

## American Fishermen's Research Foundation News

The board of directors of AFRF had two recent Telecon meetings to discuss issues related to the future direction of AFRF. Some results were:

**Hire of New Science Consultant:** The AFRF board approved the hiring of David Itano from Hawaii to take the place of Vidar Weststad who retired. David will oversee meetings concerning ISC albacore stock assessment, management strategy evaluation (MSE), and other related issues affecting U.S. albacore pole and troll vessels.

Fisheries work has been Davids' life since 1984 and specifically on research and management of tuna and pelagic resources since 1989. Key positions during his career have included Chief Fishery Biologist for American Samoa, Fisheries Research Scientist for the SPC/Noumea Tuna Programme, Fisheries Research Associate with the Pelagic Fisheries Research Program (University of Hawaii) and Fishery Management Specialist for NOAA/NMFS.

David is very familiar with fishery management systems, both domestic and international and once represented Hawaii as Vice Chair and Council member to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council; currently serving on their Scientific and Statistical Committee. In the past, he has chaired working groups of the Western and Central Pacific Fishery Commission's (WCPFC) Scientific Committee in the area of Fishing Technology and also Ecosystems and Bycatch. He has collaborated with and contributed to the work of the other tuna RFMOs in large-scale tuna tagging studies and efforts to improve targeting and reduce bycatch in tuna fisheries.

He has also participated in several commercial fisheries that included tuna purse seine, shrimp trawl, bottom dropline and salmon/albacore troll fisheries from Alaska to New Zealand. He has not commercially worked on a baitboat but has put in a great deal of time as cruise leader on tagging and research cruises on Japanese style pole-and-line vessels in the western Pacific.

**Tag Data Processing:** The AFRF board is considering a proposal by Stephanie Snyder who gave a great presentation at last years annual meeting in Newport, Oregon on some of our past tag data. She is proposing to AFRF to do geo-tracking data on the last few tags that have not been processed, as well as any other backlogged tags. This would result in up to date reports and presentations and possibly published papers using the data we have collected for the past 14 years off these tags. AFRF and NOAA have contributed over 1.2 million dollars into the tagging project during that time frame and have little information in understandable formats show the public, fishermen, regulators and others. SWFSC funding for albacore has been an issue for many years. This is not the fault of those at the SWFSC that have been trying, but just a system that is increasingly focused on the more glamour species such as, whales, sharks, sunfish, and coastal pelagics. AFRF believes the time has come to explore new initiatives and get some of the data processing completed through private parties and others. President Rick Goche appointed a committee to work with Stephanie to develop this plan soon for consideration.

**Electronic Logbooks:** The board discussed an E-Log project proposed by Mark Hess of Ocean Imaging. This would work well for boats. Unfortunately, developing a workable, user friendly version through SWFSC for past 12 years has not been fruitful. Again it is a time and funding issue and not a high priority as the majority of vessels still use paper logbooks. The board believed that the problem is processing by NOAA and costs should not be on fishermen.

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**Offshore Survey:** There was discussion by the board on possible offshore, west of dateline, fuel subsidy since there has been no effort out there in years and costs are high for boats. Such a project could be combined with genetic fin-clip project and maybe dart tagging. Logistics for archival tagging would be difficult for tech person. Some albacore is harvested not far from Hawaii by Swordfish boats and may also be an option or at least a source of presence of albacore. The board will explore this more.

**Regulatory Information:** AFRF and Oregon Albacore Commission will work on compiling all regulatory/management information affecting west coast fishermen material in one binder or file prior to the 2017 season.

**Archival Tag Rewards:** Fishermen, unloaders, buyers, and processors need to be aware of potential tags in the albacore. A \$500 reward will be paid for each recovered fish. Check out [www.afrf.org](http://www.afrf.org) under the menu item "Tagging" for more information and graphics. More than 1,000 albacore have been tagged since 2001 with at least 200 tagged in the past two seasons. The reward is \$500/fish. Retain whole fish even if you suspect it's a tag. For Information from NOAA/NMFS See: <http://tinyurl.com/myho44q>

**Bio-Sampling:** Unfortunately only a few fish were collected in 2016 for bio-sampling. This has seen good results in past years and only requires fishermen to save at random 4-5 fish per trip and mark them with informational tags from SWFSC. Then the fish need to be offloaded and saved at participating companies until SWFSC picks them up. Boats are compensated for the albacore at \$5/fish more than dock prices. AFRF will do more organizing drop off points with buyers in 2017.

**Federal and International Management Measures:** By Peter Flournoy

Since this is likely the last newsletter of 2016, this will be a combination of reporting on the few meetings since October, major developments, and some things to look for next year.

