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Malta national programme towards farming of the bluefin tuna – Present and future

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SUMMARY – The exploitation of Tuna as a farming and fattening facility is outlined for the island of Malta. The present situation and the planning for the future are also discussed.

Key words: Tuna fattening, aquaculture policy, body weight, feeding, cages.

RESUME – *"Programme national de Malte en vue de l'élevage du thon rouge – Présent et futur". L'exploitation du thon élevé dans des fermes d'engraissement est retracé pour l'île de Malte. La situation actuelle et la planification pour le futur sont également discutées.*

Mots-clés : *Engraissement du thon, politique aquacole, poids corporel, alimentation, cages.*

In Malta, bluefin tuna are fattened from the beginning of June to January, by which time they are harvested and exported to Japan. The farming of this species around the Maltese islands started in 2000 with one farm producing 330 tonnes. At present there are two farms that will export a total of about 1200 tonnes during 2001. The farms that are currently in operation stock their fish in a total of thirteen 45 and 60 m diameter offshore cages that are anchored 1 km off the Maltese coastline. The cages are HDP floating circular cages. Cages are moored independently, with a minimum depth of 38 m and maximum depth of 55 m.

The tuna are caught by purse-seine fishing and weigh between 50 and 300 kg. They are fed on Mediterranean frozen fish such as sardines and mackerel. The financial FCR achieved over a period of 180 days is 13. Feed percent varies from 2.21% body weight (BW) to 2.73% at the maximum seawater temperature of 26°C. SGR from 0.17 to 0.21. The average BW for one cage is 116.6 kg at the beginning of ongrowing in June, increasing to 159.4 kg on harvest in December. The minimum and maximum seawater temperatures are 14°C in February and 26°C in September, respectively.

Over the next two years another three companies will start tuna farming around the Maltese islands and export figures are expected to escalate to 2500 tonnes per year. The Malta Centre for Fisheries Sciences (MCFS) is in the process of starting research projects for the development of techniques for broodstock rearing, egg collection and larval development. Moreover, the Laboratory of Fish Diseases within the MCFS is collecting tissue samples from harvested tuna.

A revised National Aquaculture Policy, to be adopted in February 2002, will control the issue of licences to aquaculture operations, with sites having a minimum depth of 50 m. The licence will also include the registered state of the seabed and obligatory environmental monitoring with yearly revisions of the licenses. Immediate research priorities are the reproduction of BFT and environmental impact studies.