

PACIFIC FISHERIES: GENERAL OVERVIEW



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

KEY POINTS

- National commitments are needed to ensure rebuilding and future sustainability of fisheries stocks and other marine organisms and ecosystems, which support fishery species, drive subsistence economies, and have inherent value.
- International agreement is vital for Pacific states economically dependent on migratory tuna.
- [Marine pollution/debris](#) from global sources threaten human health, fisheries, economies, and marine ecosystems (see SDG 14.1).
- Resource sovereignty by Pacific nations relies on informed management and commitment to best practices, benefiting from frameworks of international agreements.

HOW ISSUE LINKS TO/IMPACTS SDGs BEYOND **SDG14 LIFE BELOW WATER**

- SDG1, 2: coastal and marine resources serve the long-term food security and economic needs of Pacific communities and worldwide. Indigenous coastal communities worldwide eat 15-fold more fish per capita than non-indigenous communities.¹
- SDG3: among others, the safety of seafood and marine ecosystem services are threatened by unsustainable harvest, pollution, and debris, including microplastics from global sources
- SDG9: innovation and effective regulation can support a sustainable fishing industry
- SDG8, 10: inequalities are generated through unsustainable fishing practices; the Pacific seeks productive employment for Pacific people in the fishing industry (NB: 8.7)
- SDG12, 13: [responsible consumption and production](#) are vital for the use of our seas and opportunities for our children in a changing climate

BACKGROUND

1. **Sustainable fisheries rely on healthy ecosystems across a range of marine environments.** Many commercially valuable species need different parts of coastal, benthic (seafloor) and pelagic (open water) environments throughout their lives. Pelagic biodiversity and ecosystem resilience are reduced and trophic relationships are changed by open-ocean fisheries.² [Climate change](#) is affecting Pacific fishery species.³ Sustainable fishing methods and practices support ecosystems, species, and the Pacific people.
2. **Marine pollution threatens Pacific fisheries.** Shipboard observers have recorded over 10,000 waste-dumping violations from fishing vessels in the Pacific islands region between 2003 and 2015.⁴ Fish-aggregating devices can become debris and an entanglement hazard in and of themselves: there may be over 100,000 drifting FADs in the Pacific region. Debris, especially plastics, can concentrate toxins and pass them up the food chain.
3. **Pacific fisheries affect the world.** Pacific island countries have the largest collective EEZ in the world. Considering Pacific tuna alone, nearly three-quarters of the world's tuna landings come from Pacific waters, and the end value of Pacific tuna, including canned, exceeded USD 22 billion in both 2012 and 2014.⁵ The tuna industry in the Pacific region is USD 40 billion per year and supports a range of livelihoods.⁵ Pacific tuna is considered a key affordable protein source.
4. In 17 PICTs, ~47% of households list fishing as either a primary or secondary source of income, and in rural communities, the subsistence fishery accounts for 60–90% of all fish caught. National fish consumption in Pacific islands is three to four times the global average, representing 50–90% of animal protein eaten by many Pacific island peoples.



5. **Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing harms species and economies**, but is difficult to quantify because it is a black market. Estimates of global IUU catch range from 11 to 26 million tonnes, equal to 14 or 33 per cent, respectively, of the world's total legal catch in 2011.^{6,7} In the Western Central Pacific, IUU fishing has been estimated to account for 34 per cent of the total catch.⁶ The value of illegally harvested or transhipped tuna in the Pacific region is estimated at a minimum USD 616 million per year.⁷ Unobserved transhipment (movement of goods to an intermediate location, then a separate shipment to the final destination) is a potential threat to resource sovereignty. Fisheries species and other biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) experience higher levels of overfishing, extinction, and losses of [genetic diversity](#)²; unmonitored and unregulated catch in ABNJ could be harmful.
6. **Poorly managed subsidies have economic effects but also environmental impact, and can put species at risk.** Subsidies can give advantages to foreign fleets over Pacific vessels; the global value of subsidies is USD 35 billion per year, over a third of the value of the catch. Subsidies may make a fishery artificially viable and impact the target and by-catch species.
7. **Solutions benefit from partnership.** The Global Ocean Commission⁸ proposes, among others, an end to fishing subsidies on the high seas; enhanced vessel reporting requirements; banning at-sea transhipments of fish; and a global information-sharing platform for real-time data on high-seas fishing vessels and their activities, to deter IUU fishing and promote traceability.
8. **Fisheries vessels could be a useful data source.** [SOLAS chapter 5](#) outlines requirements for, among others, meteorological data sharing (of great benefit on land and at sea for Pacific nations with limited meteorological observation capacity), efficient ship routing, and effective ship reporting. The number of longline vessels operating in the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) region at a given time is unknown (could be up to 5,000 vessels). Regular position reporting by ships is vital to combat IUU and is mandated by [IMO SOLAS](#).
9. **Sustainable fisheries benefit people and ecosystems.** Environmental sustainability for Pacific fisheries must include management of fish stocks, mitigation of bycatch of [threatened species](#) including obligations under CITES and CMS, integrated management for ecosystem health, as well as [vessel sustainability](#). Economic and social sustainability of Pacific fisheries includes, among others, need for local employment opportunities in the fishing and processing industries and greater opportunity for Pacific fleets⁹, along with just labour practices.¹⁰

1 Cisneros-Montemayor et al. 2016. A global estimate of seafood consumption by coastal indigenous peoples. PLOS ONE 11:e0166681

2 Crespo & Dunn. 2016. Policy brief: A review of the impacts of fisheries on open-ocean ecosystems.

3 SPC 2014. Pacific island fisheries and climate change. SPC, Noumea. 4 p

4 Richardson et al. 2016. Marine pollution originating from purse seine and longline fishing.... Ambio doi:10.1007/s13280-016-0811-8

5 Pew Charitable Trusts 2016. Netting billions: A global valuation of tuna.

6 World Ocean Review 2. 2013. Fisheries: Illegal fishing, Chap 3.

7 Pacific Islands FFA. 2016. Towards the quantification of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the Pacific islands region.

8 Global Ocean Commission. 2016. The future of our ocean: Next steps and priorities.

9 Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency. 2016. Future of Fisheries Roadmap

10 Nereus 2016. Information sheet: Slavery fisheries and Japanese seafood consumption. UBC, Nippon Foundation