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Report on the domestic tuna Fisheries of Solomon Islands

During 1995, a total of 7 locally registered tuna companies were actively involved in tuna fishing within the 200 nm EEZ of Solomon Islands, using either purse seining, longlining or pole-and-line to catch tuna. The number of companies which included Solomon Taiyo, NFD and other joint venture companies involving Solomon Islanders and foreign partners remain the same for 1996. During 1996, 31 single seiners, 1 group seiner, 31 longliners and 23 pole-and-line vessels were licensed. Whilst in 1995, 52 purse seiners, 1 group seiner, 59 longliners and 29 pole and line vessels were licensed. Not all domestically licensed vessels were actively involving in fishing in Solomon Islands 200 nm EEZ during 1995 and 1996. .

A total of 60,859 MT of tunas was taken by the domestic purse seine, longline and the pole-and-line fisheries during 1996 as compared to a total of 67,241 MT in 1995. The 1996 catch consisted of 33,649 MT from the single seiners, 5,450 MT by the group seiner, 5,540 MT by the longliners and 16,220 MT from the pole and line fishery. The 1996 single seiners' landed catch was the highest achieved so far by this fishery and it represented a 36% increase from that of 1995. Longline landings for 1996 was a remarkable increase of 5.5 times that of 1995, while those from the group seine and pole-and-line operations represented decreases of 26% and 53% respectively as compared to 1995. A summary total catch by species for all gear types is provided the attached table 1.

The high landed catch by the single seiners during 1996 can be attributed both to the higher number of vessels (34) in 1996 as compared to 28 vessels in 1995 and the very high catch rate of 48 MT/set for 1996 as compared to 36 MT/set in 1995. Catch rate by the group seiner for 1996 however, was 15% lower than the 1995 catch rate of 52 MT/set. The 1996 catch rate of 2.9 MT/day by the pole-and-line operations rate was also low as compared to a catch rate of 4.4 MT/day for 1995. The exceptionally very high landings by the longline fishery in 1996 is probably due to a higher number of vessels fishing and deployed more hooks for that year as compared to 1995 and very good catches were also obtained in 1996.

Skipjack was the highest catch by species in Solomon Islands' tuna fisheries with a total of 36,031 MT in 1996 whilst that for 1995 was 51,483 MT. Yellowfin came second in the overall catch by species with a total of 21,269 MT in 1996 and in 1995 the total catch was 14,224 MT. The third most important species in the overall catch was bigeye, with 1,335 MT in 1996 and 431 MT was achieved for 1995. Albacore

was the next highest catch in sequence for 1996 and the total catch for that years was 1,154 MT as compared to 161 MT in 1995. The total catch for others which includes the marlines was the lowest overall catch by species for 1996 whilst in 1995, the total catch was 943 MT

With the exception of Solomon Taiyo Limited (STL) where a small portion of their catch is processed locally into the various canned tuna products for the domestic and export markets and smoked tuna products for export, all tunas caught by vessels of the other domestic companies and most tunas from STL were exported for processing and sashimi markets overseas during the past years. A lot of these tunas have therefore been transshipped directly to carrier vessels at the three officially designated ports in the Solomon Islands and some fresh sashimi tunas have been airfreighted to markets in Japan also. During 1996, a total of 128 transshipments (64 purse seine and 64 longliners) took place at our ports as compared to a total of 66 (55 purse seiners and 11 longliners) in 1995. These transshipments included locally licensed vessels and those that have been licensed in other countries also.

It is likely that several new joint venture companies will be established in the near future as a number of quota holder are currently negotiating with foreign partners. Other developments which took place very recently on the local seen will include the taking over of all Okinawa chartered pole-and-line vessels by Solomon Taiyo early year.

On the bilateral access agreements, Solomon Islands currently has bilateral access agreements only with Japan for longline and pole-and-lines. In 1996, a total of 25 longliner and 35 pole-and-line vessels were licensed; and a total of 18 permit activations for longliners and 16 for pole-and-line vessels were issued that year. In comparison, a total of 63 longline and 33 pole-and-line vessels were licensed in 1995 and a total of 86 permit activations for longliners and 6 for pole-and-line were issued for that year.

Table 1: Total annual catch in metric tonnes by species for the domestic pole-and-line, longline and purse seine fisheries for 1992 - 1996.

Year	Skipjack	Yellowfin	Bigeye	Albacore	others	Total
1992	31,200	10,735	416		1,777	44,127
1993	22,641	14,345	87		2,033	39106
1994	29,546	12,564			844	42,974
1995	51,483	14,224	431	161	943	67,241
1996	36,031	21,269	1,335	1,154	1,070	60,869