American Fishermen's Research Foundation News (AFRF)©

The American Fishermen's Research Foundation (AFRF) held an online board meeting last week and moved forward on a few issues involving research and education for the albacore tuna industry. AFRF will be continuing the archival tagging and have been funded for expenses through 2017.

Also, the otolith sampling by bringing in whole fish by vessels throughout the season is a great program and AFRF plans to continue that in cooperation with Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) with volunteer boats. It will be very beneficial to collect more small albacore on this project. Also, it was suggested that a project be started to systematically collect stomachs or stomach samples from albacore throughout the season. This will have to be developed prior to 2016 season.

And as always AFRF will be sending representatives to all relevant Federal and International meetings where albacore is an agenda item that concerns fishermen access to the resource. AFRF will be producing some posters and material for fishermen and others to utilize in a easy to understand format.

Tagging and Sampling: The Archival tagging went well this season. To date since later 2001 AFRF has deployed over 1,000 tags. Return rate has been only about 3% with only one recovered in the past season of 2014. We are hopeful this last batch tagged late will be successful. The report from the last tagging trip is below and interesting.

The Canadians were trying to deploy pop-up tags this season but ran out of time to conduct the project. AFRF tried that many years back, working with Barbara Block from Stanford University, but the tags at that time were too large. We have run into similar issue trying on a few albacore out of Hawaii. But tags are getting smaller and batteries much better.

AFRF/SWFSC Albacore Archival Tagging - Cruise Report - F/V Royal Dawn - September 18, 2015 to September 26 ,2015 - By John Childers (SWFSC)

The vessel departed Westport, WA the night of September 18 with five crew and two SWFSC scientists, John Childers and Helena Aryafar. The vessel ran overnight to 47N, 125W. Fishing operations began the morning of September 19. Numerous schools were in the area and fishing on bait poles was good. Forty-three tags were deployed on the first day. Mixed sizes were captured and tagged.

On September 20 the vessel remained in the same general area and encountered several schools that were feeding on large surface schools of small bait. Fishing was good but the weather deteriorated during mid-morning. Numerous minke whales and small blue sharks were also feeding on the bait schools. Fish sizes ranged from 15 pounds to 30 pounds. The crew alternated between live bait and scampis depending on which type fish were reacting to best. A high percentage of those fish caught for tagging had minimal hook damage and were tagged. In the afternoon, the weather came up and tagging

had to be stopped. Twenty-two fish were tagged.

On the third fishing day, September 21, the weather continued to be rough. The weather began to improve in the late afternoon but albacore schools throughout a broad area were dispersed and went down into deeper waters. Only two tags were deployed.

On September 22 the weather was significantly better with little wind. Fish were still staying down deep and not coming up to bite. A school of albacore were under the vessel at daylight. The crew tried using rod and reel and hand lines to catch fish for tagging. Both were effective and several fish were tagged in the morning hours. Several blue sharks were caught on hand lines incidentally and released. The weather remained good for the remainder of the day although fish remained scattered and were not coming up to bite. In the early evening several schools bit well and stayed with the vessel. A total of 23 fish were tagged. The vessel moved south during the early night.

The weather increased a little on September 23. Small schools were encountered in the morning and a few followed the vessel briefly as it tacked slowly. A couple of jig strikes were the only fish caught in the morning. The weather deteriorated throughout the day as a front passed through the area. The vessel worked south but found very little signs of fish. In the late afternoon the front moved through and the wind switched to the west. Near sunset a good-sized school was found and several fish caught. No tags were deployed.

The weather improved a little overnight. In the morning of September 24 winds were 15-20 knots and increased a little during morning hours. Very few schools were found. Fishing was very slow during the day. Late in the evening a school was found that bit better than the other schools found during the day. Seven tags were deployed late in the day.

The morning of September 25 the wind was 10-18 knots but very little swell. No schools were found during early morning but gradually the vessel found several schools that bit. A large school was found boiling on a school of baitfish and several tags were deployed. Another school was found just after noon and more tags were deployed. As the school backed off and quit biting the crew used rod and reel and hand lines to catch fish for tagging and in total the last twenty-six tags were deployed that day. The vessel returned to Westport on the morning of September 26.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Over the course of the seven day trip a total of 123 tags were deployed between 45N and 47N in the 125W longitude block. The weather conditions were moderate and the large vessel size helped mitigate stability problems during tagging operations. The expert handling of the fish and use of alternate catching methods provided fish in excellent condition for tagging. This is in contrast to typical fishing operations where most fish caught are too damaged to deploy tags. Normally when albacore are feeding heavily they become agitated and a large number have to be rejected, but on this trip most fish remained calm enough to complete the tagging process. The experience of the captain and crew again proved to be the most influential factor to successful tagging operations. The ability of the crew to wing the fish carefully and transfer them to the tagging scientist was a key factor to the success of the tagging operations. The use of both live bait and scampis helped to provide ample fish with minimal injuries to the mouth. The use of hand lines and rod and reel also provided more fish for tagging. The knowledge and cooperation of the vessel captain also was a big contributing factor to successful tagging operations. The captain was able to work with other vessels that wanted to help us get the tags deployed. Using a tablet computer in place of paper forms significantly improved the tagging process, allowing scientists to get tags out in a shorter amount of time and gather better data through use of validation at the point of data entry.

