

# Taking Tuna Out of the Can

Retailers' Roles in Rescuing  
the World's Favourite Fish

Fourth Edition: April 2010



GREENPEACE



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Left: Canned Skipjack tuna for sale in a supermarket

Below: A Greenpeace activist holds a juvenile bigeye tuna - bycatch found in the hold of an Ecuadorian purse-seine fishing vessel, which uses fish aggregation devices (FADs) to attract fish. Bigeye tuna stocks are in deep decline in all oceans as a result of overfishing.

Global tuna stocks are in big trouble. Tuna is one of the world's favourite fish, the staple protein in the diet of millions, and the fish at the core of the luxury sashimi market. Perhaps the best known example is bluefin tuna. Since industrial-scale fishing of bluefin tuna began in the 1950s, the biomass of southern bluefin tuna (South Pacific ocean) has been reduced by some 95%<sup>1</sup> and the species was listed as endangered by the IUCN in 1996<sup>2</sup>. For bluefin tuna harvested in the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea, the most recent assessment (2008) showed the breeding stock of the eastern bluefin tuna population had declined from slightly above 300,000 tonnes in 1955 to just 78,700 tonnes in 2007.

The depletion of the other major global tuna stocks has been recorded by fisheries scientists over many years. Today, there is the real possibility that commercial extinction is imminent for some stocks of these valuable and iconic species. As tuna stocks in their own waters disappear, industrial tuna fleets from Japan, EU member states, Taiwan, Korea, the US and increasingly China and the Philippines are travelling further and further away to fill their holds. Pirate fishing is also common within the tuna fishing industry. Combined with the rise in fishing capacity, this illegal fishing is endangering tuna in all oceans.

If retailers want to continue selling tuna in the future, then they need to take action now. This means an end to buying from unsustainable, unfair and, in many cases, illegal sources. To be able to ensure that the tuna bought is sustainably caught from well managed fisheries, retailers must be able to trace the chain of custody of the tuna they buy. This means knowing where, when and how it was caught, and also that the fishing operator pays a fair price for their fishing licence from the coastal states whose resources they exploit.

Greenpeace is an independent global campaigning organisation that acts to change attitudes and behaviour, to protect and conserve the environment and to promote peace.

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Published in April 2010  
by Greenpeace International  
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1 CSIRO Marine Research (1999) Southern Bluefin Tuna Information Sheet No 31: <http://www.marine.csiro.au/LeafletsFolder/pdfsheets/31tuna.pdf>

2 IUCN (2007) IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Publ. IUCN <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>



