

American Fishermen's Research Foundation News (AFRF)©

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 US 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.

Electronic Logbooks: AFRF and WFOA vessels have been requesting a uniform electronic logbook for nearly 10 years. There is a test model that has been used by about 10 boats but NMFS has not produced one acceptable to the fishery or all fisheries yet. AFRF is suggesting that it might be time to approach a private entity that can produce such a logbook and have it available for fishermen. Fishermen could possibly be offered an I-Pad or similar with it already loaded with software or be we-based which would probably be cheaper in the long run than the 50k or so spent on paper logbooks annually. However, NOAA/NMFS has been problematic in this initiative as they say they are awaiting a uniform version for the entire US fishery. In the meantime we wait! AFRF and WFOA will be soliciting some in congress to help resolve this impasse.

North Pacific Albacore Archival Tagging Project: After a late deployment of 39 tags in 2014 there will be more than 100 tags to deploy in 2015. Since there will be no wait in procuring and testing the 2015 tags AFRF in cooperation with SWFSC - NOAA hopes to do an early tagging trip and a later one in 2015. This should work out this time as it has always been an issue receiving tags from the manufacturer and testing them during the season. Interested vessels should contact AFRF and express interest for 2015.

Since 2001 AFRF has deployed nearly 900 tags, with about 35 recovered including a few dummy tags used early on. We are awaiting results of the latest tag recoveries which should be interesting. One recent tag recovery was out for three years, the longest of any.

Otolith Sampling and measuring: We are still requesting boats do this in 2015. On the otolith sampling we did not pursue it as we should have in 2014. We do need a few boats to collect at random over the season a few sample fish and leave them at a designated albacore buyer during the season. The vessel will be compensate more than the dock price. Kits will be made available from SWFSC prior to the season. The overall total of fish needed is only about 100 for the entire fleet. We also encourage fishermen with AFRF measuring boards to continue to measure fish at random. We will get better details on this as the season approaches. AFRF can construct some new measuring boards if necessary. The information on these two projects is very informative and useful in the science community and supports your local fishery when it comes to international and federal management support.

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SCIENCE AND MANAGEMENT MEETINGS:

Wcpfc Annual Meeting Apia, Samoa - Peter Flournoy

I think it makes sense to cover the FFA proposed South Pacific Albacore Resolution within the context of the other issues present at the annual meeting. It is instructive to see how little influence more powerful US groups like the Hawaiian longline fleet, (LL), and the purse seine fleet, (PS), even though they have more political power and send more delegates (PS 10 plus, HLA 3 plus 5 WPFMC people plus PIRO). (Also, Kenny Alameda, whose company sells diesel and other products to the fleet, is totally supportive of the PS fleet, whereas Sean Martin, another Commissioner, is totally supportive of the LL. Our PFMC Commissioner is new this year, and may have a difficult learning curve in internationally managed fisheries, before we gain her full support, although I am impressed by her willingness to learn all aspects of the issues.) I think this will give you a greater appreciation of the advantage of having a small South Pacific fishery at the moment, (often flying below the radar), and how difficult it has been and will be to preserve that for the future.

As a reminder, last year in Cairns, Australia, the PS areas to fish were limited and the length of the FAD closures was increased during negotiations, at the last minute, without input from the harvesters or the processors. The LL fleet was limited in its catch even though their fleet barely fishes south of the equator. In the end, it became more important to the USG to get some conservation and management measure in place for 2014, than it was to support US harvesters. This result gave rise to joint action by ATA, HLA, and WPFMC, which was unprecedented in issuing joint press releases and writing joint letters to the Departments of State and Commerce. This firm opposition to the USG's acting without final input from the harvesters persisted through the WCPFC-PAC meeting in Hawaii in October, and through the November delegation call.

There are a couple of themes common to all the US harvesters which have been pushed hard on the USG for years, and which had greatly increased the pressure put on them this year. These themes are, oddly enough, also common to the FFA, and perhaps even the subset of the PNA countries. They are: (1) to force the Asian countries to supply operational data to the Commission, which they have not been doing while the rest of the members have been supplying such data for the last 10 years, as all members are obligated to do; and (2) to increase enforcement of FAD closures, and enforcement and adherence to other conservation and management measures by Asians and FFA countries.

It is clear the lack of data totally undercuts the validity of the stock assessments which are done and upon which management decisions are made. Bad data equals bad management. This year a compromise of sorts was worked out as a "first step" to the Asians supplying operational data in the future. However, this measure is limited to the tropical tunas, skipjack, yellowfin, and big eye. It does not include albacore. Our government supported the adoption of the measure with no thought to albacore, even though they are well aware of the lack of Chinese LL catch data, and its ill effects on assessments, the stock, and the markets for albacore. "The best we could do," was the only explanation given.

Enforcement has been a problem since the beginning. For us, it has been most bothersome from the increasing dollars which are put forth to fund common enforcement agreements with the PIS and the US Coast Guard, as contrasted to the total absence of any money put towards enforcement in the high seas of the North Pacific with regard to high seas drift nets and their interception of albacore. Additionally, the international bureaucrats continually place additional burdens on legal fishermen, such as catch documentation schemes, advance notices of port arrival, attempts to close high seas areas to fishing, attempts to eliminate high seas transshipping, in port inspection procedures, requirements for IMO numbers, etc., all in the name of stopping IUU fishing. Here too, the USG goes along with these resolutions, which are basically just window dressing. The USG refuses to take a firm stand and leadership role on issues such as total closures, (instead of FAD closures, which cannot be enforced), strong penalties for countries which continually fail to supply fisheries data, and stopping countries from increasing their fishing capacity, with total disregard for the management and conservation

measures. This is very disappointing.

