

The Western and Central Pacific Ocean; have the efforts of the U.S. created a model for RFMO Enforcement?

#### Abstract

Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), particularly Tuna RRMOs (tRFMOs), have significant challenges as they cover vast expanses of ocean, manage high value highly migratory species and have many members each with a different interests and motivations. The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) is no exception, with 41 member states and an area covering over 30 million square kilometers. In addition, the WCPFC manages the most productive tuna fishing grounds in the world with over third of the world's tuna landings worth \$3 billion per year. With many of the coastal states small island developing states (SIDS), and most of the fleet from distant water fishing nations (DWFN), it is easy for fishing vessels to catch fish illegally through the unauthorized entry of a coastal states EEZ or by simply not following regulations set forth by the WCPFC. The vast area and lack of enforcement capacity by SIDS makes detection of illegal activity very unlikely. This situation has lead to IUU (Illegal Unreported Unregulated) fishing estimates to anywhere between 25% and 44% of the total catch in the Western and Central Pacific (or roughly worth about \$1billion).

In 2008, the WCPFC implemented a high seas boarding and inspection scheme that allows members to board other member's vessels on the high seas within the regulatory area. The U.S. Coast Guard has taken a lead role in the region since 2008. Despite being hindered by limited resources, the USCG looked into newer and less expensive tactics including the formation of bilateral agreements with SIDS, use of imaging technology to predict fishing vessel behavior, and use of U.S. Navy platforms to increase fishing vessel sightings, boardings and compliance rate. All of this was done with little change to asset hours and costs. These results indicate that it may be possible to effectively manage a 30 million square kilometer expanse of ocean within a reasonable budget and that the Coast Guard's efforts in the western and central Pacific Ocean may serve as a model for other tRFMOs.