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8 to 13 September 2025, Wellington, New Zealand

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Annual Report of the Cook Islands to the Scientific Committee

Cook Islands

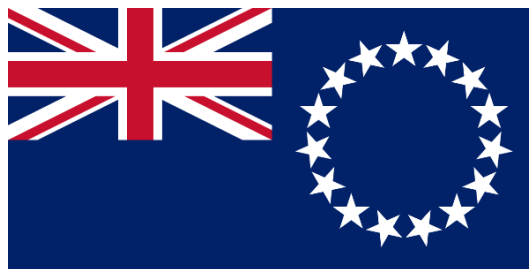


Ministry of Marine Resources
GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

SOUTH PACIFIC REGIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION

Cook Islands Annual Report in the SPRFMO Convention Area for 2024

8 – 13 September 2025



**Prepared by the Ministry of Marine Resources,
Cook Islands**

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1 Description of Fisheries

In 2024, the Cook Islands vessel scheduled for fishing activities has still not completed any trips. Initial plans aimed for the vessel to continue fishing for lobsters (*Jasus caveorum*) and crabs (*Chaceon* sp.), and to begin fishing for hapuka (*Polyprion oxygeneios*) in 2025. However, due to logistical constraints, no fishing was undertaken in 2024, but the vessel is beginning its next trip in August 2025.

In line with the Cook Islands' commitment to sustainable fisheries management, the country is exploring a new *P. oxygeneios* fishery, which is being developed in accordance with Conservation Management measure (CMM) 14g-2024. This new initiative aims to establish a regulated exploratory *P. oxygeneios* fishery that adheres to international conservation measures while promoting sustainable fishing practices. In addition, the *J. caveorum* and *Chaceon* sp. fishing will continue under CMM 14d-2024.

The collaboration with regional stakeholders and organizations is pivotal in shaping the Fisheries Operation Plan (FOP) for the *P. oxygeneios* fishery. This plan encompasses strategies for stock assessments, monitoring protocols, and catch limits designed to ensure the long-term viability of *P. oxygeneios* populations in the region.

Despite the vessel not conducting any fishing in 2024, the Cook Islands remains optimistic about commencing fishing activities under both CMM14d and CMM 14g in 2025. The *P. oxygeneios* developments are aimed at diversifying the fishery portfolio to develop several boutique fisheries for an economically viable fishery.

The Cook Islands is focused on creating an innovative and economically viable fishery sector while safeguarding marine resources. The commitment to implement conservation measures will enhance the resilience of the *P. oxygeneios* fishery and contribute to the responsible stewardship of fisheries in the Cook Islands.

Table 1. Fleet composition of Cook Islands flagged vessels operating in the SPRFMO area for the most recent 5 years.

Vessel GRT	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
0-200	-	-	-	-	-
201-500	-	-	1	1	1
500+	1	-	-	-	-
Total	1	-	1	1	1

2 Catch, Effort and CPUE Summaries

There was no fishing activities conducted in 2024.

Table 2. Catch by species in tonnes (t) for potting fishery for most recent 5 years.

Year	J. caveorum (t)	Chaceon sp. (t)	Others (t)	Total (t)
2020	1.46	13.95	0.37	15.73
2021	-	-	-	-
2022	43.78	4.44	0	48.22
2023	3.95	21.94	0	25.89
2024	-	-	-	-
Total	194.4	48.03	1.48	246.86

3. Fisheries Data Collection and Research Activities

Not applicable due to the lack of fishing in 2024. But fisheries data collection systems have been refined and will continue once the fishing resumes.

4. Biological Sampling and Length/Age Composition of Catches

Data collection will continue once the fishing resumes. We will continue to collect size frequency data as well as sex, maturity and shell state data from all *J. caveorum* and *Chaceon* sp. In addition, the Cook Islands has purchased genetic sampling kits and developed protocols to collect genetic samples from *J. caveorum* and *P. oxygeneios* as well as otoliths for *P. oxygeneios* for future stock structure and age and growth analyses. We have initiated some new work on *J. caveorum* and along with our ongoing length data collections, we will be undertaking genetic analysis of *J. caveorum* investigating the genetic links between seamounts as well as the two larger areas we fish.

5. Ecosystem Approach considerations

For *P. oxygeneios* we will be undertaking genetic analysis investigating the genetic links between seamounts as well as the two larger areas we fish, as well as age and growth analysis. The Cook Islands has recently built our own fish ageing laboratory and, as part of our capacity development work, we will be undertaking our own analysis in-house and not outsourcing the work.

As per the previous report, the same mitigation measures are applied by the Cook Islands flagged vessel in line with CMM14b-2024 and CMM14g-2024. We also intend to undertake additional sampling of *P. oxygeneios* gut contents to begin a long-term data set to help inform changes to fish diet that could elucidate changes to the ecosystem that occur as climate change progresses.

6. Observer Implementation Reports (refer CMM 02 and CMM 16)

The Cook Islands National Observer Programme, authorized for the SPRFMO Convention Area since 2018, has steadily grown, training more observers and enhancing their skills. Despite logistical challenges in 2021 due to COVID-19, the program ensured coverage by collaborating with Capricorn Marine Observers, implementing observer data collection manuals, which will be trialed during this upcoming fishing season, in preparation for the commencement of fishing activities in 2025. These manuals are designed to meet all data requirements for effective monitoring and management of

the fishery, ensuring that the data collected is reliable and useful for sustainable management practices. Despite the hapuka fishing vessel not yet conducting trips, the developments surrounding the hapuka fishery and the observer program are paving the way for a responsible and sustainable fishing future.