

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

NINETEENTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 3-7 August 1987)

COUNTRY STATEMENT - PITCAIRN

1. Background

- 1.1 The Pitcairn Islands, comprising Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno, are located in the South Pacific Ocean at latitude 25 degrees South and longitude 125-130 degrees West, approximately 2000km South East of Tahiti. The islands have a combined land area of less than 10 square kilometres (Pitcairn is the second largest at about 450 ha) but have a declared exclusive fishing zone of approximately 800,000 square kilometres. The islands are a UK dependent territory, under the administration of a Governor (concurrently the British High Commissioner, based in Wellington). Pitcairn is the only inhabited island, with a population of approximately 60.

2. Infrastructure and Communications

- 2.1 Pitcairn is self-sufficient in food, although locally grown supplies are supplemented by tinned and frozen foodstuffs usually imported from New Zealand. Communications between the islands and the rest of the world were greatly improved in 1985 by the installation of a new radio antenna and transmitter, which make it possible for Pitcairners to telephone anywhere in the world. The islands can only be reached by sea; the terrain provides no air landing strip. A regular supply service, chartered by the Pitcairn administration, calls at Pitcairn to deliver supplies roughly once a quarter, but numerous small vessels call throughout the year. A regular passenger/cargo service in the region, which proposes to include calls at Pitcairn, is presently being planned. If this venture is successful, it should help to ease the problems of isolation for Pitcairners.

3. Fisheries Legislation

- 3.1 The legislation governing Pitcairn's declaration of a 200 nautical mile exclusive fishing zone (EFZ) and the effects of this on prospective distant water fishing nations (DWFNZ) is given in three documents:-

Fisheries Zone Ordinance (1980)
Fisheries Zone (amendment) Ordinance (1982) and (1986)
Foreign Fisheries Regulations (1982) (as amended)

4. Artisanal Fisheries and Resources

- 4.1 The territorial sea around Pitcairn is limited to 3 miles, rather than the 12 mile limit in other Pacific countries.
- 4.2 Only limited fishing is carried on by the Pitcairn Islanders. Such fishing as is undertaken for recreation and food uses handliness from the rocks or close to shore.
- 4.3 The coral atoll, Oeno Island, is a turtle nursery of international interest, which is undisturbed by human habitation. Henderson Island is being considered for nomination to the "World Heritage List".

5. Oceanic Fisheries

- 5.1 The oceanic waters of Pitcairn have been fished, prior to the declaration of Pitcairn Fisheries Zone, by the fleets of three distant water fishing nations (DWFN), the Japanese, Taiwanese and Koreans, all using long line vessels to catch tuna and billfish. It is unlikely that surface swimming skipjack tuna exist in sufficient numbers to warrant tuna purse seine operations in the area, and the absence of a local baitfish supply precludes the possibility of a pole and line fishery developing.
- 5.2 Up-to-date information for the DWFN longline catches is not readily obtainable, but some figures for species proportions and catches per unit effort for the 1960s and 1970s are available.
- 5.3 Data from the Japanese longline boats, fishing predominantly between September and January each year from 1962-1977 showed an average of approximately 200 fishing days/year, with a catch rate of 1.68t/day - above average for longlining in the Pacific. Furthermore, these catches contained high proportions of valuable bigeye (43%) and marlins (39%). Taiwanese longliners, which fished with more even effort throughout the year, reported catches dominated by albacore (76%) while Korean vessels reported mainly albacore (54%) and bigeye (30%). These differences in catch composition will be the result of variations in the timing of the fishing season and the precise usage of the gear.

6. Licensing Agreement

- 6.1 In 1986 the Embassies of Japan and Korea were notified that the Pitcairn administration wished to invite their fisheries authorities to enter into formal fisheries agreements to regularise foreign fishing within the Pitcairn Fisheries Zone. As a result of these approaches, the Federation of Japanese Tuna Fisheries Co-operative Associations and Pitcairn representatives met in Wellington, New Zealand, to discuss terms and conditions for licensing. On 12 March 1987 the representative signed a one-year agreement permitting a minimum of five (but perhaps up to 20) Japanese tuna longline vessels to fish in Pitcairn waters, in return for goods and services to the islanders and licence fees based on a formula linking catches, species composition and weighted species prices. Four licences have been issued to date. The Koreans have not, thus far, responded to the invitation to enter into negotiations.
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