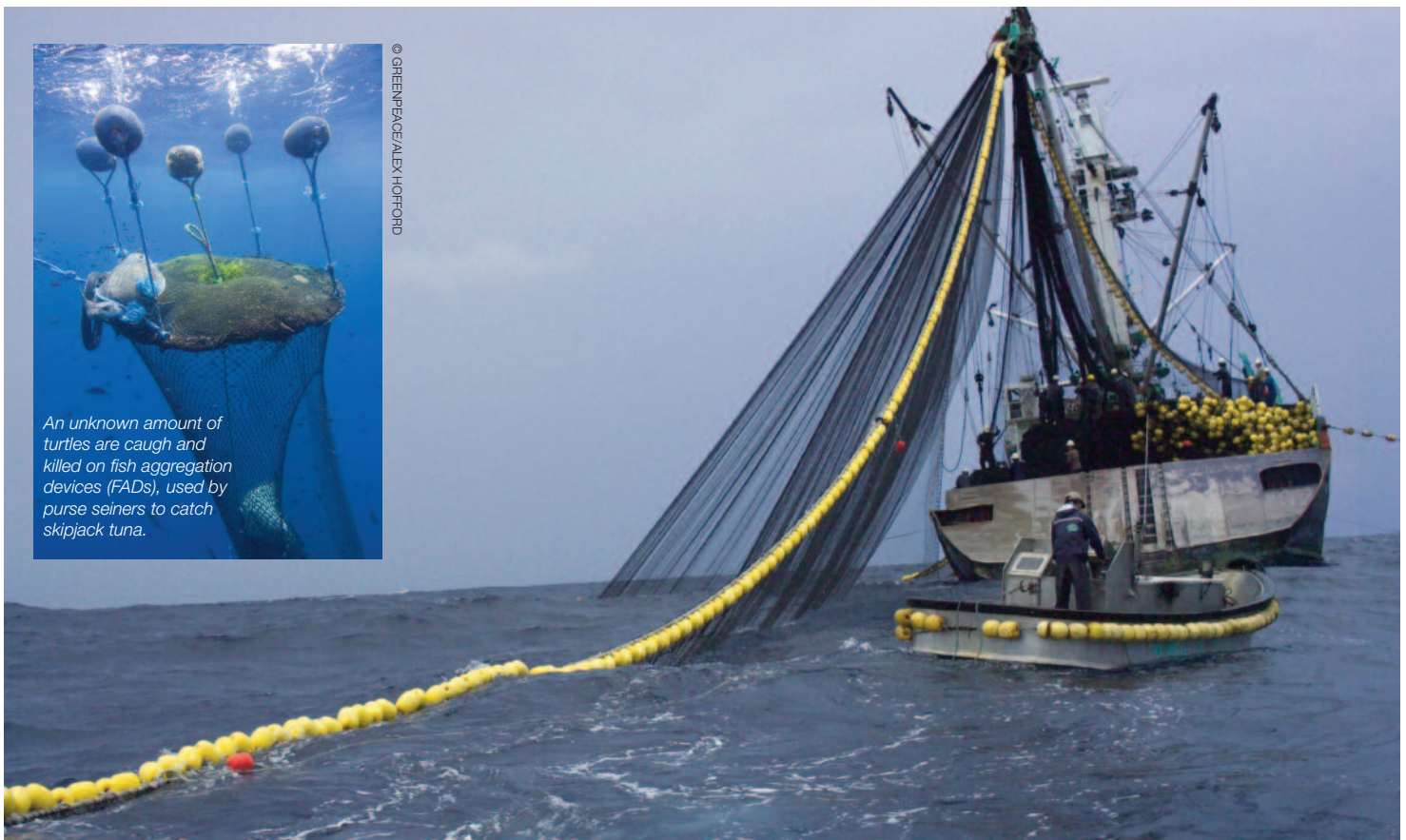
“Worldwide, up to 90% of stocks of large predatory fish have already been wiped out.”<sup>4</sup>

## Tuna Facts in a Can

### STOCKS IN PERIL:

- There are seven species of tuna that are of principal commercial interest: albacore, Atlantic bluefin, bigeye, Pacific bluefin, skipjack<sup>3</sup>, southern bluefin, and yellowfin are the single most important resource exploited in international waters<sup>5</sup>.
- Tuna stocks worldwide are in trouble. All 23 identified commercially exploited stocks are heavily fished, with at least nine classified as fully fished and a further four classified as overexploited or depleted<sup>6</sup>. Three stocks are classified as Critically Endangered, three as Endangered, and three as Vulnerable to extinction<sup>7</sup>.

- The bluefin and bigeye stocks worldwide are those in the most immediate danger of collapse, with some stocks threatened with extinction. Worldwide yellowfin stocks have now also reached a state where overfishing is suspected to be occurring in all oceans, with many stocks in serious decline<sup>8,9</sup>.
- Skipjack fisheries are the highest volume tuna fisheries in the world. The huge overcapacity in purse seining fleets<sup>10</sup>, the most common method of catching skipjack, is now undermining both the sustainability of the stocks and the economic viability of the industry itself. With the increasing use of Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs) - floating platforms to which tuna are instinctively drawn - the skipjack fisheries are now threatening the survival of the more vulnerable bigeye and yellowfin fisheries as large amounts of juveniles of these species are caught as bycatch.



An unknown amount of turtles are caught and killed on fish aggregation devices (FADs), used by purse seiners to catch skipjack tuna.

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Purse seiner *Yu Wen 101* hauls its net in the Pacific Ocean as one of its skiff boats controls the net.

