# South African National Report to the Extended Scientific Committee of the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), 2025

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**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

July 2026

## Summary

South Africa's tuna directed fishery is comprised of two fishing fleets, a baitboat (tuna pole-line) fleet of 139 vessels (131 fishing rights), and a longline fleet with a domestic (ZAD) and joint venture (charter vessel(s); ZAC) component of currently a total of 34 vessels (61 fishing rights). The tuna pole-line fleet mainly targets albacore and yellowfin tuna, when available, and the longline fleet targets tuna species (temperate and tropical) and swordfish. SBT has previously only been caught by the longline fleet but the tuna pole-line fleet started catching SBT in small quantities since South Africa became a full Member of CCSBT in 2016. South Africa continues to develop its SBT directed performance within its large pelagic directed fishing sectors. SBT effort in the ZAD has been steadily increasing over the period 2006-2016, from a mere 45 thousand hooks in 2006 to present levels of over 500 thousand hooks and a maximum of over 1 000 thousand hooks in 2024, whilst SBT targeting effort from ZAC effort was absent in 2020, 2022, 2023 and 2024 and only one vessel operated in 2021 and 2025. Similar to effort, total annual SBT landings reached a peak of 222 tons in 2018 and a maximum of 243 tons in 2024. SBT was caught by fewer longline vessels in 2025 (18 ZAD, 1 ZAC) than the maximum seen in 2024 (27 ZAD vessels), and four tuna pole-line vessels. ZAD longline vessels landed 224.8 tons (N = 3329) and tuna pole-line vessels landed 1.66 tons (N = 18), in 2025. The longline fishery operates mostly within South Africa's EEZ from May to October; however, the majority of SBT catch is typically taken over a four-month period; June, July, August and September. There are notable differences in the distribution of catch and effort between the ZAD and ZAC longline vessels. The ZAD operates off the West coast of South Africa (Area 15 and upper Area 9) and in the Northeast Coast (Area 14) and the catch distribution appears to have become more localised and contracted in these two areas since 2019. The few (1-3) JP-flagged ZAC vessels that operated under joint venture in 2019 and 2021 operated in offshore positions in Area 9. The ZAC vessel of TW operated in the east and west Atlantic in 2025, catching SBT in the East (~ -5ºE). A recent increase in size composition data in 2024 is indicative of the increase in SBT catch and an improvement in observer coverage. Efforts made in 2023 has seen ZAD observer coverage increase to 13.9% in 2023, 19.7% in 2024 and 16.8% in 2025. The 100% observer coverage required on ZAC vessels assisted in measuring 31.2% and 14.9% of SBT caught in 2019 and 2021, respectively. Small samples sizes have resulted in large variability in mean lengths (between 133.7cm and 192.5cm) from 2020 to 2024 in Area 9. The mean lengths in Area 14 and 15 have been fairly similar over the last four years, 170.0cm and 163.0 cm, respectively. A bimodal length frequency distribution in 2024 across the three Areas (9, 14, 15) can be largely attributed to vessel sampling bias.


## 1. Introduction

South Africa was formally accepted as a Cooperating Non-Member (CNM) of the CCSBT Extended Commission in August 2006; and subsequently became a Member of the Commission and the Extended Commissions in February 20216. The two South African commercial fishing sectors that target large pelagic species comprise the Large Pelagic Longline (LL) and the Tuna Pole-Line (baitboat) fleet. These fisheries have the potential to expand their Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) catches.

### *1.1 Summary of the Historical Developments in the Fishery – Large Pelagic Longline*

South Africa had a brief history targeting SBT in the early 1960s, along the west coast. During this period SBT was one of the most common species caught on longline. This fishery ceased by mid- 1960s in favour of developing other more lucrative fisheries, but foreign vessels continued to fish in South African waters since the 1970s under a series of bilateral agreements. Only in 1997, thirty experimental large pelagic longline permits were issued to revive the local tuna fishery, though swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) turned out to be the dominant target species initially. The South African Large Pelagic Longline fishery was commercialized in 2005, with the issuing of 18 swordfish-directed and 26 tuna-directed fishing rights valid for 10 years. The fishery was restricted to 50 permits (one permit per vessel) through Total Allowable Effort (TAE) control. The large pelagic longline fishery was initially split into swordfish and tuna-directed sub-sectors due to the drastic declines in swordfish catch and CPUE experienced during the period of the experimental fishery from 1997 to 2005. In 2014, it was decided to no longer classify the fleet under separate fishing strategies, tuna-directed and swordfish-directed, since the fishing behaviour of the local fleet had evolved from exclusive swordfish targeting to include tunas and sharks. Consequently, the fishery is now referred to as the Large Pelagic Longline fishery and includes vessels that target tunas and swordfish, with pelagic sharks being caught incidentally as by-catch. Directed targeting of pelagic sharks is not permitted and has been further disincentivized by banning the use of wire traces since 2016. The 10-year long-term rights granted in 2005 expired in January 2015. In February 2017, a total of 62 commercial fishing rights were granted for a duration of 15 years and 34 vessels were authorized to operate under these rights.

Foreign vessels, mainly from Japan and Fishing Entity of Taiwan, fished in South African waters through the issuing of bi-lateral agreements in the 1970s, and re-negotiated these agreements in the 1990s until 2002 (Sauer et al., 2003). Joint-venture agreements with Japan have been in place since 1995, with the primary policy objective of transferring skills to South African crew and operators and reflagging of these vessels as well as a means of acquiring suitable vessels. In 2005, when only a few vessels successfully reflagged, the joint ventures were stopped in 2006. This led to a significant decline in catches for that year, prompting the country to lift the ban to enhance catch performance, and as such right holders chartered foreign vessels from Japan, South Korea and Philippines. The vessels are required to adhere to South African legislation, including but not limited to, the Marine Living Resources Act (Act No. 18 of 1998) and Regulations promulgated thereunder as well as Large Pelagic Longline sector specific regulations. Importantly, each foreign vessel is required to carry an observer on board every trip. The catch from these vessels accrues to South Africa. According to sector specific policy, foreign vessels that operate under South African rights will be required to eventually reflag their vessels and to transfer skills to South Africans. According to the current (2015) sector specific policy, foreign vessels that operate under South African rights will, after an initial one-year trial period, be required to reflag within three (3) years. The return to stringent timeframes for reflagging has resulted in few to no foreign flagged vessels operating in South Africa in recent years. Since 2010 joint-venture agreements have consisted of Japanese flagged vessels targeting yellowfin and bigeye tuna. In 2025, a vessel from the Fishing Entity of Taiwan fished under a joint-venture agreement in the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) region and targeted albacore.

Despite the reduction in joint venture vessels, and these joint venture vessels having not reflagged to South Africa, the number of vessels actively fishing each year has remained stable (**Figure 1**) owing to the domestic right holders (ZAD) that have been steadily growing the fleet. An increase in the number of ZAD longline vessels was anticipated following the conversion of several tuna pole-line vessels to longline gear. However, after a season of longline fishing, the operators found that the operational demands of the fishery were too challenging to sustain long-term participation.

The type of longline vessels operated by South Africa is a factor impacting the catching performance for SBT. Japanese super freezer long-liners typically range from 47 to 54 meters in length overall and weigh between 400 to 500 tons gross registered weight. They are constructed of steel, feature a large catch capacity, and are equipped with ultra-low freezers. In contrast, South African vessels are generally smaller, around 24 meters or less in length, weighing less than 100 tons, are predominantly made of fiberglass reinforced plastic, though some are steel-hulled, and they lack ultra-low freezing capability and large hold capacities. South African vessels typically use ice or refrigerated seawater to maintain their catch at approximately 0°C, whereas Japanese vessels freeze their catch to about -60°C. Due to their longer range, Japanese vessels can undertake trips for Southern SBT well beyond South Africa's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In contrast, the smaller size and limited freezing capacity of South African vessels restrict them from venturing as far south, where extreme weather conditions prevail. Consequently, South African vessels usually limit their trips to 14 days or less (A Penglides, 2022).

