

SPC/Fisheries 22/WP.47
10 August 1990

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION
TWENTY-SECOND REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES

NOUMEA, NEW CALEDONIA

6-10 AUGUST 1990

COUNTRY STATEMENT - SOLOMON ISLANDS

By Sylvester Diake

INTRODUCTION

Fisheries in the Solomon Islands continues to play an important role in the economical development of our country not only as a source of foreign revenue earning and of private sector employment but as an important source of protein in the diet of Solomon Islanders.

In 1989, the total volume of fisheries exports from the Solomon Islands was 30,174 mt, a 20% drop from the 1988 figures, and a value of \$72,452,019 (Table 1). This foreign revenue earning represented 42.0% of the total export earnings for 1989 and of these \$65,388,587 was from tuna and tuna related products alone.

There exists great potential for the expansion of these national fisheries related exports and these could be achieved through the current expansion in the tuna canning industry and the diversification to other value-added products in order to tap new overseas markets and to effectively utilise our tuna resources. The establishment of processing factories in the non-fish product sector and efforts to identify other resources of commercial importance are additional measures taken to increase our export earning capability.

Present tuna developments which are aimed at increasing the total catches to the 75,000 mt Total Allowable Catch are also supportive of the co-ordinated effort to increase our foreign revenue earning from exports and maximise the benefits obtainable from our tuna resources. These new developments in addition to those stated in para.3 above will include the expansion of fishing activities into new or areas where little fishing is currently done and the construction of additional supporting facilities.

The total catch from the commercial tuna fishing industry in 1989 was 37,078 mt of which 25,869 mt was from the pole and line operations and 11,210 mt from purse seining (Table 2). The total 1989 catch was 6,693 mt lower than that of the previous year, but 4,869 mt higher than the total 1987 catch.

Greater attention continues to be focused on fisheries development in the provincial sector with the aim of creating employment and income earning opportunities, encourage the commercialisation of fisheries in the provincial sector and to supply the increasing demand of urban centre markets. Currently, four major projects have been put into operation to assist in fostering economic development in the Provinces. These developments are all in line with our fisheries policy of developing and managing the fisheries resources in cooperation with the Provincial Government to secure optimum social and economic benefits for the people of Solomon Island.

As sound and rational management of our marine resources is of paramount importance for the long term sustainable harvest and maximising economic benefits, most up to date scientific information on these resources would be essential for the rational exploitation of these resources. In conjunction with this, developmental research has been carried out in collaboration with regional and member country institutions and those of traditional donor countries.

Commercial Fisheries

A total of thirty three (33) pole and line vessels, one group seiner and three (3) single seiners were operated by the two commercial tuna fishing companies Solomon Taiyo Limited (STL) and the National Fisheries Development (NFD) in 1989. An additional group seiner bought by STL in late 1989 was refitted and commissioned in early 1990.

The domestic vessels in 1989 caught a total of 37,078 mt of tuna and from these 25,869 mt was taken by the pole and line vessels. The average pole and line catch per fishing day obtained last year, although lower than the recorded catch rates in 1988, was much higher than that for 1987. The highest total catches achieved so far by domestic vessels were 44,588 mt and 43,772 mt as recorded for 1986 and 1988 respectively.

Total tuna caught by licensed foreign vessels last year were also lower than the 1988 figures by 38%. These low catches were mainly due to lesser number of trips in 1989 which was compounded with very low catch rates in Solomon Island waters during that fishing season as well. Despite of the total overall low catches, the performance of the American Treaty purse seine vessels was comparatively higher than that in 1988.

Tuna caught by the domestic vessels are either processed locally into canned tuna, fish meal and oil or exported frozen. Some frozen fish are also sold at the local markets. The processing of tuna into higher value-added products has been a long term interest of our Division/Ministry as this will certainly bring in more foreign revenue in addition to the establishment of employment opportunities for Solomon Islanders.

The new cannery at Noro, Western Province was completed and commissioned in late 1989 and currently its output is 1/2 of the maximum production capacity. Full capacity production of 1.2 million cases of canned tuna will be achieved sometimes next year after the recruitment and training of additional cannery staff. Work on other supporting facilities are still in progress and the negotiations on the establishment of a can manufacturing company will take effect this year.

In line with NFD, a wholly owned Solomon Island company, was put to international tender and eventually transferred to BC Packers of Canada this year to the present Government's privatisation policy.

Purse Seine Operations

Catches of 6,923 mt and 4,286 mt from the domestic group seine and single seine operations respectively were slightly better than the 1988 figures. These high catches can be attributed to the higher number of sets employed during that year as the catch rates were much lower than that of last year.

Chi Tai 66, a chartered foreign vessel was the only foreign single seiner operating in Solomon Island waters during 1989 in addition to American vessels under the Multilateral Treaty.

Access Arrangements

Solomon Islands currently has access agreements with Japan, and with the United States of America under the Multilateral Treaty. Approval for the renewal of access agreement with Taiwan has been given by Cabinet and the official signing will take effect soon.

Baitfishing Operations

A total of 968,301 buckets of bait, equivalent to 2,130mt (i.e. when using one bucket of bait weighs approx. 2.2 kgs) of baitfish was taken during the 1989 fishing season. Most of the baitfish catches were from the Western (74%) and the second highest was Ysabel Province (18%) which has taken over that placing from the Central Province. The recent shift of STL vessels to the Western Province and the close proximity of the Ysabel fishing-ground and bait-grounds may have caused this change.

Provincial Fisheries Establishment

Developments in the provincial fisheries sector continues to expand with the addition of more new projects this year. A new rural fisheries centre and management project under USAID assistance has been signed recently and this project will involve the upgrading of four existing fisheries centres and the construction of three more new centres. An EEC project on the development of rural fishing enterprises in five provinces has also been established and the ICOD project on the establishment of rural fishing groups has been extended as well. A new OFCF project on coastal bottom fish fishery development has been established in the North Malaita region of Malaita Province after the completion of the Lambi project on Guadalcanal Province.

Surveys and trial grow-outs of seaweed (*Eucheuma*) under the British funded Seaweed Farming Project has been extended to other provinces with hope of setting seaweed farms in other Provinces as well.

Addition surveys for gold lip (*Pinctada maxima*) around Ysabel Province has continued after a misunderstanding by the reef owners was cleared. Further future surveys will be around Choiseul Island of Western Province and Florida Island of the Central Province.