# Regional cooperation is reducing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) tuna fishing in Pacific, but more still needs to be done

**IUU is a global problem that undermines responsible international management of fisheries and results in loss of income and livelihoods to coastal states. IUU also compromises the accuracy of fisheries data, making sustainable management more difficult.**

## Annual estimated volume of Pacific IUU tuna fishing reduced by one-third in past decade

Our best estimate of the total annual volume of tuna product harvested or transhipped involving IUU activity in Pacific tuna fisheries **during 2017-19 is 192,186 tonnes,** worth an ex-vessel value of $333.49 million. This represents about 6.5% of the total tuna catch in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCFPC) Convention Area in 2019. This compares with the total annual volume estimated for **2010-2015 of 306,440 tonnes**, worth an estimated ex-vessel value of $616.11 million.

**When comparing the results of 2016 and 2021 reports it is important to keep in mind that some of the data used were different. Changes in fishing effort, catch rates and fish prices since 2016 also influenced overall estimates.** The 2020 study should be seen as the next evolution in an ongoing process to refine approaches to estimating IUU in the Pacific with greater confidence.

The IUU figures in both studies were calculated through quantification studies conducted by MRAG Asia Pacific for the Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). The 2016 study was commissioned by the European Union funded DEVFISH II PROJECT and the 2020 study by the Global Environment Facility funded Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (OFMP2).

## Cut in IUU volume driven partly by better data to support estimates

The 2020 results show a considerable drop in estimated IUU compared to the 'first cut' estimation of 2016 where there was more uncertainty around data. This is due both to the increased monitoring undertaken by FFA members and technological developments. As a result, the 2020 study had some better data available to support some IUU estimates such as:

- the volume of longline fishing misreporting, due to a more than 10-fold increase in monitoring of longline vessels unloading in FFA member ports
- new information for estimating illegal transhipment (the unloading of fish from one ship to another for transport to market).

## Cooperation between FFA members and partners is reducing IUU

Several decades worth of cooperation between FFA members, their partners and regional secretariats, including in monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS), has had a profound impact on the nature and volume of IUU in the Pacific.

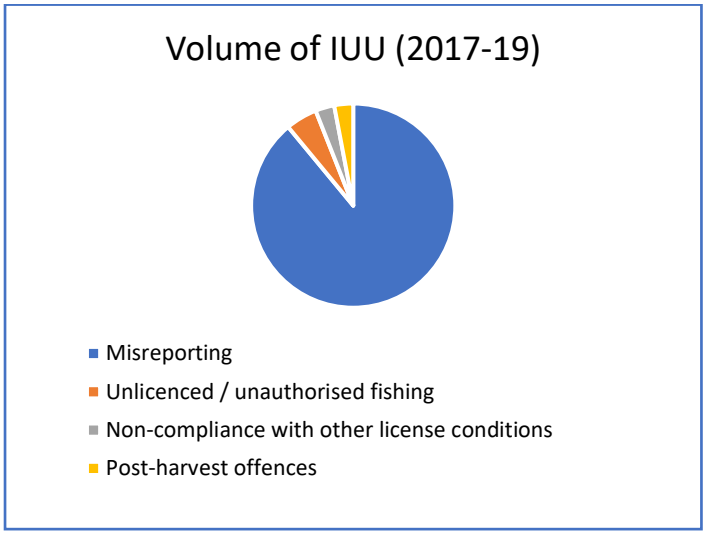
Cooperative MCS initiatives include:

- The FFA Regional Vessel Register
- Harmonised Minimum Terms and Conditions for foreign fishing vessels
- FFA Vessel Monitoring System
- Pacific Island Regional Fisheries Observers' standards and training
- The Niue Treaty and Subsidiary Arrangement facilitating MCS cooperation and information sharing
- Coordinated Regional Surveillance Operations
- Development of common regional data collection forms and protocols
- Establishment of Pacific Maritime Security Program
- The Regional Fisheries Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Strategy 2018 – 2023

## Pacific IUU dominated by misreporting

Misreporting of catch and harvest of tuna by licensed fleets contributed 89% of the estimated IUU by volume from 2017-19. Most of this misreporting was in the purse-seine fishing sector, where there is 100% observer coverage providing good independent estimates of catch. However, it can be challenging to identify species and estimate catch at sea due to the scale of the catches.

Only 5% of the overall estimated IUU volume was thought to be due to the various forms of unlicenced fishing. Few unlicensed fishing vessels were detected or prosecuted during the study period, except for incursions by illegal boats on the western fringe of the FFA area. Non-compliance with licence conditions and post-harvest regulations were each estimated to account for another 3% of IUU.




**Purse-seine fishing** in the Pacific accounts for most IUU by volume (worth some $152m), largely through misreporting. However, with 100% observer coverage for this fishery, any errors in catch reports can be picked up. In addition, purse-seine vessels are licensed to access the fishery through the Vessel Day Scheme, meaning direct revenue loss associated with misreporting is likely to be negligible.

While there is less volume of IUU estimated for **longline fisheries**, their target tuna catch of big eye and southern albacore tuna is more valuable so IUU in these fisheries is worth more than half of the total estimated IUU by value (about $181m).

## Covid pandemic results in temporary suspension of observers

Observer data was extensively used in both studies. The latest study period (2017-19) preceded COVID-19 related impacts on MCS and IUU in the region. The COVID 19 pandemic resulted in a temporary suspension in the use of observers in most circumstances, meaning FFA Members do not currently have one of their most effective means of identifying and deterring IUU fishing. In response to the COVID challenges, FFA Members are adapting and modifying their MCS activities, including the further use of technologies such e-monitoring and e-reporting.

## Need for stronger MCS for longline fisheries and transhipping

The MCS arrangements for longline fisheries of the Pacific are much weaker than for the purse seine fishery:

- Only 5% observer coverage meaning less independent data compared to purse-seining (100%)
- A higher proportion of fishing happens on the high seas, limiting opportunities for monitoring and inspection at sea and in port.

Many FFA Members are implementing stronger measures for monitoring their domestic longline vessels. But FFA Members continue to strongly advocate through the WCPFC for more effective monitoring of all longline vessels fishing in the WCPFC Convention Area.

Despite better information being available on transhipment than in 2016, we still have uncertainty around at sea transhipment of longline catch. We need better systems to validate the volume and species of tuna transhipped by these fisheries. This could involve:

- Strengthening the effectiveness of the transhipment observer program.
- Wider use of electronic reporting and monitoring
- Developing a catch documentation scheme

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