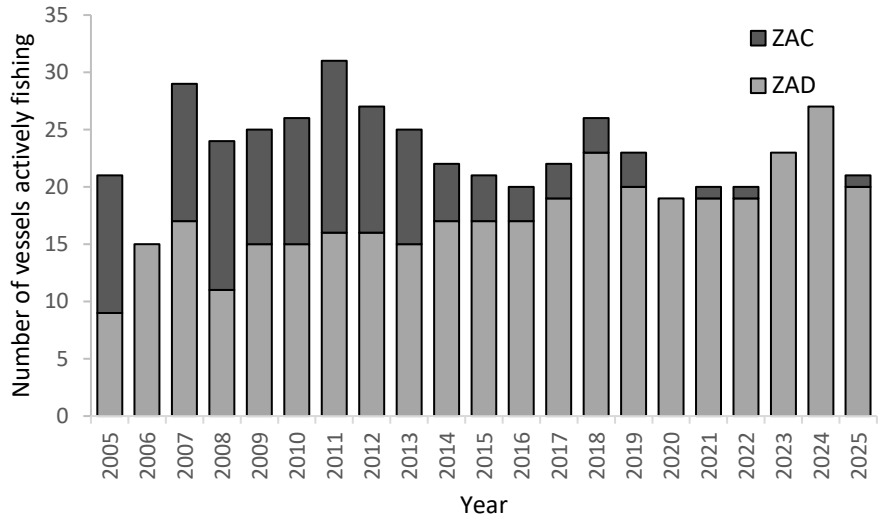



**Figure 1.** Number of domestic (ZAD) and joint venture (ZAC) vessels operating in South Africa each year from 2005 – 2025.

### *1.2 Summary of the Historical Developments in the Fishery – Tuna Pole-Line (Baitboat)*

Fishing for tunas using rod and reel and/or pole and line dates to the 1970s in South Africa when they were caught in minimal quantities as bycatch in other fisheries, making this the oldest commercial fishery for tuna in South Africa. Interest sparked in 1979 when yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*) became available close inshore off Cape Point (Shannon, 1968). Operators from other sectors converted their vessels to ice vessels to fish for yellowfin using pole and line or purse-seine nets, resulting in catches of over 4 500 t (Penney and Punt, 1993). By 1980 the yellowfin tuna was no longer available close inshore, resulting in these vessels targeting albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*) instead on the Southwest and West coasts of South Africa. Albacore catches peaked at 6 000 t in 1989, although these catches were under-reported and were probably closer to 10 000 t (Penney and Punt, 1993). The sector has continued to exploit juveniles and sub-adult albacore of between 2 and 3 years old (average of 86 cm FL) and larger yellowfin tuna (average of 133 cm FL). In addition to the uniform target species, vessels will augment catches opportunistically with snoek (*Thyrsites atun*) and yellowtail (*Seriola lalandi*).

This sector is effort controlled, limiting the number of vessels. Prior to 2006, the pole and line fishery was managed under the bracket of commercial linefishing. During the long-term rights allocation process

in 2006, the commercial linefishery was divided into three separate sectors consisting of the traditional linefishery (455 vessels and 3 450 crew), the hake-handline sector (130 vessels and 785 crew) and the tuna pole-line fishery (200 vessels and 3 600 crew) (Mann, 2013). Of the 200 vessels and 3 600 crew allocation available for 8 years, only 198 vessels and 2961 crew were allocated in 2006 (TAC/TAE, 2015). The reallocation of long-term rights in 2013 resulted in the allocation of 164 fishing rights and a total of 165 vessels granted for the 2013-2020 period. This reduction was a direct response to the 2013 ICCAT albacore stock assessment, which highlighted significant uncertainty around the estimates of albacore stock status in the south Atlantic.

In 2022, ICCAT allocated South Africa an annual albacore quota of 5 280 t for the period 2023 to 2026 (ICCAT, 2022), with the tuna pole-line sector responsible for catching 90% of this allocation. The latest tuna pole-line fishing rights were allocated in March 2022 for a period of 15 years. A total of 131 commercial fishing rights were granted (74 to new applicants), with each fishing right authorised to utilise one (1) or two (2) fishing vessels, with the total number of authorised vessels (139) not exceeding the TAE of 150 vessels. The South African tuna pole-line sector started to fish for SBT for the first time in 2016. The sector catches SBT opportunistically when targeting yellowfin tuna, resulting in relatively small amounts of fluctuating catches each season with a peak of 28 SBT (2.5 tons) landed in 2018.

Since vessels are small and the nature of the operation requires the vessel to maximise on crew (who work in pairs to catch and haul albacore), South Africa has not mandated vessels to accommodate human scientific observers and instead catches have been monitored in port during offloading. Two industry groups within this sector, which collectively cover the entire fleet, have achieved Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification in August and December 2024. The MSC certification process includes assessing and scoring external validation of evidence and information, and the adequacy of information through methods such as observer coverage. As such, this sector has voluntarily commenced with onboard human scientific observer coverage on suitable and willing vessels and their observer coverage currently is ~3% of fishing days.

### *1.3 Overview of the most recent fishing season*

During the 2024-2025 fishing season (1 March 2024 to 28 February 2025), 32 right holders reported SBT landings, which were made by 28 longline vessels (all ZAD) and four tuna pole-line vessels. In 2025, longline vessels landed 224.8 tons (N = 3329) and tuna pole-line vessels landed 1.66 tons (N = 18).

#### *1.3.1. Trends by gear type*

“Targeted” SBT effort is defined here as the total number of hooks per set that retained at least one SBT. The 2018/2019 season was the first time SBT directed effort exceeded 600 thousand hooks since the commercialization of the SBT fishery in 2015. SBT effort in the ZAD fleet has been steadily increasing over the period 2006-2016, from a mere 45 thousand hooks in 2006 to present levels of over 500 thousand hooks. In 2024 targeted effort in the ZAD fleet attained a maximum at over 1 000 thousand hooks (**Figure 2**). ZAC effort fluctuated widely between 6 (2010) and 497 (2007) thousand hooks, and in recent years little to no effort after 2019.

Similar to effort, total annual SBT landings reached a peak of 222 tons in 2018 and a maximum of 243 tons in 2024 (**Figure 3**). Consistent with relative catches since 2009, the domestic vessels accounted for the majority of South Africa’s annual SBT catch. In April 2016, quotas were for the first time allocated to the tuna pole-line sector, which contributed just over 2.3 tons (~ 5.5%) to total SBT catch in that season. Apart from the peak in catches in 2018 (2.5 tons), as occurred in the longline sector, the tuna pole-line sector catches <2 tons per season by on average 4 vessels.

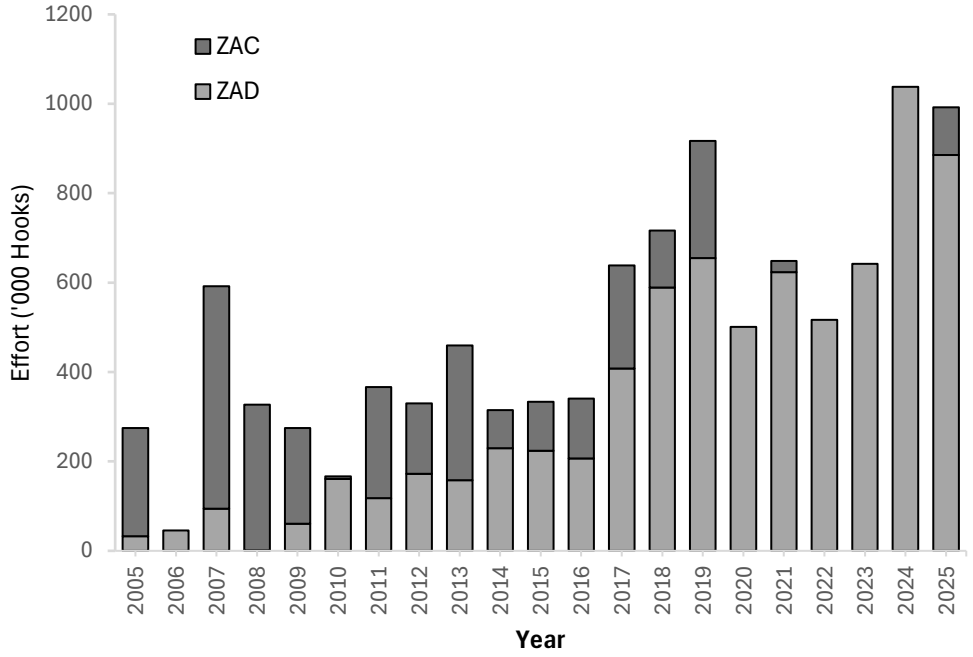



**Figure 2.** South African SBT directed domestic (ZAD) and chartered (ZAC) longline effort for the period 2005 – 2025. Effort is calculated as the total number of hooks in all sets that retained a SBT.

