RNZN and New Zealand Fisheries Officers. The details of those inspections are provided below.

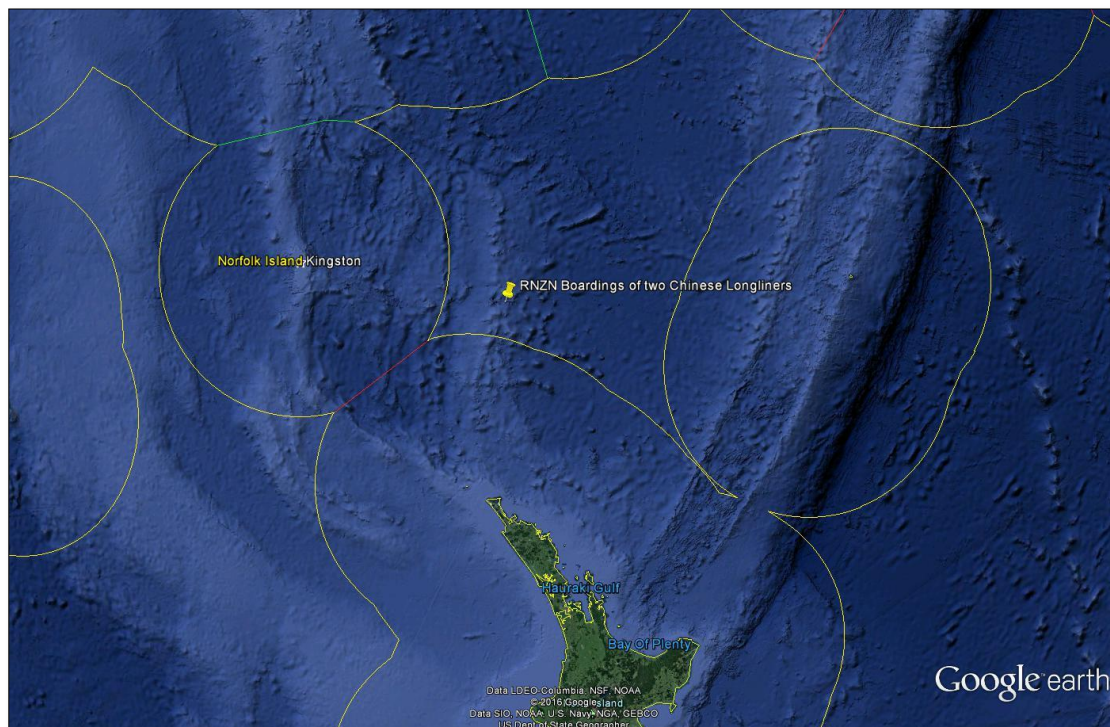


Figure 2. Location of high seas boarding and inspection of the two suspect longliners.

Suspect Vessel 1

Date of Inspection: 31 July 2016

Location of Inspection: Lat: 30°11.18 'S Long: 173°14.67 'E

Operational Characteristics

Longline vessel using between 2160 and 2400 hooks depending on the weather. Used along 160-200km backbone. Branch line length 45m. 16 branch lines between floats. Claimed to be setting early in the day. Tori line on board but did not appear to have been used.

Catch on Board

The catch logs on the vessel listed bigeye tuna as the lone species on board and declared a total weight of 103,353 kgs (2,824 fish). The skipper admitted that this was in fact southern bluefin tuna and that he had received instructions from the company to misreport it as bigeye (note a translator was on board the patrol vessel). Crew members also confirmed that the fish caught were indeed southern bluefin tuna. DNA samples were taken and New Zealand can confirm that those samples came back positive for southern bluefin tuna.

In addition to the misreported bigeye tuna, officers also discovered a hold containing shark trunks hidden under a layer of albacore.

The skipper initially admitted that the vessel had been transshipping at sea but subsequently denied this claim. New Zealand believes that the initial admission is likely true and that the vessel has received transshipments from other company vessels.

Suspect Vessel 2

Date of Inspection: 31 July 2016

Location of Inspection: Lat: 30°11.18 'S Long: 173°14.67 'E

Operational Characteristics

Longline vessel with 2500-3000 hooks used along 160-200km backbone. 17 hooks between floats. Weighted hooks used (50g weights). Tori line on board but did not appear to be used.