**3** Despite being perhaps the most widely known 'tuna', skipjack are technically not a tuna, belonging instead to the mackerel (*Scombridae*) family.

**4** Myers RA and Worm B. 2003. 'Rapid Worldwide Depletion of Predatory Fish Communities', *Nature* 423, pg. 280-3.

**5** FAO (2006) State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) - SOFIA 2006. FAO

**6** Maguire J, Sissenwine M, Csirke J, Grainger R, Garcia S. (2006) The state of world highly migratory, straddling and other high seas fishery resources and associated species. FAO Fisheries Technical Paper. No. 495. Rome: FAO.

**7** The IUCN assessments are now over 10 years old and thus out of date. The status of the stocks however cannot be considered as improved since the last assessments and if anything, the status of the species is likely to have deteriorated since the assessments.

**8** Marsh J. (2006a) Seafood Watch Seafood Report: Yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*) pub. Monterey Bay Aquarium, Final Report. 91pp [http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/cr\\_seafoodwatch/content/media/MBA\\_SeafoodWatch\\_YellowfinTunaReport.pdf](http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/cr_seafoodwatch/content/media/MBA_SeafoodWatch_YellowfinTunaReport.pdf)

**9** Marsh J. (2006b) Seafood Watch Seafood Report: Bigeye tuna (*Thunnus obesus*) pub. Monterey Bay Aquarium, Final Report. 78pp. [http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/cr\\_seafoodwatch/content/media/MBA\\_SeafoodWatch\\_BigeyeTunaReport.pdf](http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/cr_seafoodwatch/content/media/MBA_SeafoodWatch_BigeyeTunaReport.pdf)

**10** Purse seiners send a small boat 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 'purse'd' at the base and hauled alongside and on board the parent ship.

“Killed alongside the skipjack tuna that finds itself in your tin is almost the entire cast list of 'Finding Nemo'”<sup>11</sup>

## WASTED MARINE LIFE:



- Global pelagic longline fleets<sup>12</sup> set around 1.4 billion hooks each year. Turtles, sharks and birds are caught accidentally as bycatch. The problem is a big one: it is estimated that around 250,000 loggerhead turtles and 60,000 leatherback turtles are caught as bycatch annually<sup>13</sup>. The great leatherback turtle may be threatened with extinction as a result of interactions with tuna and other fisheries<sup>14</sup>. Populations of species such as blue sharks have been markedly depleted by tuna fishing operations in the central Pacific<sup>15</sup>.
- Only a small percentage of tuna fleets have independent observers onboard to record the activities of the vessels. This makes it much easier for fleets to under-report their catch and to illegally remove shark fins, devastating the world's shark populations.
- In addition, an estimated 60% to 70% of all purse seiners use FADs<sup>16</sup>, which as well as attracting skipjack also entice other marine species including young bigeye and yellowfin. These young tuna are vital for breeding and future stock growth, which together with other marine life such as sharks, turtles and unwanted fish get caught and killed as bycatch.

## STOLEN FROM THE POOR:

- Big fishing nations such as Japan, EU member states, Taiwan, Korea and China negotiate access agreements to fish for tuna in developing countries' coastal waters. The agreements end up being incredibly unfair. Often, coastal states will only receive between 5% and 6% of the value of this multi-billion dollar industry.
- Lack of adequate regulations and the practice of transferring catch at sea (transshipping), exacerbates pirate fishing. This contributes to the ongoing decline of tuna stocks and loss of income for poor developing states.

# Remove the Worst and Improve the Rest

## WHAT RETAILERS SHOULD DO:

- Bluefin tuna:** The bluefin tuna crisis is so critical that retailers must stop selling all bluefin tuna until stocks recover.
- Bigeye and Yellowfin tuna:** Retailers should stop selling bigeye and yellowfin tuna until fishing effort of these fisheries is reduced to sustainable levels.
- Skipjack tuna:** Skipjack is in better shape than most other tuna species but all skipjack tuna caught by purse seiners using FADs should be rejected as unsustainable because of the bycatch problem which is undermining the recovery of the threatened bigeye and yellowfin fisheries.