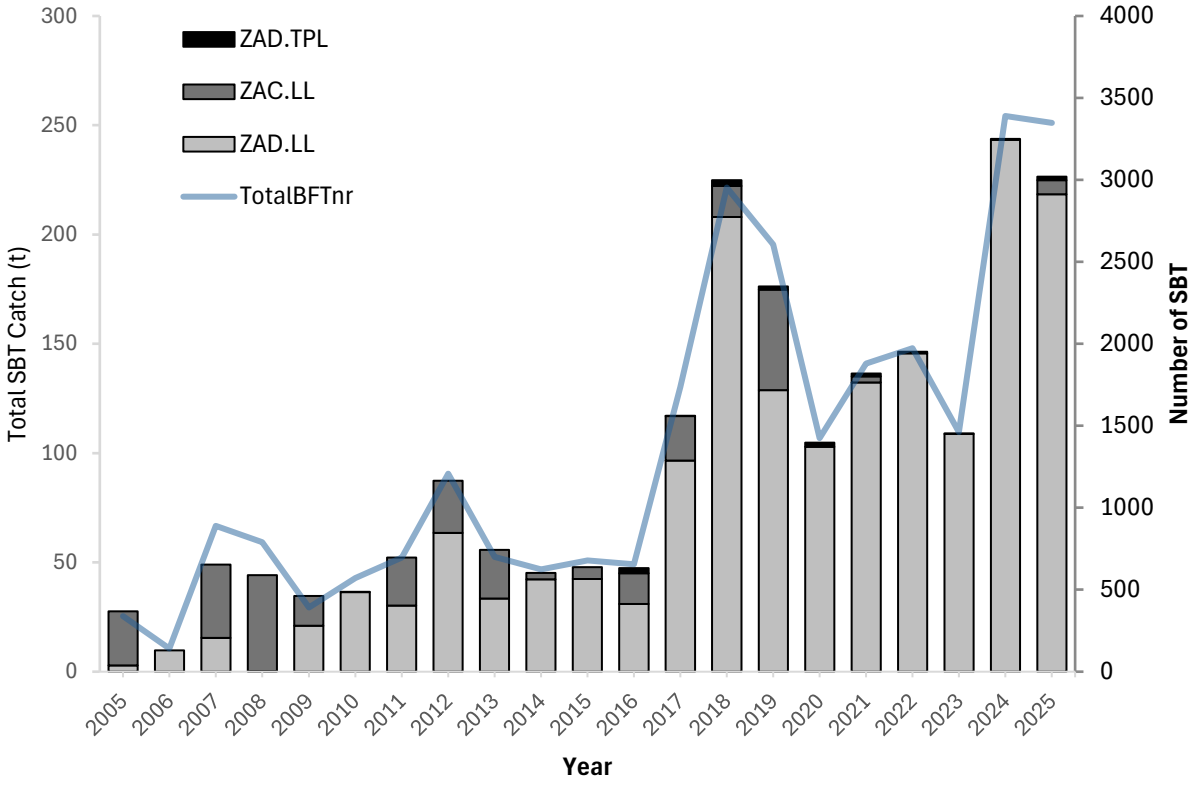



**Figure 3.** Total catches (tons) of SBT for South African longline (LL) vessels, domestic (ZAD) and chartered (ZAC), for the period 2005 – 2025; and the domestic tuna pole and line (TPL) from 2016. Total catch weights are up-scaled to reflect round weight using vessel-specific conversion factors for GGO and DRO. Total number of SBT caught for ZAD, ZAC and TPL combined from 2005-2025 is included.

### *1.3.2. Trends by area and season*

The longline fishery operates mostly within South Africa's EEZ from May to October; however, the majority of SBT catch is typically taken over a four-month period; June, July, August and September. Consistent with previous years, most catches of SBT from the 2019 to 2024 occurred from May to October, peaking in July (**Figure 4**). Area 14 produced relatively high catches in June/July, Area 15 had their highest catches in July/August, whereas catches peaked only in August/September in Area 9 (**Table 1**).

There are notable differences in the distribution of catch and effort between the ZAD and ZAC longline vessels (**Figures 5 & 6**). The ZAD fleet operates off the West coast of South Africa and the Northeast Coast (**Figure 5**), with effort distribution clearly associated with proximity to the two main fishing harbour locations (Cape Town on the West coast and Richards Bay on the East coast) and suitable fishing grounds for this mixed-target fishery. The catch distribution of the ZAD fleet appears further localised and contracted in these two areas since 2019 with catches made across CCSBT Statistical Areas 9, 14 and 15. The ZAC vessels of JP have been exclusively operating east of Cape Agulhas (>20° Longitude) 2014 to 2022 (**Figure 6**). These vessels showed a strong range contraction from formally widespread effort in Area 9, including the High Seas, to predominantly fishing South Africa's EEZ of Area 14. The few (1-3) JP-flagged ZAC vessels that operated under joint venture in 2019 and 2021 operated in offshore positions in Area 9. The ZAC vessel of TW operated in the east and west Atlantic in 2025, catching SBT in the East (~ -5ºE).

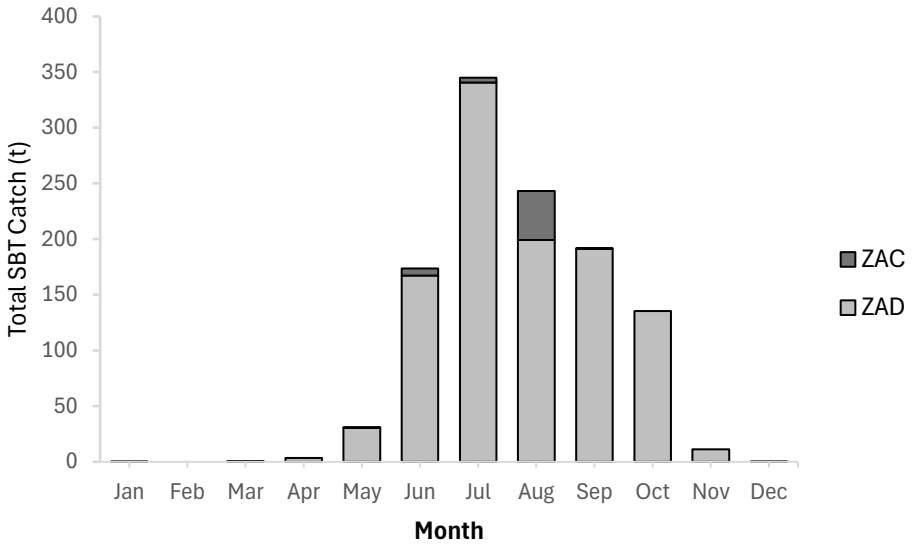



**Figure 4.** Total monthly SBT catch (in tons) for the Large Pelagic fishery of South Africa from 2019 – 2025. The catch statistics are derived from the domestic longline (LL ZAD) and chartered longline (LL ZAC).

