

## Crisis Management and Jack Mackerel Fishing In the South Pacific

6 years ago, the negotiating rounds to create a Regional Fisheries Management Organization in the South Pacific (SPRFMO) began. However, much of this effort has been eclipsed by the crisis in the main transboundary fishery in the area, the jack mackerel (*Trachurus murphyi*).

For the second time the member countries will meet in this negotiation in Chile, this time in Santiago, but with the same goal: to try to agree interim measures to prevent the imminent collapse of the jack mackerel.

This meeting is the third session of the preparatory conference, because the Convention has still not received the necessary ratifications for the entry into force of the Convention, despite negotiators having signed the text of the agreement in November 2009. The entry into force of the Convention is the only way to enforce agreements on fisheries, since the current interim measures have been ineffective in making consistent and effective efforts to reduce catches recommended by the Jack Mackerel Science Sub-Working Group on mackerel (JMSG).

In addition to failures in the interim measures, questions remain over the allegations over dual reporting of catches of Russian Federation and the Peruvian fleets. This concerns those countries that have complied with such measures, due to disadvantage and prejudicial effects on access to the resource.

While the Chilean fleet has reduced their catch internally, the Peruvian fleet has captured nearly 6 times more than it promised to capture. Although catches of Peru have taken place within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), this increase in catches causes direct pressure on the stock that must be managed by the efforts of all countries participating in the fishery and the fishing inside the EEZ must be compatible with measures in international waters as stated in paragraph 23 of the interim measures. Situations of this type have been part of JMSG analysis in its report of September 2011 on the status of the stock.

At the meeting in Auckland, New Zealand in 2009, Greenpeace circulated a proposed 50% cut in fishing for jack mackerel and a plea to follow scientific advice to save the stock. It is clear that the call was well founded then. In January 2011 in Cali, Colombia, Greenpeace again requested respect for scientific advice and made a call to reduce by 60% (10% higher than the JMSG asked for to recover the mackerel). Unless strong actions are taken in Santiago, it is possible that the failure to respect the interim measures, legacy of ignoring scientific advice, short-term vision and nationalism end up collapsing the resource, with serious environmental, social and economic conditions for the Pacific coast of South American continent.

To date, management has failed miserably. In 2009 the JMSG emphatically stated that *“further declines in stock status are likely unless fishing mortality is reduced, particularly if recruitment remains poor.”* It insisted that *“[t]o stop further declines and re-build this jack mackerel stock, urgent and adequate measures will be required to limit fishing mortality to sustainable levels. Indicators suggest that this will require a decrease in fishing mortality. Given current declines in estimated biomass, a decrease in fishing mortality will require a reduction in total removals”*. In 2010, it recommended to lower catches to 50% in 2011 based in the catches made in 2010, because the stock had reached a historically low biomass of 2.1 million t. The SPRFMO agreed that these reductions would only be 40%.

The catches in 2011 were 522,440 t, the lowest catch on record since 1976 (Annex SWG-JM-02 Table 1, and SWG-JM-03 Figure 5, and Report of the Jack Mackerel Subgroup Annex SWG-10-03). Yet even this is too high.

The recommendations by the JMSG in its report of September 2011 only confirm the complete failure of the interim measures taken, because although it experienced a slight increase in biomass to 2.8 million t, the spawning biomass continues to decline, reducing from 760,000 t in 2010 to 723,000 t in 2011 (Annex SWG-JM-03 Figure 17). This amount is 10 times less than optimal for spawning biomass ( $SSB_{MSY}$ ) which is identified at 7.4 million t, and which of them the optimal fishing mortality ( $F_{MSY}$ ) was 0.15, i.e., the optimal fishing is 1.1 million t. However, the results of the models say that only a constant catch of 390,000 t have a high probability of allowing an increase in biomass at 2021 (SWG-JM-03 Figure 24 and 25 and Table 1 on page 7 of Annex SWG-10-03) and only a constant catch of 260,000 t is certain under all models to increase the biomass to 2021. Given the poor history of the fishery, data uncertainties and patchy application of interim measures to date, applying the precautionary approach, as is mandated by the Convention, it is clear that the total catch must be limited to 260,000 tonnes: a 50% cut from 2011 catches.

The South Pacific Permanent Commission last year *“shared an abiding concern for sustainable development of fisheries on the high seas and the conservation and management of straddling and highly migratory species”* and requested that countries *“adjust the volume of their catches of mackerel in the area of application of the Convention during the years 2011 and 2012 at levels that allow recovery of the fishery”*, and paragraph 83 of the Zero Draft of the declaration for the upcoming Rio +20 meeting notes that *“despite agreement to restore global fish stocks to sustainable levels by 2015, many stocks continue to be depleted at increasingly unsustainable levels.”* The draft calls upon *“States to re-commit to maintaining or restoring depleted fish stocks to sustainable levels and to further commit to implementing science-based management plans to rebuild stocks by 2015”*. This paragraph speaks directly to the jack mackerel stocks and to SPRFMO. The measures must be taken now, at Santiago. Only a catch of 260,000 t or below has been found by the Sub-Group to be certain to rebuild stocks. Either maintaining spawning biomass (520,000 t) or a 'high probability' of rebuilding (390,000 t) are enough to ensure that the stocks are rebuilt.

## **What is needed to restore sustainability in the Southeast Pacific mackerel?**

With this background, and given that the South Pacific is one of the places that still remain a regional fisheries body in international waters, Greenpeace demands that participants in Santiago:

1. Ensure that no more than 260,000 t of jack mackerel are caught in 2012, following the findings of the Sub-group. This requires a 50% cut from 2011 catches.
2. Take concrete measures expressed in a plan to ensure the sustainability of long-term based on the ecosystem approach and precautionary principle. These measures should include limiting access, location verification, and validation reports of the capture at sea, and the closure during the spawning season.
3. Publicly commit to accelerate the process of ratification of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Fishery Resources in the High Seas of the South Pacific Ocean.

For more information contact;

Samuel Leiva

Campaigns Coordinator

[saleiva@greenpeace.org](mailto:saleiva@greenpeace.org)