

# FRANCISCO BLAHA

Fisheries Consultant -  
Consultor Pesquero

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## FADS – THE GOOD AND THE BAD (FROM PNA'S TMI) /MAY 5, 2018

Every few weeks the good people from PNA in Majuro publish their [Tuna Market Intelligence](#) briefings, and if you are interested in tuna, they are compulsory reading. I have republished in the past some of their content, yet as always say: nothing beats [the original](#). This week they publish this VERY interesting overview of the status and evolutions of FADs and also a small interview they did about my work with the MIMRA crew in Majuro. I have [written quote a lot about FADs over the years](#), and the information in this piece is very good and accessible. Enjoy!



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Finally, apologies in advance for my terrible grammar and orthography! I'm dyslexic and never had any formal education in English.

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*Quoted from PNA TMI#70*

While Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) have been around for ages, they have significantly evolved over the last 20 years, changing the fishing industry and affecting the status of tuna stocks. It is estimated that currently 50% of canned tuna comes from skipjack caught with the aid of FADs.

Today, up to 72% of FADs are connected to solar powered satellite buoys that contain GPS and sonar devices. This enables a vessel to see the exact location and depth of the tuna as well as how many and what kind of tuna is under the FAD. Purse seine fishing is much more efficient with the aid of FADs as boats spend less time looking for tuna. This results in a considerable savings of both time and fuel.

Fishing vessels, mainly purse seiners, deploy FADs, which in turn attract tuna, specifically skipjack. One vessel carries anywhere from zero to 350 FADs in our waters, and in other oceans up to 1,000 per boat. Generally, it takes two months for skipjack to congregate around a FAD.

FADs are ultimately lucrative and they seem like a good idea. But there are several problems associated with use of FADs, primarily because there is no required accountability. There are no rules governing how many FADs a vessel can use, nor are there any regulations regarding retrieval.

Another major issue is that, not only are the target species (adult skipjack) caught, but many other species, bycatch, are taken on board as well, including juvenile skipjack and yellowfin and other non-targeted tuna and non-tuna species. Some of these species are endangered, such as turtles and sharks, and some are fish species that are vulnerable. For example, Greenpeace estimates that as many as 80,000 tons of baby bigeye tuna are landed yearly as bycatch.

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Another issue is that FADs are easy to deploy but vessels don't find it worthwhile to recover FADs that drift out of productive areas. Greenpeace reports that at any time, over 100,000 FADs are either adrift or anchored globally. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) reports that most companies recover less than 10% percent of the FADs they deploy with PNA/SPC estimating at least 50,000 annually in PNA waters. This makes for a lot of ocean waste that entraps ocean life. In addition, a considerable amount ends up on beaches of small island nations like Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, remote places that have difficulty handling large quantities of rubbish.

Data would be helpful in analyzing the true ramifications of FADs. PNA, SPC and PEW are working to obtain information, but collecting data on FADs has proven tricky. It's hard to link a FAD to a vessel. Observers are on board but they need better training to record the numbers correctly and consistently. 62 % of the buoys associated with FADs are labeled with the name of the company or the associated vessel but that means that over 35% are not.

Meanwhile, FADs are deployed by one vessel and then picked up by another. When tracking data feeds to PNA they are often turned on, then off by industry. They are geo-fenced to limit the tracking by PNA. FADs are traded and stolen and they drift from one zone to another. At the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission meeting last December, PEW called for action and cooperation by governments, fisheries, satellite-buoy companies and fleet managers to share information and to help facilitate responsible management and regulations of FADs.

To help counteract the negative effects of FADs, the Western Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) and Indian Ocean have created FAD bans. This year there is a three-month WCPO FAD ban for July through September in both the high seas and the WCPO coastal states' Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). In addition, there is a two-months WCPO high seas ban that each government can choose

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and then declare to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

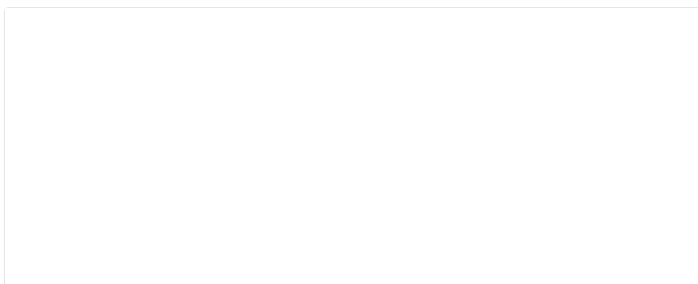
FAD bans are controversial; not everyone agrees they are the answer to protecting the sustainability of the tuna stocks. FAD bans are hugely costly to fishing companies as well as coastal states as vessels sometimes refuse to fish during the ban. It has been estimated that the reduction in the value of catch taken per month during the closure is up to USD15 million. Meanwhile, the reduction of catch is offset by extra-large catches as soon as the FAD ban is lifted. And not everyone honors the ban; according to SPC there were 4071 FAD deployments during a recent FAD closure.

To address the problems that FADs create, companies are increasingly constructing eco-FADs from biodegradable materials and non-entangling FADs are coming into use to help reduce bycatch. Several tuna commissions, including IOTC, IATTC and ICCAT, are requiring vessels fishing in their waters to transition to non-entangling FADs. The ISSF says that use of the non-entangling FADs as well as correctly handling and release of bycatch will reduce bycatch mortality by 15 to 20%. In addition, the Parties to the Nauru Agreement are continuing to lead the study of FADs and their operations using the Fish Information Management System (FIMS) to track FADs in the PNA tuna fishery.

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