**Table 1.** Spatial and temporal statistics of South African Large Pelagic longline fishery SBT catches for 2019 to 2025.

| Month | Area 15 | | Area 9 | | Area 14 | | Combined | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | nr | tons | nr | tons | nr | tons | nr | tons |
| Jan | 2 | 0.1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 0.1 |
| Feb | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Mar | 6 | 0.2 | 4 | 0.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 10 | 0.5 |
| Apr | 21 | 1.6 | 20 | 1.426 | 0 | 0.0 | 41 | 3.0 |
| May | 314 | 22.1 | 56 | 3.9 | 11 | 0.8 | 381 | 26.8 |
| Jun | 835 | 54.7 | 214 | 13.9 | 1155 | 82.3 | 2204 | 150.9 |
| Jul | 2091 | 128.5 | 820 | 52.2 | 1636 | 119.3 | 4547 | 300.0 |
| Aug | 1741 | 105.5 | 1982 | 101.9 | 85 | 4.1 | 3808 | 211.5 |
| Sep | 551 | 33.8 | 2272 | 132.5 | 3 | 0.2 | 2826 | 166.5 |
| Oct | 1051 | 61.7 | 964 | 55.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 2015 | 117.0 |
| Nov | 122 | 8.1 | 26 | 1.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 148 | 9.8 |
| Dec | 1 | 0.1 | 1 | 0.072 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0.2 |
| Total | 6735 | 416.4 | 6359 | 363.2 | 2890 | 206.8 | 15984 | 986.3 |

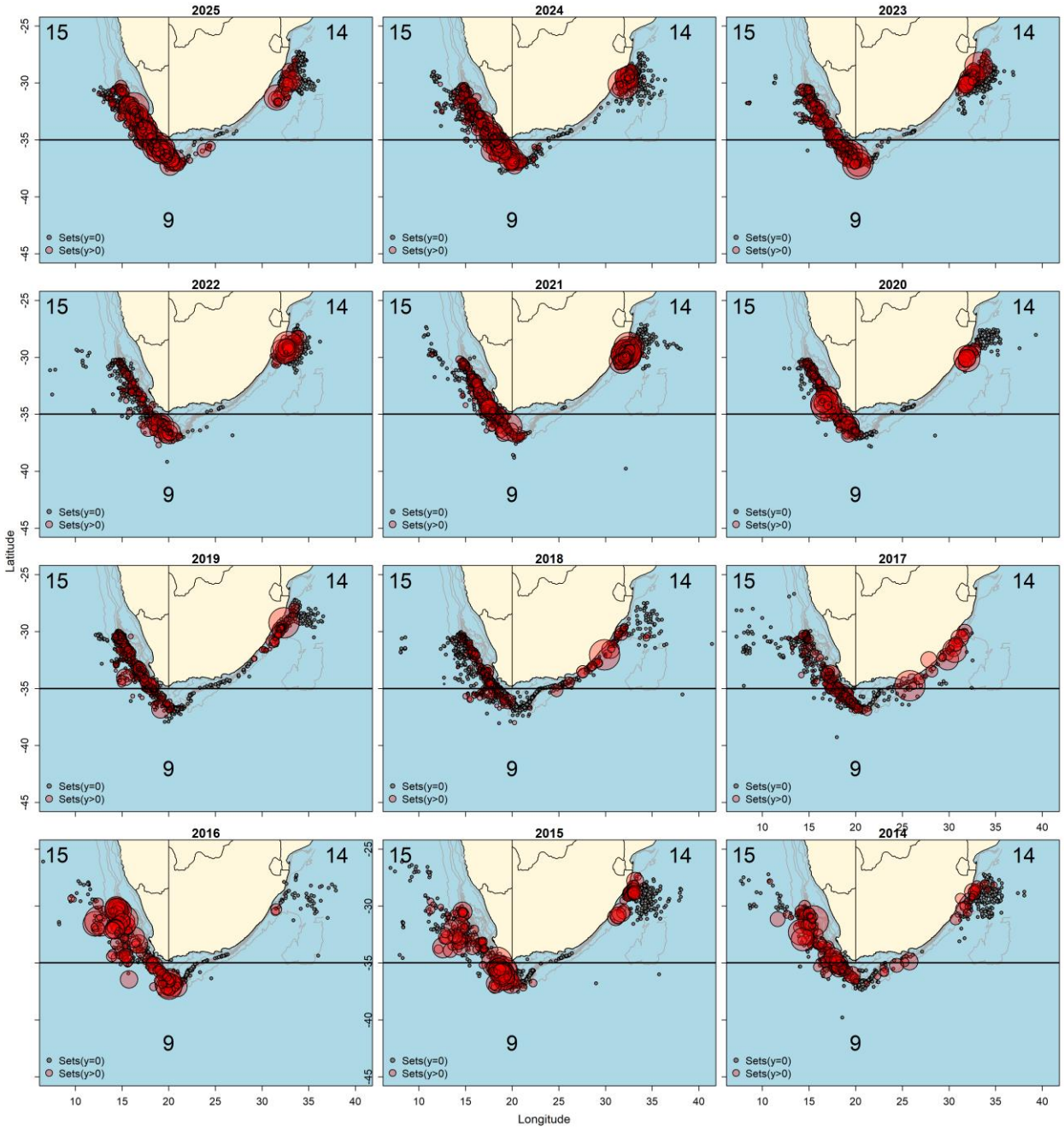



**Figure 5.** Annual distribution (2014 - 2025) of longline sets for the South African domestic vessels fleet (ZAD). The size of the bubble indicates the relative SBT catch per set in kg per 1000 hooks.

