

The China Syndrome

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The China Syndrome was a book and movie about the meltdown of a Nuclear Powerplant and the scenario that the meltdown material would go through the earth and emerge in China. Today we have a revised version of albacore going into China and emerging on all sides of the earth. According to WWW.Globefish.org the international trade of frozen tuna in China has increased significantly over the years and according to national data, exports in 2013 grew by nearly 41%. Skipjack was the main species in both export and imports. At the same time, more than 80,000 tonnes of frozen tuna were imported into the Chinese market in 2013, which is a 29% increase compared with 2012. The majority of these imports were re-processed into cooked loins, for which the major clients were canned tuna producers in the USA, Thailand and in the EU. In 2013, China exported over 73,000 tonnes of processed tuna (cooked loins and canned products tuna) to the global market. For example, Italy, in 2013 canned imports decreased but more pre-cooked tuna loins were shipped into the country, mainly from Ecuador (+15.2%). In Spain, Papua New Guinea shipped more pre-cooked tuna loins (+31.8%) in 2013 compared with 2012. The increase in China catching capacity has resulted in a major shift in international markets and a decline in price.

It has been noted in many news articles that the expansion of the Chinese fleet and associated fishing subsidies have resulted in an economic imbalance that fishermen of other countries that do not have the same subsidies to offset rising costs of fishing and processing. Over the last decade, China's longline tuna fleet has grown rapidly, leading to complaints from other nations and from environment organizations regarding catch and effort increases and lack of accountability of China.

In an article in the Guardian news (<http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/oct/27/toyo-reizo-shell-companies-fisheries-china-tuna-overfishing-oceans-ipo>) it was reported that the Chinese Bureau of Fisheries officials stated “China is a developing country, its offshore fishing companies are still weak, levels of management are still uneven, and the management system still needs to be steadily improved” Once wholly state-owned, 70% of the Chinese fishing industry has been privatized in recent years. The rapid growth of the Chinese fisheries may have exceeded the capacity of China to manage it's fleets, but reported subsidies and a 2010 Chinese task force report stating that “marine biological resources are seen as the largest store of protein, therefore owning and mastering the ocean means owning and mastering the future” indicate that China policy is to increase it's presence in Pacific Ocean fisheries.

The international market informs us that China has penetrated many markets with low cost tuna that is making it difficult for tuna fisheries of other nations such as the U.S. that do not have subsidized operations. However, the trends in catch and effort are difficult to follow. One of the problems with tuna is inconsistency in reporting. The following table is the reported catch by China for the north and south Pacific and for the WCPFC area. Greatest increases have been in the South Pacific. One can see an inconsistency in the numbers, which may relate to Commission reporting areas or errors in reporting. Chinese representation to assessment meetings has been limited and only academics have attended meetings who do not appear to access to all catch data. Table 1 Reported Chinese catches (Thousand lbs) from the North and South Pacific 1999 to 2013

	NPAC	SPAC	WCPFC
1999	-	3,473.00	3,473.00
2000	27.00	2,056.00	2,056.00
2001	636.00	2,073.00	2,711.00
2002	430.00	2,410.00	2,920.00
2003	823.00	6,318.00	6,223.00
2004	874.00	5,176.00	6,104.00
2005	571.00	3,799.00	4,103.00
2006	1,103.00	5,112.00	7,191.00
2007	121.00	5,125.00	5,453.00
2008	188.00	15,362.00	15,092.00
2009	96.00	21,900.00	20,149.00
2010	910.00	16,926.00	13,025.00
2011	1,836.00	10,161.00	11,996.00
2012	6,092.00	27,746.00	24,826.00
2013	3,255.00	28,722.00	24,162.00

This is a source of major uncertainty at present and we are uncertain as to the actual extent of the growing Chinese fishery. The US and Canada has been trying to encourage the Chinese to improve the reporting and completeness of information of their catches and its timely submission. Unfortunately, the Chinese have not attended the last ISC meetings, and have not attended the WCPFC-NC for the last two years. Albacore CPUE is important for the commercial viability of fishing fleets, and there is concern that the current high catch levels may affect the sustainability of albacore fisheries.

Assessment results for the South Pacific indicate that total catch has doubled and regional stock depletion has contributed to catch rate declines, but localized depletion may also have contributed. Observed declines in catch rates from significant domestic longline fisheries (e.g. Fiji, French Polynesia, and Samoa) — following periods of relatively high albacore catch (3,000–10,000 mt per year) — may indicate localized stock depletion (Langley 2004).

WFOA has expressed its concern about increases in the Chinese longline catch and the resulting oversupply of cheap tuna on the international market since the Chinese vessels. The increased volume of albacore, principally from the South Pacific is reducing the access of the US fleet to historic markets. There is also a noted increase in albacore catch in the Northeast Pacific but the reports received by the RFMO are not clear as to what is reported, total catch, or catch by a monitored segment of the fleet.

WFOA has long had concerns about the growing Chinese fleet going back to 2002 when WFOA asked the Pacific Fisheries Management Council to support efforts to prevent the growth of Chinese fisheries in the NE Pacific Ocean. Unfortunately, that became a general call for all nations to maintain effort at 2002 levels. These controls do not appear to be limiting the growth of China or other nations; rather, it has been used to attack the U.S. fleet for “exceeding effort limits”. WFOA is very concerned that the current administration is not applying the pressure it should on this issue. WFOA has also has concerns regarding attempts to impose unilateral restrictions on the US fleet that is believed will only result in less access to the resource by the US fleet.

These concerns were recently addressed by the Coalition of Coastal Communities in a recent resolution to State and Federal officials.

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Resolutions regarding North Pacific Albacore Tuna - passed at Coalition of Coastal Fisheries meeting 12-18-14

Resolution 1

The Western and Central Pacific Fishery Commission Northern Committee has noted that North Pacific albacore are being fished sustainably and stocks are near the MSY level, but there is concern about reporting by China and the growing effort and disregard of international calls for effort stabilization. Chinese catch is poorly reported and the amount of effort is unknown which complicates assessment and confidence in management measures. The Chinese catch has grown tremendously in recent years and the importation of albacore from Chinese vessels to the US has impacted US fishermen economically. China also provides fuel and other subsidies to its fleet that provides them with an undue economic advantage in markets. Given the disregard of China to controlling its fisheries, the Coalition of Coastal Fisheries (CCF) resolves that the U.S. Government agencies emphasize the importance of bringing China into compliance with Regional Fishery Management Organizations’ regulations.

Resolution 2

The Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 provides that management of HMS species be vested in Regional Fishery Management Organizations and that the U.S. regional fishery management councils do not need to take action until RFMOs fail to maintain stocks at or above biological reference points. Currently the North Pacific Albacore stock is at or above the MSY level. The U.S. effort is at an average level relative to historic effort. Much of the US reduction is due to effort shifted to more profitable fisheries, poor market conditions and a general reduction of the troll fleet by attrition. The U.S. albacore fishery is the last remaining open access fishery on the west coast. The CCF is concerned that unilateral actions by the US to regulate the albacore fishery may put US fishermen at a disadvantage relative to the fleets of other nations. The CCF resolves that the Department of Commerce and Department of State through subsidiary agencies such as NOAA and NMFS should recognize the importance of this fishery to the west coast, that they should not implement any restrictions on the US fleet that will put US vessels at a disadvantage relative to other nations, and that they should recognize the need that the historic US effort level be supported in International management formulation.

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