Retailers should also exercise extreme care in purchasing skipjack because of widespread illegal fishing and unfair returns to developing coastal states. They must examine their products and supply chain with care and seek best practice sustainable and equitable supplies, especially those originating from well-managed fisheries using pole-and-line, hand-line and troll-fishing methods.

**Albacore tuna and others:** Declined stocks in some oceans, illegal fisheries and unfair returns to coastal states are a major source of concern for these fisheries. Retailers should examine their products and supply chain with care and seek for best practice sustainable and equitable supplies, especially those originating from well-managed fisheries using pole-and-line, hand-line and troll-fishing methods.



Activists from Fiji and Papua New Guinea in the hold of the Philippine ship KenKen 888, which was caught transshipping illegal tuna in the Pacific.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Clover, author of 'End of the Line', 2005

<sup>12</sup> Longlining uses fishing lines over 100 km long strung with up to 3,000 baited hooks set up to 100m apart. Sharks, turtles and seabirds take the baits and get caught on the hooks.

<sup>13</sup> Lewison RL, Freeman SA and Crowder LB. (2004) Ecology Letters 7: 221-231

<sup>14</sup> Ferraroli S, Georges J-Y, Gaspar P and Le Maho Y. (2004) Where leatherback turtles meet fisheries. Nature, 429: 521

<sup>15</sup> Schindler DE, Essington TE, Kitchell JF, Boggs C and Hilborn R. (2002) Sharks and Tunas: Fisheries impacts on predators with contrasting life histories Ecological Applications 12 (3): 735-748

<sup>16</sup> Figures based on presentation by Dr Martin Hall of ITTC, April 2009



*The solutions exist, but we must act now - time and tuna are running out.*

## Support the Best Sustainable Equitable Alternatives

Retailers should actively seek and support more sustainable and equitable sources of tuna. The best option for this is well-managed domestic, small-scale pole-and-line, handline and troll tuna<sup>17</sup> fisheries in developing country coastal states from intact stocks.

If tuna caught via fishing techniques other than pole-and-line or troll is purchased, retailers need to ensure that, for purse seine vessels, the fishery does not use FADs and has observers onboard for the full duration of the fishing trip. The vessels should also use all possible means to avoid dolphins or other bycatch. Longline vessels should have 100% observers and state of the art mitigation methods to avoid bycatch and not transship their catches at sea.

For equitable alternatives, purchasing tuna directly from coastal state operators is always preferable, as access agreements with foreign fishing nations are by and large incredibly unfair to developing coastal states.

If tuna is purchased from operators of foreign fishing fleets, then retailers need to ensure that these companies have fair access agreements with strong sustainable and equitable standards<sup>18</sup>.

This means that the financial returns of the agreements need to be:

- in the region of 30% or more of the value of the fishery;
- agreements are negotiated between flag and coastal states (no private company deals); and
- accompanied by effective means for monitoring, control and surveillance of the fishery operations.

In addition, retailers should demand that the companies they purchase tuna from have sustainable and equitable policies and are actively engaged in advocating sustainable management of tuna stocks at the political level.

## HELP DEVELOP BETTER FISHERIES

Currently, sources of pole-and-line skipjack are limited. Only a handful of coastal states are engaged in this fishing method. Retailers should actively seek coastal state partners willing to develop pole-and-line operations and assist in ensuring market access and capacity building (see full report on sourcing sustainable and equitable pole-and-line skipjack tuna,

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/press/reports/retailers-guide-skipjack>).

Having a purchaser guarantee will be a key factor in encouraging and empowering tuna-rich coastal states to restrict the access of foreign operators to their EEZs and develop their own sustainable and equitable pole-and-line and other tuna fishing industries. Greenpeace encourages companies to demonstrate the market demand for better products by joining the 'pre-order petition' for sustainable and equitable skipjack tuna products. By April 2010 over 75 million tins have been 'ordered' by European and US tuna traders and retailers.