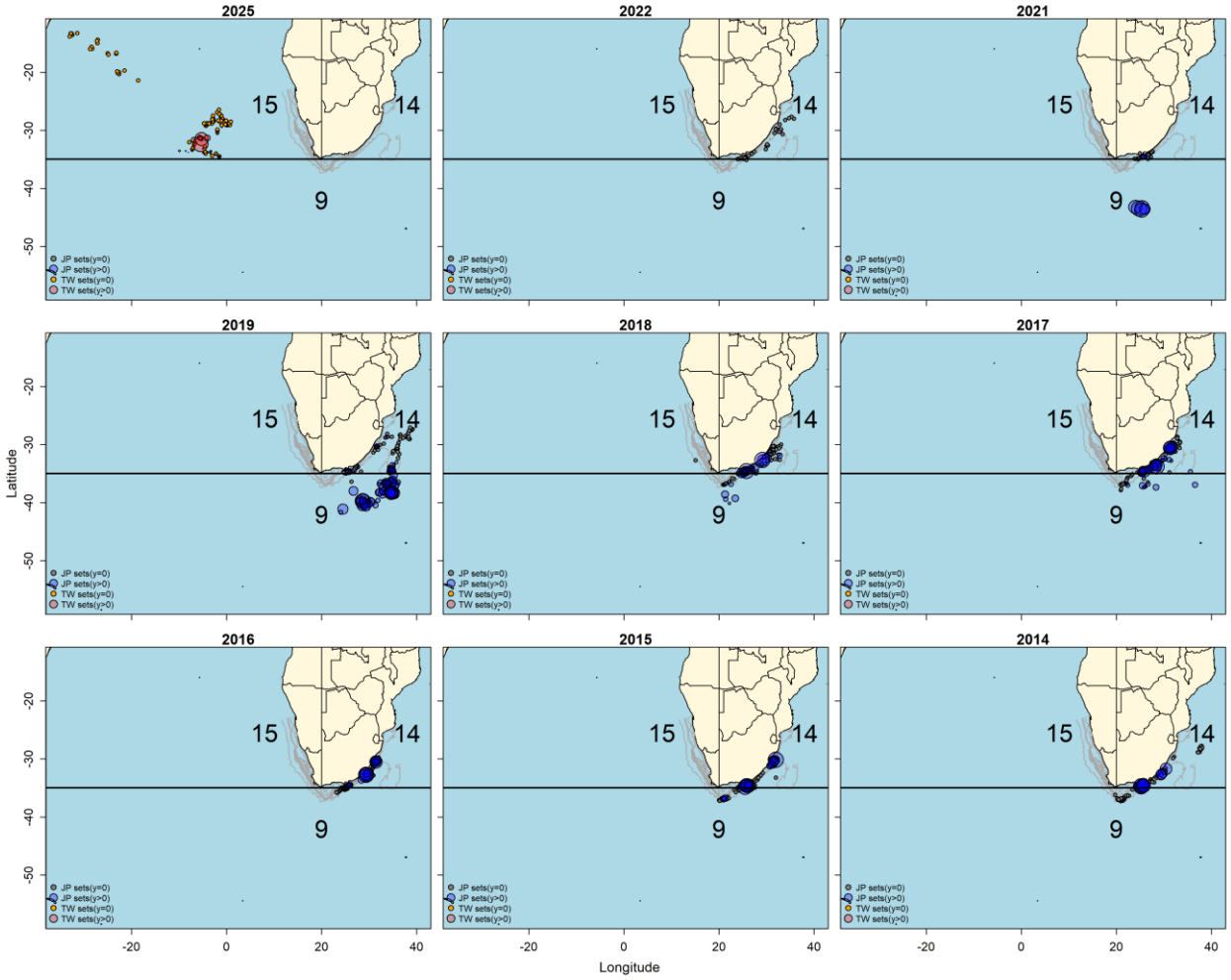



**Figure 6.** Annual distribution (2014 - 2025) of longline sets for the South African chartered (foreign flagged, JP and TW) vessels (ZAC). The size of the bubble indicates the relative SBT catch per set in kg per 1000 hooks.

## 2. Nominal CPUE

Nominal CPUE for the longline fleet sector was calculated as kilogram of SBT round weight per 1000 hooks (**Figure 7**) and number of SBT per 1000 hooks (**Figure 7a**). The nominal CPUE only includes sets that caught at least one SBT, which is consistent with the definition of "targeted" effort used throughout this report. In the absence of a direct SBT target fishery and given the historically small quota of 40 tons, the South African longline CPUE can therefore not be seen as an index of relative abundance. The CPUE trends in Areas 9 and 15 have showed overall no clearly discernible trend for both ZAD and ZAC vessels. There was a steep increase in ZAD CPUE in 2017 for Area 14, and has since returned to levels seen from the earlier period (**Figure 7**). The 2025 CPUE showed a slight increase compared to 2024 for the ZAD fleet in Areas 9 and 15 and a slight decrease in Area 14 (**Figure 7 and 7a**).

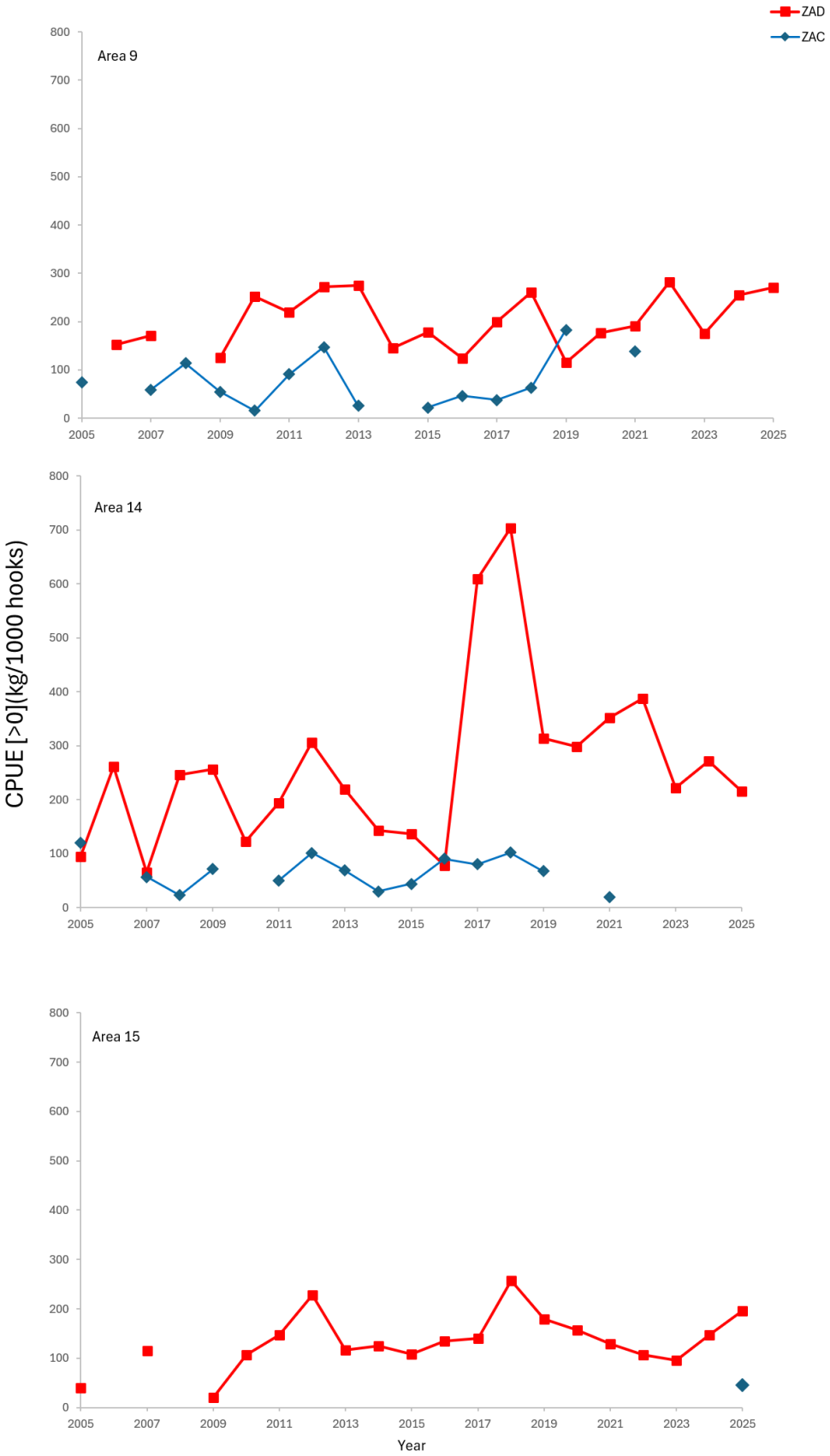



**Figure 7.** Trends in Nominal CPUE (kg/1000 hooks) by area and fleet segments of domestic and chartered vessels for SBT over the period 2005-2025. Effort is calculated as the total number of hooks in all sets that retained at least one SBT.