The first October meeting was a continued session of the Annual IATTC meeting, which was held in La Jolla from October 11-14, 2016. The primary purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Tropical Tuna Conservation and Management measure, although there were other items on the agenda, most of which got little attention during the 4 day meeting. Once again there was no consensus during the time allotted, so the IATTC has scheduled an Extra-Ordinary meeting for Mid-February with only the tropical tuna measure on the agenda. Since the IATTC only categorizes skipjack, big eye and yellowfin tuna under the category of tropical tunas, there will probably be no discussion of albacore. The only lesson for us is that the more countries which show an interest in a stock, the harder it is to get consensus.

The WCPFC met in Fiji during the week of December 5th. Going into the meeting albacore fishermen had several concerns. The last assessment of south Pacific albacore brought forth by the SPC made changes in how that stock was assessed and AFRF questioning this change, NMFS scientists had not, and still haven't seen fit to raise this as an issue with the SPC. Perhaps with a new science consultant on board, we can get better answers.

As you might recall, recommendations of the SPC, the WCPFC Scientific Committee (SC), and the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC), are driven by the FFA's legitimate concern with the greatly increased longline effort on South Pacific albacore by China. Last year the WCPFC set a conservative limit reference point of 20%, and at this meeting the Pacific Island States were striving to set the acceptable level of risk of going over this reference point, at a very low conservative level of 5%. This would have had the effect of forcing the "buffer" necessary between the target reference point (the point at which fishing should occur) and the limit point to be very conservative in the sense of being overly broad. Another concern was the goal of the Pacific Island States to set a very low target reference point. Fortunately, there was no real agreement on the appropriate level of risk, after several days of discussion. Perhaps unfortunately, China blocked a consensus on where the appropriate target reference point should be. Their rationale was that there had been a target reference point set for Skipjack last year, and China wanted to see how that management measure was working out with that stock before setting target reference points for albacore.

There was a bit of high drama at the meeting over the failure of Japan to join in to the consensus supporting a U.S. resolution for observer safety. Japan stated that some of the resolution's provisions were actually under the jurisdiction of the Japanese Labor Department and that they had to wait for Tokyo to give their okay (despite the fact that the proposed resolution had been on the table for 30 days prior to the meeting). When impassioned speeches by almost all delegations and several ENGOs failed to move Japan, the Plenary decided to put the resolution to a vote. In my 40 years of covering meetings of RFMOs, this was the first time in my memory that vote had been called for in an organization which is supposed to operate on a consensus. Minutes before the vote was to start, Japan indicated they had received approval to join the consensus, so an historic moment was cancelled.

Unexpectedly, the resolution that had come out of the August workshop between members of the IATTC and the Northern Committee (actually attended by the Chair of the WCPFC), concerning the conservation of North Pacific Bluefin, became a center of controversy. While albacore fishermen have no direct interest in bluefin, it is instructive to follow how RFMOs handle a species with similar spawning and migratory characteristics. The Pacific Island States (supported by the WCPFC Chair) forced an extra-ordinary meeting of the Northern Committee at the annual meeting of the RFMO because they were unhappy with the conservation impact of the Bluefin Resolution.

Normally I call this stock "North Pacific Bluefin", however, I was corrected recently by a scientist to call it "Pacific Bluefin" distinguishing it from South Pacific Bluefin, Atlantic Bluefin, and Mediterranean Bluefin, but implying that what I call "North" Pacific Bluefin, was actually present in some parts of Western and Central Pacific. I was told that recent genetic studies show that "North Pacific Bluefin" have been caught off New Zealand. Others since then have told me this is incorrect (another reason for a science consultant). In any event, the point is, that I believe the Pacific Island States greatly interfered with the charter of the Northern Committee by not merely approving or disapproving an NC resolution, but forcing the NC to modify it at the annual meeting, under threat of not approving it. Clearly, whether you call it Pacific or North Pacific, this stock is fished primarily, and lives primarily within the jurisdiction of the NC. This happened once before in 2005, with a slightly different approach. Then, the WCPFC refused to approve the North Pacific Albacore resolution until the U.S. and Japan had agreed to a similar resolution for South Pacific Albacore, even though there was no scientific basis for it. This is the second example of the manner in which the WCPFC can interfere with the management of North Pacific albacore. The other method is to add more Pacific Island States to the NC membership (which happened in 2015), and then not attend the NC meeting, thus preventing action by the NC because there is no quorum.

Since I am almost out of space the list of accomplishments, and the "to do" list for next year will be relatively short. This year, after a lot of effort, we were able to move the Management Strategy Evaluation of North Pacific Albacore at the ISC in a direction which more fully reflects harvesters concerns, not just those of managers and ENGOs. We were able to bring the IATTC and the WCPFC organizations into closer harmony for setting limit reference points and risk levels. We were able to continue our MSC rating without putting greater burdens on the harvesters. AFRF was able to avoid efforts to shut down the high seas and thereby eliminate the South Pacific albacore troll fishery. AFRF continued its cooperative research (soon to be revised) and cooperation with NMFS. AFRF continued to influence and advise the State Department on issues of importance to us in the IATTC, the NC, the WCPFC, and the U.S. North Pacific Albacore Treaty with Canada.