Catch on Board

The catch logs aboard the vessel listed the following species and quantities:

Species	Kg	Number
ALBACORE TUNA	1200	
YELLOW FIN TUNA	-	
BIGEYE TUNA	16000	
SHARK (MAKO/BLUE)	-	
OILFISH	900	
SUNFISH	-	
MARLIN & SWORDFISH	600	16
Other (Wahoo etc)	1200	
MOONFISH	120	

The skipper from Suspect Vessel 2 did not admit to the misreporting of southern bluefin tuna as bigeye, although it seems likely that this was the case. DNA samples were taken and New Zealand can confirm that 3 of the 5 fish sampled were positively identified as southern bluefin tuna. The results from the remaining two fish were inconclusive and are undergoing further testing.

3 Implications for Management

This Commission has clearly recognised the importance of non-Member catch and its potential to impact on its rebuilding efforts. This can be seen in the decision to make allowances for said catch within the next three-year block. Therefore, improving our understanding of this source of mortality is critical for the ongoing management of this stock. This conclusion is reflected in the recent advice of the Extended Scientific Committee (ESC) which urges the EC to “take steps to quantify all sources of unaccounted SBT mortality as a matter of urgency”.

3.1 Estimates of IUU Catch

Estimates of IUU catch typically carry a high degree of uncertainty based on the illicit nature of the activities involved. It would be unwise to attempt to extrapolate the results of this single incident alone to develop an estimate of the global IUU catch of southern bluefin. However, the quantities involved here do illustrate the potential scale of this trade and the urgent need to address it as part of the ongoing management of the stock. Dealing only with the evidence at hand, we are potentially faced with substantial figures.

Based on the statements made by the crew, all catch declared as bigeye in Suspect Vessel 1 was in fact southern bluefin tuna which amounts to 103,353kgs of unreported catch. New Zealand believes that the bigeye tuna held in Suspect Vessel 2 was also misreported southern bluefin tuna which brings about an additional 16,000kgs of unreported catch.

Before 16 July 2016, the skipper of Suspect Vessel 1 was acting as the skipper for the vessel which was towed into Suva for repairs. The skipper stated that 23 tonnes of fish were unloaded in Fiji from that vessel. The vessel had only been fishing for 18 days, which is why there was only a small amount. The skipper then swapped out as captain of Suspect Vessel 1 in the Tasman. New Zealand believes that there is a high likelihood that the 23 tonnes unloaded in Fiji contained a high proportion of southern bluefin tuna.

Suspect Vessel 2 transhipped with another vessel of the same company, without an observer onboard, on 10th May 2016. During this transhipment, Suspect Vessel 2 unloaded the following:

- 24,463kgs bigeye tuna
- 1,913kgs yellow fin tuna
- 1,071kgs swordfish
- 190kgs marlin
- 3,893kgs of mixed species.

According to the skipper of Suspect Vessel 2, this fish was then landed back in China to the company (the port was not disclosed). New Zealand believes that it is highly likely that once again the cargo identified as bigeye tuna did in fact contain misreported southern bluefin tuna.

These incidents alone may equate to over 166 tonnes of unreported southern bluefin catch in the area.

3.2 Next Steps

As stated earlier, the results from New Zealand's monitoring efforts in the Pacific clearly establish that there is a deliberate and coordinated IUU trade in southern bluefin tuna. This trade likely extends beyond the areas covered by this patrol and across the entire range of southern bluefin tuna. Although we believe that the results of this year's patrolling activities cannot, in isolation, provide the Commission with a global estimate of the IUU trade in southern bluefin tuna, we do believe that they can serve as a valuable input into a wider exercise.

New Zealand has provided information to the flag state of the vessels involved and has asked for an investigation of the matters raised.

In recent years, the ESC has repeatedly asked for the Compliance Committee and the Commission to provide it with additional information on the level of illegal trade. Although singular exercises such as this and the recent analysis of the Chinese tuna market can provide an insightful glimpse, they cannot provide the regional perspective needed to develop a robust estimate. This is why New Zealand believes that CCSBT Secretariat should be resourced to have a greater focus on coordinating regional sources of information. This would better reflect the respective risks involved in those activities.

In the absence of a coordinated exercise, New Zealand submits the information from its most recent monitoring efforts as being indicative of a wider problem in the fishery and as evidence for consideration into the unaccounted mortality work of the ESC.