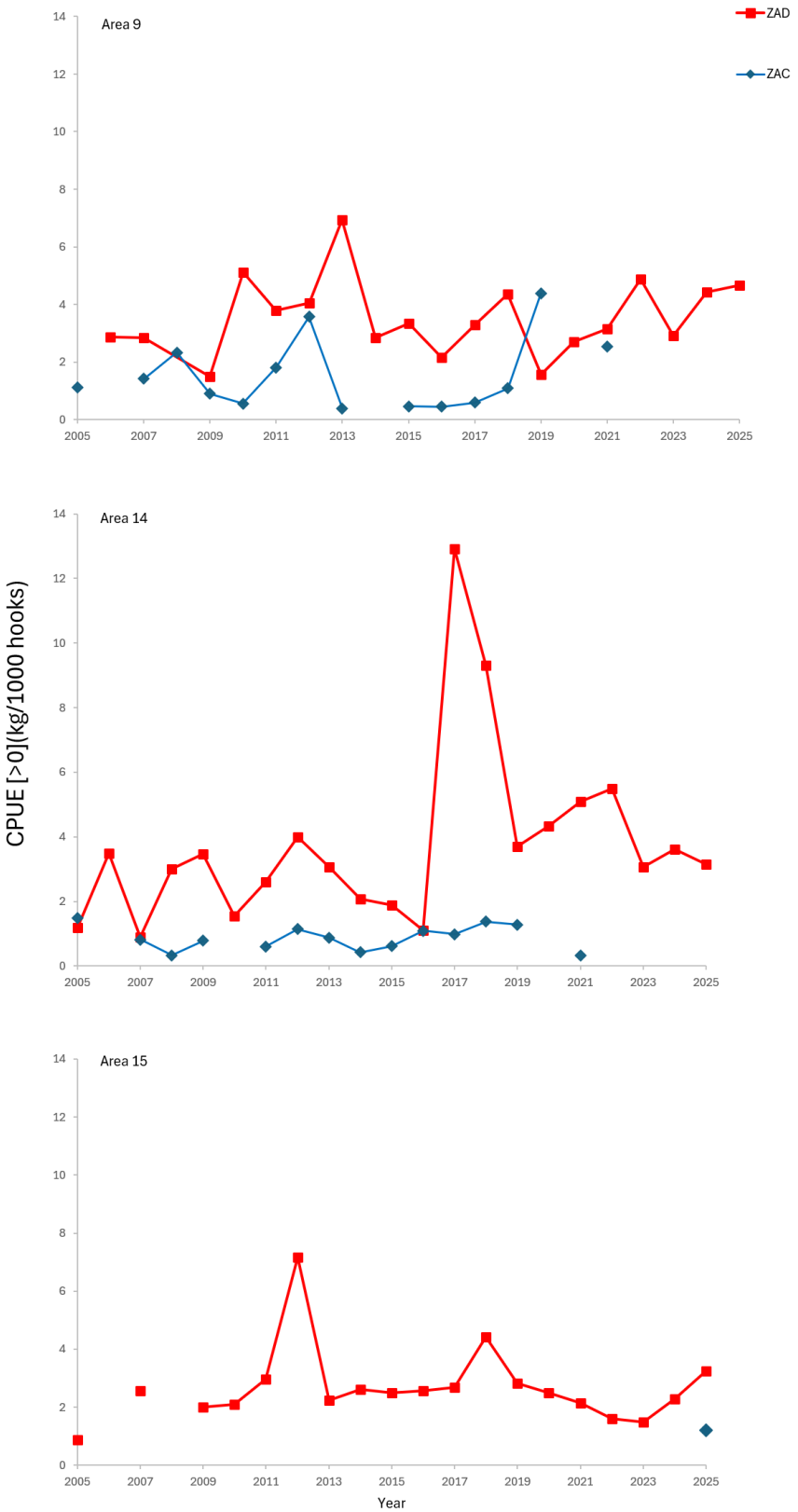



**Figure 7a.** Trends in Nominal CPUE (nr/1000 hooks) by area and fleet segments of domestic and chartered vessels for SBT over the period 2005-2025. Effort is calculated as the total number of hooks in all sets that retained at least one SBT.

## 3. Size composition

Size composition data (mm Fork Length) were compiled from the on-board scientific observer programme. A recent increase in size composition data in 2024 and 2025 is indicative of the increase in SBT catch and an improvement in observer coverage (**Figure 3 & 8, Table 2**). However, observer coverage has been skewed towards Area 15 in months when SBT catch is highest (June to August), with small sample sizes seen in Areas 9 and 14 in 2025 (**Figure 8**). The limited sample sizes in Area 9 during 2020 to 2023 and in 2025 have resulted in no clear trends or consistent patterns in length-frequency distributions that can be inferred for these years. The mean lengths in Area 14 and 15 have been fairly similar over the last five years, 168.0cm and 160.0 cm, respectively. The bimodal length frequency distribution in 2024 across the three Areas (**Figure 8**) can be largely attributed to vessel sampling bias; out of the 19 vessels that were sampled, 11 caught SBT that were on average 160cm – 170cm, 4 caught SBT that were on average 109cm – 127cm and the remaining vessels caught SBT across a wide size range. The total number of SBT measurements taken by observers was N = 553 in 2024 and N=579 in 2025, which equates to 16.3% of the total retained catch by all vessels and represents a significant improvement compared to the 1.0% measured SBT in 2022 and 8.5% in 2023 (**Table 2**). The 100% observer coverage required on ZAC vessels assisted in measuring 31.2% and 14.9% of SBT caught in 2019 and 2021, respectively (**Table 2**).

**Table 2.** The number and percentage of landed SBT measured by observers from 2017 to 2025.

| Year | Nr SBT measured | Percentage SBT measured |
|---|---|---|
| 2017 | 256 | 14.7 |
| 2018 | 381 | 12.9 |
| 2019 | 814 | 31.2 |
| 2020 | 333 | 23.4 |
| 2021 | 280 | 14.9 |
| 2022 | 20 | 1.0 |
| 2023 | 124 | 8.5 |
| 2024 | 553 | 16.3 |
| 2025 | 576 | 17.3 |

## 4. Fleet size and distribution

The number of ZAC vessels that caught at least one SBT has declined from 12 in 2007 to only three from 2016 – 2019, one in 2021 and 2025 and complete absence in 2022, 2023 and 2024 (**Table 3**). The activity of the ZAC JP-flagged fleet segment has notably shifted from Area 9 (2005-2010) to Area 14 (2013-2018), with the few vessels showing renewed interest in Area 9 in recent years. The TW-flagged vessel caught SBT in Area 15 in 2025 though its primary target was south Atlantic albacore. ZAD vessels reporting at least one SBT has been increasing gradually since 2005, reaching a maximum of 27 vessels in 2024. New vessels entering the sector have an interest in catching SBT and South Africa's quota allocation that has increased from historically 40 tons to 527 tons is a further encouragement. Area 14 has the lowest percentage of ZAD vessels reporting SBT catch, which reflects the small component of the fleet that operates in that region.