Sign up at:

[http://www.greenpeace.at/uploads/media/Preorder\\_Petition\\_Tuna\\_web.pdf](http://www.greenpeace.at/uploads/media/Preorder_Petition_Tuna_web.pdf)



*Pole-and-line fishermen in the Maldives catching skipjack tuna.*



*Skipjack tuna caught by the pole-and-line method clearly labelled in UK supermarkets.*

<sup>17</sup> Trolling is a method of fishing in which some form of bait is drawn on a line through the water.

<sup>18</sup> For full detailed recommendations, please refer to section 5 of the Greenpeace report *Taking Tuna Out of the Can: Rescue Plan for the World's Favourite Fish*, available at <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/press/reports/taking-tuna-out-of-the-can>

## INTERNATIONAL SEAFOOD SUSTAINABILITY FOUNDATION - SOLUTION TO SUSTAINABILITY?

The International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF) calls itself 'a global partnership among science, the tuna industry and the environmental non-governmental community'. Its mission is to 'undertake science-based initiatives for the long-term conservation and sustainable use of tuna stocks, reducing bycatch and promoting ecosystem health'. Some of the world's largest tuna brands (Bolton Alimentari, Bumble Bee Foods, LLC / Clover Leaf Seafoods, MW Brands, Princes, Sea Value, StarKist, Thai Union / Chicken of the Sea and TriMarine), as well as WWF, are part of the ISSF.

Greenpeace welcomed the formation of ISSF when it went public in April 2009. ISSF's policies should be in favour of science-based sustainable management. However, Greenpeace regards many of ISSF's policies as not sufficiently far-reaching to meet the objectives of sustainable management and is disappointed by the level of real action taken by the member companies to ensure the sustainability of the products in which they trade. Products by ISSF member companies do still contain tuna from stocks where overfishing is taking place, have mostly been caught with purse seiners setting nets on FADs or longline fisheries with little regulations in place. Full and transparent traceability for the end customer has not been implemented and many products have been transshipped at sea.

Recently ISSF has recognised the sustainability concerns around FAD-associated purse seine fisheries and has launched a research programme looking into ways to mitigate unwanted bycatch. While Greenpeace welcomes this initiative, more action to safeguard endangered marine life and tuna stocks is needed right now. There is nothing hindering ISSF companies from taking action to stop the use of FADs in purse seine fisheries, to support the development of sustainable and equitable pole-and-line, handline and other selective fishing methods suitable for the use of coastal communities where appropriate and to improve the rest of their operations/sourcing to meet the standards of true sustainability.

## CERTIFICATION – THE SIMPLE SOLUTION? THINK AGAIN.

Several tuna fisheries have been certified by seafood sustainability certification schemes. However, Greenpeace is of the opinion that no fully credible certification system for sustainable seafood currently exists. At present, a seafood label can at best help to identify the best available choice from a particular fishery. It is certainly not an indicator of whether the purchase of such products is the best choice in absolute terms. This is why any certified seafood product deserves as much attention with regards to its sustainability and equity as any other fish product does.

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)<sup>19</sup> as well as the Friends of the Sea (FOTS)<sup>20</sup> have certified various tuna fisheries. Perhaps the most prominent one is the MSC-certified Pacific Albacore tuna fishery. Currently it comes from two different stocks: Northern and Southern Pacific. The northern stock is being fished at unsustainable long-term levels and hence Greenpeace considers products coming from this stock as unsustainable despite being fished with a more selective fishing method. The southern stock is in a better shape but, both the North and South Pacific troll fisheries target juvenile albacore.

The MSC-certified Tosakatsuo Suisan pole-and-line skipjack fishery in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) can be considered a better choice in terms of sustainability. If both the bait fishery component as well as the tuna fishery itself are adequately managed, pole-and-line can be a sustainable and equitable method of catching skipjack. The WCPO stock is currently considered as relatively healthy (no overfishing occurring).

Several tuna fisheries have been certified by FOTS. There are more than a dozen yellowfin tuna fisheries certified by FOTS and some bigeye fisheries. As described earlier, all yellowfin and bigeye stocks in all oceans are currently fished at unsustainable long-term levels. Therefore the products certified from these fisheries by FOTS cannot be seen as sustainable choice.

