



Managing the longline catch of southern bluefin tuna off the east coast of Australia

Every year southern bluefin tuna (SBT) migrate with the cold water along Australia's southern and eastern coastlines. These fish are caught by both commercial and recreational fishers. In 2016, AFMA expects targeted SBT longline activity to occur off southern New South Wales and Tasmania in particular with unloading in nearby ports.

AFMA has strict regulations that limit the catch of southern bluefin tuna by commercial fishers to the catch entitlement (quota) they have.

How does AFMA manage the SBT catch from longlining?

At certain times during the year off the south-east coast, operators from the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF) catch SBT while longlining. To minimise the risk of SBT being taken by ETBF operators without quota, AFMA implements a special SBT Zone. Typically the waters off Victoria and Tasmania are within this special zone all year round.

The zone is a designated area of the ETBF where SBT are likely to interact with longline fishing gear. To enter the zone a commercial longliner must have uncaught SBT quota and an operational electronic monitoring system. Commercial longliners with no SBT quota are unable to fish in the zone and usually move north of the zone into warmer waters where SBT are not usually caught.

More information about the management of SBT caught by commercial fishers can be found on the SBT page of the AFMA website (afma.gov.au)

What are the rules for commercial longline vessels entering the SBT zones?

Arrangements that commercial longliners must abide by include:

- an operational electronic monitoring system.
- an operational satellite vessel monitoring system.
- using bird scaring devices (tori lines) during fishing operations.
- using line weights to rapidly sink their baited hooks out the range of diving seabirds.

- no use of wire leaders and are limited to landing no more than 20 sharks.
- no shark finning.
- all SBT are required to be landed to an authorised fish receiver with an individually numbered tag. The length and weight of each fish is recorded on the tagging form. Fish without tags are not permitted to be landed.
- SBT are only allowed to be released if they are alive and vigorous. All other fish (including fish that are dead and/or damaged on the line) must be covered by quota.
- when fishing off Victoria and Tasmania the vessel must have a minimum amount of quota for SBT, yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna, striped marlin, broadbill swordfish and albacore tuna.

How do the SBT zones work?

The location and timing of the zone moves during the catching season and is determined by analysing information such as sea surface temperatures, landing data, electronic monitoring and vessel monitoring system data, advice from industry and the habitat preference information from the Commonwealth and Scientific Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). All of this information indicates where SBT are likely to occur and enables AFMA to set the SBT zone location accordingly.

Operators are notified of the new SBT zone location and therefore know the areas where it is more likely SBT will be present. This means they can choose to enter or not enter the zone. The SBT zone location is reviewed and updated weekly.

The locations of the SBT zones are posted on the AFMA website (afma.gov.au).