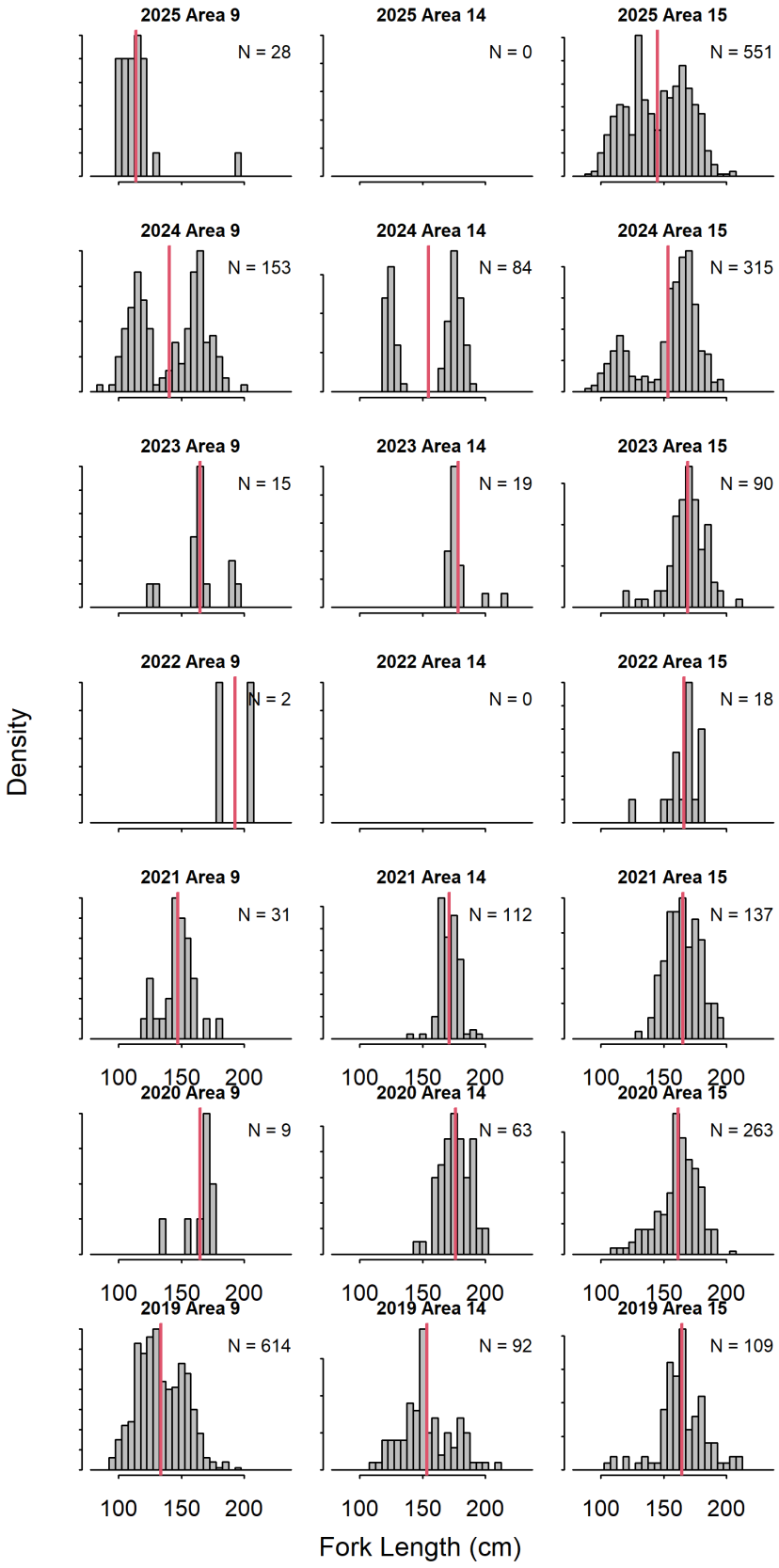



**Figure 8.** Length frequency distribution (in mm FL) of SBT by area based on observer data from 2019-2025, with red line denoting the mean length and N the sample size.

**Table 3.** Total number of active domestic (ZAD) and chartered joint-venture (ZAC) vessels that have landed at least one SBT per year and the percentage (%) of those vessels that reported a SBT from a specific CCSBT area, for the period 2005-2025.

| | ZAC | | | | ZAD | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Area 9 | Area 14 | Area 15 | Total N | Area 9 | Area 14 | Area 15 | Total N |
| 2005 | 100.0 | 36.4 | 0.0 | 11 | 0.0 | 66.7 | 33.3 | 3 |
| 2006 | | | | | 100.0 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 2 |
| 2007 | 100.0 | 50.0 | 0.0 | 12 | 77.8 | 11.1 | 44.4 | 9 |
| 2008 | 100.0 | 11.1 | 0.0 | 9 | 0.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 1 |
| 2009 | 100.0 | 25.0 | 0.0 | 8 | 25.0 | 75.0 | 25.0 | 4 |
| 2010 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2 | 44.4 | 33.3 | 66.7 | 9 |
| 2011 | 81.8 | 45.5 | 0.0 | 11 | 55.6 | 55.6 | 44.4 | 9 |
| 2012 | 77.8 | 77.8 | 0.0 | 9 | 66.7 | 44.4 | 33.3 | 9 |
| 2013 | 22.2 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 9 | 36.4 | 27.3 | 63.6 | 11 |
| 2014 | 0.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 4 | 54.5 | 27.3 | 81.8 | 11 |
| 2015 | 50.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 4 | 70.0 | 30.0 | 70.0 | 10 |
| 2016 | 33.3 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 3 | 90.0 | 10.0 | 80.0 | 10 |
| 2017 | 66.7 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 3 | 100.0 | 18.2 | 90.9 | 11 |
| 2018 | 33.3 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 3 | 81.3 | 31.3 | 68.8 | 16 |
| 2019 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 3 | 75.0 | 18.8 | 81.3 | 16 |
| 2020 | | | | | 70.6 | 17.6 | 76.5 | 17 |
| 2021 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 1 | 68.4 | 26.3 | 73.7 | 19 |
| 2022 | | | | | 66.7 | 27.8 | 66.7 | 18 |
| 2023 | | | | | 78.3 | 30.4 | 73.9 | 23 |
| 2024 | | | | | 70.4 | 25.9 | 85.2 | 27 |
| 2025 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 | 1 | 77.7 | 11.1 | 83.3 | 18 |

## 5. Scientific Observer Coverage

### *5.1. Observer Training*

Two observer comapnies in South Africa deploy observers onto large pelagic longline vessels, CapMarine (Capricorn Marine Environmental) and Imvelo Blue. These companies provide training that can be split into two components; in-house training and out-sourced specialised training. Prior to being accepted for training candidates should provide proof that they are medically fit (SAMSA approved seafarer's medical certificate (STCW95 compliant)). Observers begin their careers doing short trips outside of the large pelagics sector in order to evaluate their reliability and allow for upskilling of each observer before deployment in the large pelagic sector.

In-house training follows a curriculum close to the outline of the IOTC Regional Observer Scheme (ROS) – Basic Observer Training Curriculum and the ROS Scientific Field Observer Training Manual. Theoretical and background subjects are usually covered by lectures using PowerPoint presentations, video material and practical workshops such as visiting an operational pelagic longline vessel in port during the offloading and obtaining unprocessed tuna for training in biological sampling techniques.

The other important component of in-house training is data entry and capturing. At the end of the training period candidates are given a final examination on all the components covered during the training, which consists of a set of questions and practical exercises.

Out-sourced training is divided into compulsory safety training to meet international standards and additional specialised courses that will assist the observer both in the event of emergencies and the professional execution of their duties. This training is outsourced to accredited organisations that conform to "The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch keeping for Seafarers (STCW). Subjects that are outsourced are:

- Compulsory: Personal Survival Techniques (PST), Personal Safety and Social responsibility (PSSR)
- Additional: Practical First Aid and CPR, Fire Fighting, GMDSS (Global Maritime Distress and Safety System).

### *5.2. Scientific Observer Program Design and Coverage*

The observer program was established in 1998, at the start of the experimental phase of the pelagic longline fishery, and a minimum 20% observer coverage was stipulated. The government-funded Offshore Resources Observer Programme (OROP) began in March 2002 and required 100% observer coverage on foreign-flagged vessels. Up until March 2011, 11- 20% observer coverage was achieved on ZAD vessels per year based on the total effort deployed. This government-funded observer programme contract expired in March 2011, and the Department has not re-established the programme. The observer programme for foreign-flagged charter vessels continued, with 100% observer coverage achieved on all charter vessel fishing trips (**Table 4**). As required by the regulations, the cost of the observer was borne by the right holder. Observer coverage on the ZAD fleet has also increased progressively since 2016 through the implementation of regulatory measures prescribing a minimum level of observer coverage per vessel, with the associated costs likewise borne by the right holder (**Table 4**).

The effective observer coverage of SBT effort (number of hooks per sets with at least one SBT) for the ZAD fleet declined in 2021 (6.2%) and 2022 (2.4%) and efforts in place in 2023 has seen observer coverage increase to 13.9% in 2023 and 19.7% in 2024 and 16.8% in 2025 (**Table 4**). The ZAD fleet straddles Area 15 and Area 9, with a smaller proportion of effort deployed in Area 9. Achieving a 10-20% observer coverage of SBT effort that is spatially and temporally representative of Areas 9, 14 and 15 for a fleet that is a mixed-target fishery requires agile planning of deployments.

As mentioned previously, since tuna pole-line vessels are small and the nature of the operation requires the vessel to maximise on crew, South Africa has not mandated these vessels to accommodate a human scientific observer and instead catches have been monitored in port during offloading.

To improve the spatio-temporal observer coverage for ZAD fleet segment, since 2018-2019 Section 16 (Observer Programme) of the Large Pelagic Longline Permit Conditions require Permit Holders to carry one or more scientific observers on board their vessel on a minimum of one fishing trip per quarter so as to ensure that 20% of all fishing days per quarter are monitored.

In 2026, the permit conditions were further improved through the development of an observer coverage schedule based on recent fishing activity (2021–2025). It provides right holders with a practical framework for achieving the required observer coverage while maintaining spatio-temporal representativeness. The schedule converts the required observer coverage into the number of trips to be observed for each vessel, based on average number of fishing days per year, average trip duration, proportion of trips conducted per quarter, proportion of trips conducted in ICCAT and IOTC regions. Observer trips are then allocated across quarters according to each vessel's historical seasonal fishing patterns, ensuring that coverage reflects when vessels typically operate without requiring changes to

normal fishing behaviour. The schedule is intended as a guideline to support compliance with observer coverage requirements, which is now 15-20%, while recognising that actual fishing activity may vary between years, and that right holders remain responsible for ensuring the required level of observer coverage is achieved.