Additionally FOTS has certified some Atlantic Albacore fisheries. Both North and South Atlantic stocks have been fished down to unhealthy levels and the North Atlantic stock continues to be fished at an unsustainable rate that will prevent its recovery to a healthy level. Again, these stocks should not be sourced from until they have recovered fully and fishing effort is adjusted to long-term sustainable levels.

When it comes to skipjack, Greenpeace regards selective fishing techniques such as pole-and-line fishing as the most sustainable and equitable options when conducted properly. FOTS has certified several pole-and-line skipjack fisheries including the Maldivian pole-and-line fishery which is also undergoing MSC certification (April 2010). However, FOTS has also certified a purse seine fishery for skipjack and yellowfin operated in the Western and Central Pacific: this fishery uses FADs, which renders it unsustainable.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.msc.org/track-a-fishery/certified/certified-fisheries>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.friendofthesea.org/news.php?viewStory=151>

*“Strategically-placed marine reserves can benefit migratory species such as tuna by improving habitat quality and feeding opportunities, allowing greater survival of offspring and providing protection at aggregation sites and migration bottlenecks<sup>21</sup>.”*

## For Tuna Tomorrow, We Need Marine Reserves Today

Marine reserves are essential for ensuring sustainable fisheries. Unfortunately, progress to establish such areas has been slow, and to date little protection exists in the international waters where many tuna fisheries operate their free-for-all plunder of marine biodiversity. To ensure healthy oceans and tuna for tomorrow, the establishment of a comprehensive large-scale worldwide network of marine reserves is urgently needed today.

Retailers are urged to support an historic move towards the creation of such areas made by eight Pacific Island Countries in 2008, closing the international waters of the Pacific that lie between the Pacific Island Countries (see map areas 1 and 2) to all tuna fishing from 2010 onwards<sup>22</sup>. The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission also agreed to close these areas to purse seine fishing as of 1 January 2010. Retailers should request that their suppliers are not involved in any trade of tuna from these areas, as this fish is likely to be of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) origin. In addition, the Pacific Island Countries want similar high seas areas further east closed to all fishing (see map areas 3 and 4)<sup>23</sup>. In support of this much needed move to curb pirate fishing and to protect biodiversity and the declining tuna stocks in the region, retailers should also make sure no tuna is sourced from these areas either.

### MAKE SURE YOUR TUNA IS LEGAL:

Only by knowing the chain of custody of tuna right back to the boat that caught it, can retailers ensure the product they sell comes from legal sources. The first step is to check that none of the vessels and companies traded with are on the Greenpeace blacklisted vessels database at: <http://blacklist.greenpeace.org>. Tuna should also be rejected if it comes from operations that have transferred tuna at sea and/or cannot guarantee 100% observer coverage on their vessels. Observers ensure compliance to conservation and management measures.

Tuna is also illegal if it has been caught by purse seine vessels using FADs in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean between 1 August and 30 October 2010, as the use of FADs will be banned by the WCPFC during this period. Tuna caught during the closure periods for tuna fisheries in other oceans, such as the Eastern Pacific and the Mediterranean, is also illegal.



Areas 1 and 2 have now been closed to purse seine fishing. The remaining high seas pockets, 3 and 4, continue to be vulnerable to pirate fishing and overfishing, and also need to be regulated. Retailers should not be purchasing tuna from any of the areas proposed by the Pacific Island Countries to be closed.

<sup>21</sup> Roberts CM et al. 2005. 'The role of marine reserves in achieving sustainable fisheries'.

<sup>22</sup> The UK government has established a no-take area in the Chagos archipelago in the Indian Ocean. In order to support this welcome move, retailers need to ensure they do not purchase tuna illegally caught in this area.

<sup>23</sup> The Pacific Island Countries proposed that these areas be officially closed by the WCPFC at its December 2009 meeting in Tahiti, but resistance from the Asian fishing powers to this much needed move has left these areas vulnerable to pillage by international fleets for another year.

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