



## TONGA TUNA FISHING INDUSTRY

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Tonga occupies approximately 700 square kilometers in land area as against nearly 700,000 square kilometers of sea area. Surprisingly however, it is in this vastly smaller land area that most development activity occurs. The Government has established a policy that future fisheries development should be largely tuna-oriented.

Tonga's tuna fishery resources are classified into, offshore tuna resources and seamount tuna resources, vary in magnitude and are subjected to different levels of exploitation. Tuna, in particular, is a largely untapped resource with considerable potential. Three species of tuna (i.e. albacore, yellowfin and bigeye) offer the greatest opportunity for Tonga future fisheries development. Skipjack tuna also available but not in large quantity to support commercial fishing operation. Tonga has approximately 3 % of the sea area in the Pacific where tuna migrate, but manages to catch 1991 only .03 % of the total catch reported (300 tonnes of 1,000,000 tonnes-regional sustainable harvest).

Tonga has been operating tuna longliners in the offshore area since 1967 and end in 1991 when the Government decided to establish public/private fishing company called Sea Star Fishing Co Ltd, primarily to develop tuna fishing in the offshore area more on a commercial level. Fishing activities of the company reported to be operating successfully. The fleet has been increased from 1-4 longliners in 1994 and two more longliners are expected to arrive before the end of 1996 or beginning of 1997.

Catch from the company's fleet reported to have been exported about 80 per cent of the total catch to the canneries of American Samoa, steak fish market of New Zealand and Australia and to the fresh fish market of Hawaii; the remaining 20 per cent sold at the local market. Catch rates of albacore tuna in the offshore area of Tonga is likely to vary between 1-4 per 100 hooks.

On the seamount tuna resources, research on assessing small-scale tuna longline prospects in 1994 under a joint arrangement between the Government of Tonga and USAID, has shown promising results; (a) on the potential for small-scale longline from 40 - 50 ft vessels using 8 km of monofilament longline gear system; (b) the assessment made an estimated of the overall potential for seamount tuna longline development in Tonga of 15 - 30 vessels producing 1500 - 3000 mt per annum; and (c) the assessment indicated that these vessels can be operated profitably if marketing systems and shore facilities are made available.

Four private local companies were established in the past two years with the purpose of harvesting tuna within the seamounts of Tonga. The existing fleet consists of 5 small longliners using monofilament longline gear targetting to catch bigeye and yellowfin tuna for the sashimi market of Japan and fresh fish market of Hawaii and the USA. It is estimated that about 30 per cent of the total catch of the four companies remained for sale at the local market.

With regard to the investment requirements, the Government is currently in the process of looking at requirements for new infrastructure that will emerge in areas such as dock space, and storage and distribution facilities. Government also considered these requirements in the context of public sector investment programmes. No pole-and-line and purse seine fishing effort in Tongan waters.