### *5.3. Observer Data Collected and Tag Return Monitoring*

The observers collect all operational, catch (retained and discard, with fate code), effort and length frequency data, and will collect biological material when required. The observers record data on the following forms:

- Form 1: Vessel and trip information sheet (IOTC Form I-GEN)
- Form 2D: Pelagic longline gear and operation information (IOTC Form 2-LL)
- Form 3D: Fishing effort pelagic long-line (IOTC Form 4-LL)
- Form 4: Marine mammal, sea turtle, and seabird incidental take form
- Form 6: Depredation
- Form 7: Fish biological sampling

The observers conduct exhaustive sampling and are required to collect length data on all tuna and bycatch species caught for at least 80 % of the line.

A high percentage of all fish landed are monitored and observers submit data on recovered tags when encountered.

**Table 4.** Total fishing and observed effort[2] for South Africa's ZAD vessels from 2019 to 2025 in the pelagic longline fishery.

| Fleet code | Year | Gear code | CCSBT area | Total hooks set | Total hooks observed | Observer coverage (percentage) | Observer coverage (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ZAD | 2019 | LL | 9 | 65375 | 9790 | 15.0 | |
| ZAD | 2019 | LL | 14 | 65805 | 6325 | 9.6 | 13.4 |
| ZAD | 2019 | LL | 15 | 523659 | 71896 | 13.7 | |
| ZAD | 2020 | LL | 9 | 71858 | 4240 | 5.9 | |
| ZAD | 2020 | LL | 14 | 45850 | 8000 | 17.4 | 19.9 |
| ZAD | 2020 | LL | 15 | 383277 | 87499 | 22.8 | |
| ZAD | 2021 | LL | 9 | 33996 | 1512 | 4.4 | |
| ZAD | 2021 | LL | 14 | 124971 | 22350 | 17.9 | 6.2 |
| ZAD | 2021 | LL | 15 | 465776 | 15100 | 3.2 | |
| ZAD | 2022 | LL | 9 | 82393 | 1512 | 1.8 | |
| ZAD | 2022 | LL | 14 | 145214 | 0 | 0.0 | 2.4 |
| ZAD | 2022 | LL | 15 | 288957 | 11088 | 3.8 | |
| ZAD | 2023 | LL | 9 | 145878 | 11882 | 8.1 | |
| ZAD | 2023 | LL | 14 | 103391 | 13139 | 12.7 | 13.9 |
| ZAD | 2023 | LL | 15 | 388909 | 63816 | 16.4 | |
| ZAD | 2024 | LL | 15 | 663940 | 136505 | 20.6 | |
| ZAD | 2024 | LL | 9 | 222679 | 29114 | 13.1 | 19.7 |
| ZAD | 2024 | LL | 14 | 151385 | 38428 | 25.4 | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ZAD | 2025 | LL | 15 | 731108 | 145097 | 19.8 | |
| ZAD | 2025 | LL | 9 | 107606 | 3252 | 3.0 | 16.8 |
| ZAD | 2025 | LL | 14 | 46680 | 0 | 0 | |

[2]Effort is defined as number of hooks per set with at least one SBT retained as catch

**Table 5.** Total fishing and observed effort[2] for South Africa's ZAC vessels from 2019 to 2025 in the pelagic longline fishery.

| Fleet code | Year | Gear code | CCSBT area | Total hooks set | Total hooks observed | Observer coverage (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ZAC | 2019 | LL | 9 | 183635 | 183635 | 100 |
| ZAC | 2019 | LL | 14 | 78639 | 78639 | 100 |
| ZAC | 2021 | LL | 9 | 16116 | 16116 | 100 |
| ZAC | 2021 | LL | 14 | 9228 | 9228 | 100 |
| ZAC | 2025 | LL | 15 | 131280 | 131280 | 100 |

[2]Effort is defined as number of hooks per set with at least one SBT retained as catch

## 6. Research and monitoring to improve estimates of components of attributable catch

### *6.1. Releases and/or discards*

The right holder is not permitted to discard SBT that are undersize. Dead discards are only permitted when the right holder does not have SBT allocation remaining. Observers report data on dead discards and live releases, and these data are provided in Table 2 of the ERSWG data exchange (**Table 6**).

South African scientists have recently used the Bycatch Estimator toolkit (R package BycatchEstimator) (Babcock *et al.*, 2022) to estimate total annual bycatch of swordfish (SCRS/2026/133) and shortfin mako (SCRS/2026/134) in the ICCAT region. The tool works by expanding the data from an observer program to the total effort from logbooks or landing records. The toolkit can be used in the future to estimate the total annual dead discards and live releases of SBT.

**Table 6**. Observed captures/mortalities of SBT, by country, year, fishery and strata for 2025, reported by South Africa to the ERSWG.

**Table 2: Observed and estimated captures/mortalities for each species, by country, year, fishery and strata**

| Country / Fishing Entity | Calendar Year | Quarter | Fishery | | Human Observer / EM | Area | | Species Code or Species Group Code | Species Scientific Name or Species Group Name | Observed Captures Fate (*numbers*) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Gear Code | Fleet Code | | Longitude | Latitude | | | Retained (dead) | Discarded (dead) | Released (live) | Other |
| ZA | 2025 | 3 | LL | ZAD | OBS | 10 | -30 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 24 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TW | 2025 | 3 | LL | ZAC | OBS | -5 | -25 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ZA | 2025 | 3 | LL | ZAD | OBS | 15 | -35 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 207 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| ZA | 2025 | 4 | LL | ZAD | OBS | 15 | -35 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ZA | 2025 | 3 | LL | ZAD | OBS | 15 | -30 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 206 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| TW | 2025 | 2 | LL | ZAC | OBS | 0 | -30 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 35 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ZA | 2025 | 4 | LL | ZAD | OBS | 10 | -30 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TW | 2025 | 2 | LL | ZAC | OBS | -5 | -30 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 28 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TW | 2025 | 3 | LL | ZAC | OBS | 0 | -30 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ZA | 2025 | 2 | LL | ZAD | OBS | 15 | -30 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TW | 2025 | 3 | LL | ZAC | OBS | -5 | -30 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 77 | 1 | 10 | 0 |
| ZA | 2025 | 4 | LL | ZAD | OBS | 15 | -30 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 18 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TW | 2025 | 3 | LL | ZAC | OBS | 0 | -25 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| ZA | 2025 | 2 | LL | ZAD | OBS | 15 | -35 | SBF | Thunnus maccoyii | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

### *6.2. Recreational fishing, Customary and/or traditional and Artisanal*

The boat-based recreational sector, including informal charter and sport fisheries using rod and reel and spear guns, also catches albacore, yellowfin, skipjack, bigeye, eastern little and southern bluefin tunas

and billfish (swordfish, blue marlin *Makaira nigricans*, black marlin *Makaira indica*, longbill spearfish *Tetrapturus pfluegeri*, shortbill spearfish *Tetrapturus angustirostris* and striped marlin *Kajikia audax*), from small fishing vessels (on average 4 – 10 m in length). All recreational fishers are required to purchase a permit and are restricted to a bag-limit of 10 tunas, 5 swordfish and 5 billfish per day, with the sale of catch strictly prohibited. There are further minimum weight restrictions of 3.2 kg for yellowfin and bigeye, 6.4 kg for southern bluefin and 25 kg for swordfish caught. As there are no reporting requirements for this sector, catch and effort data are not consistently available. The angling associations have regular tuna and billfish competitions every year where they promote research (e.g., tagging), catch-and-release and responsible fishing. Most recreational fishing takes place in nearshore waters during holidays and relatively few anglers are equipped to target tuna. There are no reported catches of southern bluefin tuna made by the recreational sector, however South Africa sets aside a 5t allowance of their SBT allocation for this sector every year.

## 7. Other relevant information

None to report.

## 8. Literature cited

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