Next year will require continued efforts in all the above areas. In addition, harvest control rules and target reference points are likely to be set for North Pacific and South Pacific albacore. These will have tremendous impact on how albacore will be managed in the future and can lead to annual international and national quotas. There may be an opportunity to finally reform the immigration laws with regard to crew visas and the ability to pick up and release foreign crew in the United States. Before January 20th we must fight any further fishing closures off the West Coast. After January 20th, I guess it is anyone's guess, however, I would not be surprised to see limited entry and catch shares raise their ugly heads. The Magnuson Act reauthorization has still not passed, and we are still trying to get the PFMC included among those Councils which must hold referendums among those affected before any catch share plan can be enacted. Happy Holidays!

**Pacific Fisheries Technologists' (PFT) Conference 2017** - Vancouver, BC Canada. Feb 5-8th 2017. This has quite interesting issues and programs dealing with many handling and quality control issues for fishermen, scientists, food handlers, processors, and others. See [www.pftfish.net](http://www.pftfish.net) for more information.

**68<sup>th</sup> Tuna Conference:** (<http://www.tunaconference.org/>) Monday through Thursday, May 15-18, 2017. The conference will be at its traditional venue at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Lake Arrowhead Conference Center (<http://uclaconferencecenter.com/>). In order to secure our venue and lodging, we must receive your registration no later than January 13, 2017. Please R.S.V.P. on or before this date. Please share this announcement with any other interested parties and refer to our webpage [www.tunaconference.org](http://www.tunaconference.org) for detailed information.

The annual Tuna Conference is sponsored by the NOAA Fisheries and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, and it attracts an international community of scientists and participants interested in research on tunas and tuna-like species. The Tuna Conference provides an informal forum for the presentation of ongoing research and developing theories, and unique opportunities for stimulating exchanges of views and opinions. This year's theme will be "Challenges Concerning the Conservation and Management of Large Pelagics and their Supporting Ecosystems". Large pelagics support some of the world's largest and most valuable fisheries, as well as sustaining smaller-scale artisanal and sport fisheries and local economies. However, the populations of these species in many regions are under increasing pressure from fisheries as a result of an escalating global demand for fish product. In particular, populations of the three principal species of bluefin tunas have declined to levels that require immediate management intervention to ensure their longevity. Concomitantly, some pelagic fisheries target and/or incidentally catch a range of non-tuna species (e.g. sharks, turtles, cetaceans, and billfish) some of which are slow-growing, long-lived, and have a low reproductive capacity, thus presenting conservation concerns over their long-term sustainability. Fishing impacts, coupled with natural perturbations such as global climate change, have the potential to cause significant, and potentially irreversible, changes to the productivity of target and non-target species, but also to alter the structure and function of entire pelagic ecosystems. Measurement, modelling and prediction of these impacts on species population dynamics, movements, and ecosystem structure is a significant challenge, but necessary to properly inform fisheries managers and policy makers.

Presentations and Posters - Preliminary titles of presentations and posters must be submitted with complete registration forms by January 13, 2017. The final abstracts must be received by March 17, 2017.

Registration - The registration form and non-refundable deposit of \$600 (except for students applying for scholarships) must be received by us on or before January 13, 2017. The remaining balance must be paid in full no later than March 17, 2017. Reservations may be transmitted using any of the following options:

Fax to (858) 546-7133, Email to [info@tunaconference.org](mailto:info@tunaconference.org) or  
Mail to Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission  
Attn: Sofia Webber  
8901 La Jolla Shores Drive  
La Jolla, CA 92037-1509

American Fishermen's Research Foundation (AFRF) founded in 1971, is involved in the ongoing stock assessment of North Pacific albacore as well as the management and regulation in both hemispheres of the Pacific ocean. At considerable expense AFRF continues to represent the U.S. albacore trollers and baitboats at management and scientific forums, and continues to be involved in the scientific process through the International Science Committee - Albacore Working Group (ISC-ALBWG). AFRF represents all U.S. albacore trollers and baitboats in maintaining research and data collection that benefits ALL U.S. albacore vessels. AFRF is funded by a per ton assessment paid by AFRF contracted buyers. AFRF also secures research grant funding in cooperation with NOAA/NMFS for items such as archival tagging expenses.

**AFRF Contracted Buyers:** Bornstein Seafoods Inc., Bumble Bee Seafoods, Chicken of the Sea International, Driscoll's Wharf, Hag Fish LLC, High Seas Tuna Inc., InterOcean Fisheries, Island Trollers Inc., Jessie's Ilwaco Fish Company, JK Fisheries, Ilwaco Landing LLC, Oregon Seafoods, Pacific Seafood Group, Papa George Gourmet Albacore, Pelican Packers Inc., Seafood Producers Co-op, Star Kist Foods, Trident Seafoods, Tri-Marine International, Wild Planet Foods Inc

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