

Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center

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Catch quotas in developed countries

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Catch quotas in developed countries

Total allowable catch

Rather than allocating fishing areas as is the case with territorial use rights, many of the rights-based approaches in developed countries allocate shares of a total allowable catch.

Perhaps the most common allocation system is that used by the United States in its Pacific trawl fisheries. Total allowable catch is set for several species and groups of species. These TACs may also be defined for times and areas. For example, in 1989 the Pacific Fishery Management Council established a total allowable catch for all shortbelly rockfish caught off the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington at 10 000 metric tons. They set a coastwide TAC for Pacific cod at 3 200 mt, for Pacific whiting at 300 000 mt, for sablefish at 9 000 mt, for English sole at 1 900 mt, and for jack mackerel at 12 000 mt. The TACs for lingcod, other species of rockfish, other sole species, and other fishes were established separately for five management areas, where those areas coincided with statistical areas defined by the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission several years ago.

In some fisheries, separate quotas are assigned to foreign fishing fleets, joint ventures (domestic fishermen delivering their catch at sea to foreign processing vessels), and to domestic fishermen delivering to domestic processors. As some fisheries become nationalized, TAC is allocated among competing domestic groups. In those fisheries, such as sablefish, the fish is fully utilized by domestic fishermen delivering to domestic processors. Even here, allocation occurs as some of the harvest is set aside for the Makah Indians -- an aboriginal group with special rights -- and the rest of the harvest is divided between trawl and non-trawl gears. When the allocation for each group is reached, that group must close its fishery unless special provisions are made for the continuation of the fishery.

Individual transferable quotas

The Australian southern bluefin tuna fishery uses individual transferable quotas. Southern bluefin tuna spawn in the Indian Ocean and migrate along the southern coast of Australia and eastward to New Zealand. The largest shares of the harvest are taken by Japanese high-seas fishermen and by the Australians, and a smaller amount by New Zealanders. The drop in the 1970s of the average age and size of the catch created great scientific concern. By 1982, the decline of the biomass to one-third of its original size raised fears of a recruitment failure. Agreement in 1983 among the three major harvesting nations to an overall quota and national shares of that quota forced Australia to sharply reduce tuna harvests at a time when the fishermen's real incomes were falling.

Australia adopted an individual transferable quota program that would reduce fleet capacity voluntarily. Fishermen faced three options: harvesting shares of the new overall quota in proportion to their historical catch patterns; buying additional quotas from other fishermen to make fishing more economical; or selling part or all of their quota and reducing their level of activity in this fishery. Selling quotas meant that the fishermen who left the fishery received compensation for doing so. Although the program is too new to judge completely, a sense of optimism accompanied its introduction. Fishing effort declined and shifted toward the capture of larger fish.



Source: RB Rettig, 1991. *Recent changes in fisheries management in developed countries*. In: T Yamamoto and K Short (eds.). *International Perspectives on Fisheries Management; Proceedings of the JIFRS/IIFET/ZENGYOREN Symposium on Fisheries Management*; 26 Aug - 3 Sept 1991; Tokyo, Japan. National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations.