

The only fishery resources of significance in the Trust Territory are the highly migratory tuna, which are widespread throughout the region. These are not local or native fisheries as such, but are part of larger stocks of tuna extending over vast areas in the Central and Western Pacific. Little is known about the stock structure or the potential harvest of the tuna in this part of the world. Skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye and other species of tuna are pursued by a variety of fishing methods principally by fishermen from Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, and in the more southern areas, Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines. It is generally believed that the Skipjack tuna stocks of the Central and Southwest Pacific are a large resource which is not even approaching full utilization, the only tuna stocks in the world of any species which is being significantly underfished.

Total catches of tuna within 200 miles of Micronesia are estimated to be around 100-150,000 tons, taken mainly by Japanese fishermen. Skipjack tuna is the principal species fished, but yellowfin, bigeye and other species are also taken in the longline fishery. The tuna fishing method employed for the most part by U.S. fishermen, purse-seining, has proven difficult for a number of technical reasons. The schools of fish are smaller, faster, more erratic and the water conditions (thermocline) different than in the areas presently

fished successfully with purse-seine nets. The Japanese, however, have recently had some success purse-seining, and with gear modifications and new fishing techniques it is very likely that purse-seining will become practical and economical.

The Pacific Island Development Commission (PIDC) has been established by law for the purpose of determining the feasibility of economically conducting large scale tuna fisheries in the Trust Territory. This is being done with the cooperation and resources of the U.S. tuna industry. Representatives of the Trust Territory participate in the work of the Commission, which is committed to pursuing its efforts in a way calculated to bring economic benefits to the island territories. Three U.S. tuna seiners are scheduled to begin experimental fishing in the area this summer under the auspices of the PIDC. The Commission has also emphasized developing in the area bait-fishing, a method of fishing tuna in which live bait is thrown at a school of fish and bare hooks on the ends of poles are employed to hoist the tuna out of the water. This type of fishery may be one which could be developed locally, although one of the problems encountered in encouraging a large scale bait fishery has been limited supplies of bait available. The Japanese have conducted rather successful bait fishing

around the islands but have brought with them live bait taken from their own waters.

It is clear that there is a large tuna resource moving through the Pacific which appears in waters off the Trust Territory in significant quantities, with annual catches worth perhaps 50-75 million dollars just in the value of the fish landed. The processing and associated industries increase this economic value several-fold. The question arises as to how can this economic benefit be turned to the advantage of the people living in the area. It is conceivable that a local fleet could develop which would pursue tuna fisheries in the area in a major way, but whether or not this could be accomplished would depend on a number of intangible factors as well as on an infusion of the capital and technology necessary to conduct a serious tuna fishery. Perhaps of more immediate benefit would be for the islanders to realize economic gains associated with expansion of a U.S. fishery in the area. This could be accomplished in a number of ways, although it must be kept in mind that the islands do not at the present time have the facilities, such as ports, labor, power, etc., necessary to attract the proper investments. Also, it must first be proven that the resource can be economically fished. It

would seem that arrangements could be made which would encourage fishing in Micronesian waters in such a way as to provide economic benefits to the local inhabitants. Such a balance may not be easily achieved, however, and the situation is such that the utilization of the resources there could be discouraged unless a considered approach is taken.