Now to the specific subject of South Pacific albacore. Nothing really happened. Why? Because the PIS set the recognition and acceptance of this idea of “disproportionate burden” as the main policy goal or accomplishment for them at the WCPFC meeting. This is the argument that somehow the conservation and management measures passed by the WCPFC make it harder for the PIS to advance their own fisheries interests. The only concrete example given was for Tokelau, which had been prevented from entering into a joint venture with a new Taiwanese purse seine vessel because the owners did not have permission to enter the fishery from the Taiwanese government, until an existing vessel had been removed from the fishery. Somehow the PIS believed that the distant water fishing nations (DWFN) should reimburse them for this lost business opportunity. The FFA countries also seem to believe that somehow the FAD closures hurt their countries’ fishing revenue, although they were at a loss to explain this when the EU questioned it. “You are still getting paid for the same number of fishing days whether it is FAD fishing or school fishing. How are you losing any money?”

The advantage for the DWFN, and therefore for the albacore harvesters, was that none of the other measures really received much attention given all the arguments and discussions over exactly what “disproportionate burden” meant, and how, if at all, the PIS should be compensated. This meant no discussion of sharks, seabirds, turtles, longer FAD closures, adopting the measures for the albacore long line fleets fishing in countries EEZs, or a discussion of limiting the fishing for South Pacific albacore on the high seas.

There was one 90 minute meeting among those interested in the albacore proposed management and conservation measure which occurred on Tuesday. I opened the discussion by asking for the scientific basis for including the South Pacific troll fishery in the resolution. In return I got a vague answer that they were not concerned about the impact of different gear types but rather the “health of the overall stock.” I took a different tact and questioned the reasoning for including a fishery which their own scientific advisors, the SPC, had said could increase five-fold and still not have any impact on the stock? Again the same vague answer. The discussion was led by the delegate from New Zealand (a new person, not the delegate we have been having such problems with for the last 9 years, but apparently no more open to reason).

The USG, through PIRO, has taken a firm stance that the US high seas troll fleet for South Pacific albacore must be protected and must be distinguished from the problem with the long line fleets targeting South Pacific albacore. The one worrisome development within the US delegation was the government’s apparent willingness to take as a fallback position, the idea that there could be total allowable catch (TAC) limits put on fleets fishing on the high seas for South Pacific albacore.

On the up side, the USG pledged to take the year of the highest US catch (about 6-7,000 metric tons) as the TAC, not some average of the last several years. But, there is no reason to relax, since it is clear there would be push back from the FFA, EU, and other countries. Then the becomes overcoming the argument that saw the commercial bluefin catch of the US cut 43%. “Why should you have a 7,000 TAC when you haven’t been utilizing it, and everyone else is taking cuts?” We have to be prepared to counter this type of approach by the USG.

We believe the current state of knowledge and scientific research and data is not sufficient to make such reasoned judgments which are necessary to formulate harvest control rules and target reference points for North Pacific albacore. Not only do we not have an adequate grasp of stock assessments, age studies, migration studies, environmental and oceanographic changes, but we haven’t even explored the economic impacts of various target reference points.

These arguments so far seem to be often lost on the PFMC which periodically suggests that North Pacific albacore needs to be managed. In my view, the desire for management as soon as possible sometimes colors the Council’s judgment as to whether target reference points (TRPs) and harvest control rules

(HCRs) should be set by the WCPFC-NC (which is further ahead than the scientific staff of the IATTC in this regard), or the IATTC, which is the area where most of the US fishery occurs.

Likewise, despite the harvesters telling the Council that we have moved beyond the Council staff's suggested precautionary management proposal of 2013 (the 10 page proposal was rejected by PIRO at the 2013 WCPFC-NC meeting and reduced to 2 pages, which were then endorsed by the WCPFC annual meeting in December of 2013), that we should be focusing on what was decided at the NC in 2013 and 2014, as well as the 2014 IATTC resolution (calling for the evaluation of a range of target reference points, which we worked with the Western Region to get in front of the IATTC), and the rejection by the NC in 2014 of the Canadian suggested target reference points the Council seems as yet not convinced by our arguments. The harvesters' main concern is that there is one management regime across the entire North Pacific. It should also be noted that the PFMC-HMSAS has requested that economists from the HMSMT and/or the SWFSC examine the various suggested target reference points and document their projected impact on the economic well-being of the U.S. harvesters.

OSU marine ecologist chosen as first U.S. Science Envoy for Oceans:

Building on a new commitment to improved marine protection and management, the U.S. Department of State has chosen Jane Lubchenco as the first Science Envoy for the Oceans. Officials today named the fourth cohort of the U.S. Science Envoy Program, which was begun by President Obama in 2009. For the first time, one of the eminent scientists involved in the initiative has a specific focus on the world's oceans. Lubchenco is the University Distinguished Professor of Marine Biology at Oregon State University and former administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. She is an international expert on marine ecology, environmental science and climate change. "This new focus on the oceans is a strong statement by the Secretary of State and President Obama about the importance of our oceans to people around the world," Lubchenco said. "They understand that science-based understanding, policy and management hold the key to a healthy, productive and resilient ocean, people and communities."

Team OSU makes our effort continuously for the PFT 2015.

Pacific Fisheries Technologists Conference. "Safe and Sustainable Seafood" is the theme of the 66th PFT annual conference meeting, which will be hosted at the Hampton Inn & Suite Astoria on Sunday, March 1 - Wednesday, March 4, 2015.

PFT has a unique tradition where three parties - industry, academia, and government - exchange the most updated technical information during our 3-day program. Our membership covers every state from Alaska to Mexico facing the Pacific Ocean and often includes fellow visitors from Pacific Rim countries as well.

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