

Tuna Market Intelligence

Issue 30, January 17, 2016

Your fortnightly report on trends and influencers on the global tuna market from the Pacific Islands.

MARKET UPDATE

And there is light at last. Insiders in the Bangkok Tuna Market have reported slight increases in tuna prices which have been attributed to a number of factors including the tying up of US boats in PNA waters.

Whilst the lowest price recorded for January was US\$950 per metric tonne, some buyers reported paying US\$1,000 per metric tonne recently.

Increased fishing effort in the high seas means there is still an abundance of skipjack tuna hence the slow climb back to normalcy in the market.

Vessels in the US fishing fleet have been tied up since January 1 after the Forum Fisheries Agency ordered that all licenses to the US fleet be withdrawn until they pay their first installment of US\$17million of the agreement which they signed with the Pacific states in Brisbane in August.

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INFLUENCERS REPORT

PNA welcomes New Year

As the New Year beckons and with another Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission meeting completed in Bali last year, Parties to Nauru Agreement Chief

Executive Officer Dr Transform Aqorau says they will not be taking any new measures in their waters. He said the PNA was concerned that whilst fishing nations were trying to oppose attempts by the PNA to manage their fishery sustainably, they were not taking action on tuna themselves.

“The PNA has now put in place Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) charging and FAD tracking, along with strengthening of the purse seine Vessel Day Scheme and longline Vessel Day Scheme and vessel day prices that are also effectively constraining effort,” he said.

While PNA was controlling fishing in its waters, the Commission members needed to tackle a number of problems, said Aqorau: “The Commission needs to address the failure of Indonesia and Philippines to apply the FAD closure, control high seas purse seine effort and improve control over high seas longlining, especially by vessels that target bigeye tuna, and which avoid monitoring in port, refuse to carry independent observers and in some cases are still withholding operational data to conceal the operations of the vessels.”

Nauru fisheries revenue rises

Nauru fisheries has experienced a steady increase in fishing revenue for the last three years from the successful selling of PNA Vessel Day Scheme days which has contributed immensely to the small island nations budget.

Senior Nauru fisheries officials revealed the nation has raked in the following revenue over the last three years: –USD\$17,490,000 in 2014, USD\$24,000,000 in 2015 and USD\$26,140,000 in 2016.

“The increases are due to slight increase of Nauru’s allocation of days due to the seven year rolling average as well as increases in the value of the day,” a senior Nauru official revealed. “We have been selling maximum at USD\$10,000 per day with a minimum of USD\$8,000 in 2014. The current figures go a long way in beefing up the national budget.”

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Forum Fisheries Agency stops US licenses

A bleak start to 2016 for US fishing vessels in the Pacific. The Pacific island Forum Fisheries Agency has stopped issuing all licenses under the US treaty from January 1 this year until the fleet makes its first US\$17m payment.

FFA officials say despite ongoing communication it looks like no payment will be forthcoming. The US Government has not lodged any licence applications (another requirement of the Treaty), which further indicates that payment will not happen.

In Bali earlier this year, US fleet officials said frankly they now cannot afford to pay the fees they had agreed to pay in Brisbane in August last year. In the meantime, Pacific nations will continue to develop options for achieving a more sustainable arrangement.

All US vessels will not be able to fish in the region's most productive fishing grounds without the issuing of Treaty Licences.

Purse seiners docked in Marshalls

A record number of purse seiners were anchored in Majuro lagoon by January 15, demonstrating a slow start for the commercial tuna fishery in the first month of 2016. The 38 purse seiners in the lagoon beats the previous high of 34 set in late December.

The 37 U.S. flagged purse seiners have all halted fishing because the industry defaulted on its US Treaty agreement to pay its first quarter fishing day fee. Nearly a quarter of U.S. purse seiners are presently anchored in Port Majuro.

Meanwhile, two domestic registered fishing fleets — Koo's Fishing Company and Pan Pacific Foods, which operates a tuna loining plant on Majuro — have yet to reach agreement on a price for fishing days with the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority (MIMRA).

The fisheries department is seeking an increase in fees for 2016. Until the two fishing companies, which account for about a dozen fishing vessels, and MIMRA reach agreement, they have no licenses to fish.

MIMRA reported that not only 38 purse seiners were anchored in Majuro, but also that 11 tuna carrier vessels are in port. Yet despite 49 tuna vessels being here, only one tuna transshipment was taking place during the week, which also indicates the slow fishing situation for purse seiners at the start of 2016.

One fishing vessel representative said he thinks some of the purse seiners anchored in Majuro are waiting to see if the world market price will improve from its current level of around US\$900 per metric ton before resuming fishing operations.

Congressman queries US aid

A United States Congressman is querying why the US continues to pay millions in aid to the 17 member states of the Forum Fisheries Agency when its boats are now tied up because they cannot meet their financial commitment to the US treaty for 2016.

Republican Duncan Hunter who is member for San Diego, where most of the US fishing fleet which operates in the Pacific are based, has written to US Secretary of State John Kerry.

PNA CEO Dr Transform Aqorau said that any change in aid is "up to the US government" but added that it plays a valuable role in underpinning the region's fisheries management. He said the PNA believes that both the fleet, through its quarterly payments, and the US government through assistance, each has roles to play.

Dr Aqorau said with China showing its presence in the Pacific should the US fail to salvage the deal then the highest bidder was waiting for the opportunity to pick up the slack.

Taiwan takeover of Solomon fisheries exaggerated

Parties to Nauru Agreement Chief Executive Officer Dr Transform Aqorau says a recent report on two senior leaders in the Solomon Islands fisheries ministry were sensationalized and inaccurate.

The media report names Solomons Fisheries Minister John Maneniaru and his permanent secretary Chris Ramofafia as being on the verge of giving most of the

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country's tuna quota to a Taiwanese consortium in exchange for three new super-purse-seiner fishing boats.

Fishing days in the Solomons have also been sold to Korean and Japanese for 2016 using a tender auction system.

"I know that two formerly US flagged vessels are being reflagged to Solomon Islands and will be operated under NFD, a Solomon Islands Company wholly owned by Tri-Marine International, a US Company. This is a Company that has 5 Solomon Islands flagged purse seine vessels already," Dr Aqorau said: "SSI has had a longline operation in Solomon Islands for sometime, processing fish and exporting it from Solomon Islands, in particular bigeye and yellowfin tuna."

"One day all vessels fishing and operating in the Pacific should be flagged to Pacific Island countries," Aqorau added. "There are Kiribati, Marshall Islands, and FSM flagged purse seiners operating throughout the region."

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