

NOUVELLE-CALEDONIE

SERVICE D'ETAT  
DES AFFAIRES MARITIMES

SERVICE TERRITORIAL  
DE LA MARINE MARCHANDE  
ET DES PECHEES MARITIMES

TUNA FISHING IN  
NEW CALEDONIA

The first attempt to develop a tuna industry took place in the early 80's when several local pole-and-line vessels started to operate around New Caledonia. For some reasons (i.e. high seasonality of bait), pole and line was rapidly abandoned and switched to longline.

The longliners then were all freezer vessels imported from Japan. In 1989, the first fresh sashimi longliner started to fish around New Caledonia and monofilament was introduced in the fishery five years after.

In 1996 5 vessels (of a total of 8) were so using a monofilament longline and targetting mainly for bigeye and yellowfin tuna to be exported to the japanese sashimi market. Their fishing trips are usually limited to 6 days during which 4 longline sets are made. Due to their cruising range these vessels can't operate far from their landing port and thus have a coastal activity.

The two freezer longliners are capable to stay at sea for up to 45 days. Deep frozen bigeye, yellowfin and striped marlin are the only catch not sent to cannery.

A Catches from 1992 onwards

The breakdown of the catches reported by the New Caledonia longline fishery is shown in the table below.

Catches from the New Caledonia longline vessels

tonnes (%)	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996 (*)
yellowfin tuna	333 (26%)	387 (29%)	390 (24%)	749 (53%)	723 (56%)
bigeye tuna	24 (2%)	95 (7%)	70 (4%)	92 (6%)	190 (15%)
albacore	692 (54%)	755 (56%)	840 (53%)	332 (23%)	187 (14%)
others	232 (18%)	101 (8%)	300 (19%)	246 (18%)	198 (15%)
Total	1,281 (100%)	1,338 (100%)	1,600 (100%)	1,419 (100%)	1,298 (100%)

(\*): Figures for 1996 are estimates.

Since the introduction of monofilament yellowfin has become the predominant species caught and the proportion of bigeye has greatly increased.

## B. The markets

Catches are sent to three different markets:

- Japan for sashimi-grade tuna and marlin (i.e. yellowfin and bigeye tuna and striped marlin); there is also a lower-quality sashimi market for albacore during the austral cool season;
- canneries throughout the Pacific for low-quality tuna;
- local market for any non-exportable by-catch as well as yellowfin, bigeye or albacore tuna not sold on the sashimi market (damaged or too lean fish).

Regular direct flights from New Caledonia to Japan allows to send much of the fresh fish to the sashimi market. However, several hundreds tonnes of by-catch and non exportable fish must be sold locally.

## C. The future

5 new monofilament longliners are to be imported in 1997 and 4 other vessels of the same type would be delivered in the near future. It is so expected that the fishery will soon reached an annual production of 2,000 tonnes. The demand for sashimi grade species is still high but the local is limited to sell off the by-catch.

An important study is currently designed to define new avenues to develop New Caledonia's tuna fishing by focusing on precise goals to be reached by five years.