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## **Dire warning on Pacific Tuna**

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There really are far far less tuna in the sea than there used to be. What we see now is tuna being pursued with ever more sophisticated technology And there really is no place for fish to hide any longer. Callum Roberts, Professor of Marine Conservation, University of York, UK

Dire words of warning by the Pacifics own marine scientists are still not being heeded by those responsible for managing the Pacifics valuable tuna resource.

So Greenpeace is defending pockets of international Pacific waters in a bid to have them declared Marine Reserves and off limits to greedy tuna fishers.

Our activities at sea have already seen four foreign fishing vessels leave the zone that Greenpeace is defending.

Here in the Pacific, three distinct high seas areas exist within the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO), entirely bounded by the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of surrounding island nations.

These areas have great biological and ecological importance and face a number of threats, including overfishing and the potential extraction of seabed minerals in the future.

Colloquially known as donut holes, high seas pockets or Pacific Commons, these areas of international waters appear relatively small in comparison to the huge sea areas falling within the EEZs of some of the Pacific states.

The Pacific Commons are between Pacific Island countries Papua New Guinea, Federated States of Micronesia, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Nauru, Marshall Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia and the Cook Islands. They are three large areas of international waters that belong to everyone.

What is a donut hole and

why should you care?

Well, pour a cup of coffee and grab a donut. See that hole in the middle; imagine that it is the only ungoverned space in a big ocean surrounded by waters governed by the Pacific Island States.

Now imagine you were fishing illegally in a Pacific EEZ adjacent to one of these high seas pockets, you could slip into

the donut holes every time a surveillance vessel or plane came by when you really were fishing in the EEZ, and you would not have to pay a single cent.

Despite warnings since 2001 by Pacific fisheries scientists that strong measures are needed to conserve stocks, over-fishing and destructive fishing methods continue to threaten the Pacific's fragile ocean environment and the tuna that depend on it. Tuna has given the Pacific peoples food, jobs, education, roads, health care and life, and now faces an imminent crisis.

And what do the clever distant water fishing nations do? They haggle over the science! Who knows exactly how much tuna were in the ocean before industrial fishing began, or what the level of pirate fishing is in the Pacific? Most boats fish without observers on board, satellites can't weigh the fish in the holds, and many island governments only have one patrol boat to cover a huge area of ocean. These factors are often overlooked when setting catch levels. With so many unknowns where is the precautionary wisdom?

Marine reserves tabu ocean zones

Marine reserves are highly protected areas off limits to all extractive and destructive uses, including fishing and mineral exploitation. They are the most powerful tool available for the conservation of ocean wildlife and may also benefit fisheries by promoting recovery and reproduction of exploited species.

Marine reserves will prove crucial to effective management of the sea and have important benefits to scientific understanding of this environment. They provide control areas without human disturbances and more natural baselines for the measurement of impacts. This means scientists will be able to collect more accurate information on natural lifecycles of all marine life, including valuable fish stocks.

Marine reserves benefit sea life by protecting breeding areas, ocean habitats and fish that have been targeted by unsustainable fishing. The three proposed marine reserves above cover extensive areas that include biologically rich undersea mountains, migration routes of tuna species, habitat of endangered leatherback turtles and breeding areas of skipjack, albacore and bigeye tuna.

More than half the world's tuna is fished from the Pacific. Of the world's fisheries, 75 per cent are exploited up to and beyond the point where they can be regarded as sustainable.

Global fisheries expert Dr **Daniel Pauly** states that in the future people will be eating jellyfish, because that is all that will be left unless we act now.

Since April, Greenpeace activists have been defending the Pacific Commons on board the MV Esperanza. Five Pacific Islanders joined the crew in Honiara and are on board now as the Esperanza continues to defend the Pacific Commons.

The ocean defenders have found two purse seiners and six longliners, all from foreign countries, contributing to the overfishing of yellowfin and bigeye tuna.

These ocean defenders targeted three boats and one FAD (fish aggregation device) was confiscated.

On April 17, The Olympus - owned by Korea's largest tuna company, Dongwon Industries Co. Ltd, a significant global player in the tuna industry was told by the ocean defenders to leave the Pacific Commons they are defending as a no-take marine reserve immediately. The same day the activists also confiscated a fish aggregation device (FAD) used by purse seiners to attract tuna and intensify overfishing.

On April 21, the ocean defenders went on board the Taiwanese vessel Nian Sheng 3, after an invitation from the captain when it was found in the international waters of the Pacific.

The Esperanza then peacefully escorted the vessel out of the Pacific Commons and into Solomon Island waters where

the Taiwanese vessel had a licence to fish.

The ocean defenders painted the side of the vessel with the words Tuna overkill and held a banner reading Marine reserves NOW. The fishing vessel was also asked to leave the area immediately.

But the action did not stop here in the Pacific Commons; it even went as far as the European Seafood Exposition in Brussels where the future of Pacific tuna and those that remain around the world was vigorously defended by 80 Greenpeace ocean defenders from 15 countries.

These Greenpeace activists closed down the stands of five large tuna suppliers in a bid to save Pacific tuna stocks. They covered the stands with fishing nets, chained themselves to the stands and put up banners in 13 languages saying: Time and Tuna running out.

An 8 by 11 metre banner with the same message was hung from the front of the building. A message was also broadcast through the exhibition halls public address system urging visitors to buy only sustainably caught seafood

The fishing companies were called on to stop trading in threatened bluefin, yellowfin and bigeye tuna and other unsustainably caught tuna until stocks recover. Among these companies are the major Pacific tuna players Dongwon Industries, Dongwon F&B, Mitsubishi and Moon Marine.

The Pacific supplies about 60 per cent of the worlds tuna, worth over \$US3 billion (K8.55 billion). Pacific nations are being ripped off, only receiving 5-6 per cent of the value of the catch caught by foreign vessels in their national waters. This is because of the unfair and unsustainable agreements negotiated by foreign companies and countries for access to fish for tuna in their waters.

Its do or die for Pacific tuna stocks. Pacific Islanders need to come together as they did at the 2007 Pacific Island Forum leaders meeting, and moving towards halving their catch and becoming instrumental in turning the Pacific Commons into marine reserves.

Your chance to turn the tide

The people of the Pacific can make a difference in how our precious marine resources are managed, instead of being stolen, with minimal or no benefits to Island nations.

We can stand together and support the call for new Marine Reserves in the Pacific Commons areas.

An easy way to do this is to enter the Greenpeace competition to give these significant areas a name.

Anyone can enter. Just send your name for any of the three areas, and say why you have chosen that name for our Pacific heritage. Entries can be posted to Greenpeace Australia Pacific, P.O Box 166, Port Moresby. National Capital District. Papua New Guinea or email at [greenpeace@connect.com.fj](mailto:greenpeace@connect.com.fj)

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