

American Fishermen's Research Foundation News

The AFRF board of directors met in mid-December online to discuss directions AFRF should take now and in the future. The research and educational goals and direction of AFRF should emphasize projects that support scientific stock assessments of albacore and any involvement to the management processes that supports U.S. access to the albacore resource now and in the future.

AFRF was established in 1971 to be proactive in carrying out cooperative research and educational projects that, in future decades, when management was a reality would support the fishery. AFRF carried out many projects in the north and south Pacific during that time.

Lately our main thrust has been cooperative archival tagging with the Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC). Much has changed in the last 10 years, and the board now is questioning their (SWFSC) direction and goals. We are asking how do we move forward or in other directions. In that respect, below is the text of a letter AFRF just send to SWFSC personnel with our concerns. They have already responded and we expect to hear back within a couple weeks with details.

Text of January 2020 Letter from AFRF to SWFSC Personnel:

The American Fishermen's Research Foundation (AFRF) has a long history of cooperative research involving albacore tuna in the Pacific Ocean. For over 47 years the commercial albacore fishing industry on the west coast has contributed more than 7 million dollars through processors and fishermen's contributions to scientific research of Pacific albacore tuna. Our goals have been to gather important research data on albacore stock status and migration patterns. AFRF was the only organization for many years that actually pursued these goals and a great deal of the work was carried out through cooperative arrangements with the SWFSC. This has worked well in the past.

We are troubled that cooperation and focus on AFRF supported albacore research has diminished over the past decade. As we know, some of these changes in direction have been brought about by significant changes in personnel over the past ten years and these changes continue. One of our key SWFSC collaborators, John Childers retired at the end of 2019. Over 1,000 tags have been deployed since 2001, but nothing since 2016. A large part of the problem has been access to suitable vessels and mobilizing SWFSC tagging personnel in time to take advantage of tagging opportunities in Oregon and northern ports.

AFRF, through its affiliation with WFOA is still uniquely placed to coordinate and conduct field oriented research and biological sampling on vessels within the fishery that cannot be conducted by land-based organizations or researchers alone. AFRF desires a continued relationship of cooperative research with the SWFSC that is focused on U.S. albacore troll and bait boat fisheries and the sustainability of stocks they target.

While archival tagging has been a large part of this effort since 2001 it may not be a continued focus going forward. At the same time, we are sitting on an inventory of over 70 archival tags that are in

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storage at the SWFSC with their batteries slowly draining. AFRF is open to discussing what projects we can do in a cooperative manner with SWFSC. AFRF also remains open to addressing these goals through projects with other private and governmental agencies.

Some questions AFRF has of the SWFSC are:

- Does SWFSC have interest in continuing support in the deployment and/or analysis of albacore archival tags and data?*
- Is there interest in dart tagging or the use of pop-up satellite tagging technology?*
- Mobilization time to field a tagger from SWFSC has proved too slow to be effective. Can technical people from Pacific northwest ports – including crewmen, OR ODFW or other entities closer to the fishery be trained to support tagging cruises?*
- Are there SWFSC staff members familiar with archival tag programming and analysis that could be tapped to test existing tag status and examine existing and future AFRF archival tag data sets for additional fishery and habitat related information?*
- We have heard that the Canadian government is interested in albacore tagging and wonder if this is a collaboration of interest to NOAA.*
- Is there interest by NOAA to work with AFRF to develop collaborative research with Japanese researchers on the movement patterns of juvenile albacore across the Pacific?*
- We were told over a year ago that SWFSC was in the process of developing a “comprehensive tuna research program” across the N Pacific and albacore would be part of it. What happened?*

AFRF was founded by fishermen and processors in 1971 and was considered to be very forward thinking at the time. Our mission was to gather data and information on the fishery so it would be available when regulation and management of the stocks may be needed so that we would have more than anecdotal information to inform our managers who support our local fishermen and their access to the resource. Albacore has wavered little in catch over 5 decades, remains in healthy condition with virtually no bycatch and remains the largest US HMS fishery on the west coast. Albacore was a very important part of SWFSCs program in the 80's and 90's but seems to have been pushed aside in recent years in favor of research on more charismatic species and stocks under dire stress.

AFRF is open for suggestions and wants to be involved but there is a growing impatience on how slowly the process is moving. We suggest that AFRF and the SWFSC sit down to assess the current situation and discuss research priorities to develop a collaborative research program going forward.

AFRF Contracted Buyers: Bornstein Seafoods Inc., Bumble Bee Seafoods, C2C Premium Seafood, Chicken of the Sea International, Da Yang Seafood, Driscoll's Wharf, Garibaldi Landing Fishermen, Hag Fish LLC, High Seas Tuna Inc., Interocean Fisheries, Island Trollers Inc., Albers / Jessie's Ilwaco Fish Company, JK Fisheries, J. DeLuca Fish Co., Ilwaco Landing Fishermen, Manabe & Co LLC, Oregon Seafoods, Pacific Seafood Group, Papa George Gourmet Albacore, Pelican Packers Inc., Seafood Producers Co-op, Star Kist Foods, Trident Seafoods, Tri-Marine Fish Company, Westport Seafood Inc, Wild Planet Foods