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Western Central Pacific Fisheries Committee Meeting: Bali, Indonesia December 2015- By Peter H Flournoy This year's Commission meeting was a disappointment to almost everyone in attendance, except perhaps the Chinese. As already reported for South Pacific albacore, neither of the two FFA proposals was passed as proposed. On the last day, the Chinese finally agreed to supply information by vessel, by amount, by species, for I believe beginning in 2006, for vessels catching (not targeting) albacore South of 20 degrees South. Otherwise the 2005 resolution remained unchanged. The reporting situation for the South Pacific is a little more complicated than for North Pacific, since, as I am told, the only fisheries targeting albacore in the south are the surface fleets of the U.S. and N.Z. All the longline fleets take albacore only as a bycatch when actually targeting yellowfin and big eye. I must say it is one hell of a bycatch given the massive increase in supply and its impact on the price (I think of both NPA and SPA).

It will be interesting to see if the new information agreed to be reported by the Asians will be useable, or just a dump of information which will takes years to sort out. I don't believe the specific information nor the type of information will be at all compatible with the reporting on NPA.

While there was no accomplishment to speak of on Yellowfin, Big Eye, sharks or seabirds, there was a skipjack target reference point of 50% established. At the moment this means nothing because no one really knows how it relates to current catch, nor whether the current catch is at or above MSY, nor how skipjack MSY relates to the TRP. Furthermore, there is no HCR to indicate what happens if the TRP is exceeded.

A potential downside for the albacore fishermen is if the 50% Target Reference Point is just carried over to the SPA, or has an influence on NPA settings of a TRP. Clearly, 50% of the unfished biomass is much too conservative.

In summary, nothing was done to curb, report on, or control the Chinese longline fleets' catching SPA (400 new vessels the past 2 years). It is also noteworthy that the 2015 assessment indicates that the growth in the amount of catch is coming from the zones of the Pacific Island countries, not from the high seas!!

WCPFC-13 will be held in Nandi, Fiji December 5-9, 2016. There may well be a few days of management strategy meetings right before the annual meeting dates, and perhaps some NPA MSE discussions.

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67 th Annual Tuna Conference - Second Announcement - December 8, 2015

This announcement is to remind you about our invitation to attend the 67th Tuna Conference (http://www.tunaconference.org/) Monday through Thursday, May 16-19, 2016. 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, 2016. Please, R.S.V.P. by this date or before. Please share this announcement with any other interested parties and refer to our webpage 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 "Tuna Trials and Tribulations: Is all hope lost?" Recent stock assessments, direct counts, and casual observations have indicated that tuna and tuna-like species have declined to critically low levels and face an increased risk of extinction if current trends continue. Yet, after decades of high landings and increased global demand, they are still among the most persistent species of the sea. This leaves one to speculate that tuna and tuna-like species may possess certain traits which make them resilient to high levels of fishing pressure. This year's Tuna Conference will focus on the population status of these fishes and their unique biological, physiological, and behavioral traits that may help or hinder their ability to withstand the enormous pressure exerted upon them and, ultimately, if all hope is lost for future of these species. However, as always, we welcome presentations on tuna and tuna-like species whether they conform to the theme or not!

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Record-breaking Sea Levels and El Niño Resources - California Ocean Protection Council

The Ocean Protection Council's website includes resources on El Niño, including on the issue of elevated sea levels from El Niño and unusually warm ocean conditions. See the California Ocean Protection Council website on El Niño for more information, including a science summary on this issue of elevated sea levels, which includes graphs showing how sea levels were elevated for extended periods during past strong El Niños, reaching levels similar to projections for mid-century sea level rise.

See www.storms.ca.gov for information on preparedness for storm impacts during this strong El Niño and a memo by OPC staff under "Lead Stories" on record-breaking sea levels and urgency to take action on climate change. The highest sea levels ever observed at the San Diego, La Jolla and Santa Barbara tide stations were documented on November 25, 2015 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) during the King Tides. Due to El Niño and the unusually warm ocean conditions off of California, sea levels have been elevated, causing the King Tides (highest predicted tides caused by alignment of earth, moon and sun) to be extra high this winter, resulting in "Tall Kings". With these elevated water levels and storm conditions in Southern California last week occurring during the Tall Kings, the sea levels reached heights never before recorded in the history of these tide stations. The San Diego tide station has been recording sea levels since 1906; La Jolla since 1924 and Santa Barbara since 1974. NOAA tide stations for Southern California are currently documenting sea levels about a half foot higher than predicted.

The OPC and Scripps organized a workshop on September 22, 2105 on "Changing Ocean Conditions: Understanding El Nino's Impacts on California's Living Marine Resources Through Ocean Observations". The workshop summary is also posted on the OPC's El Nino website. See: http://tinyurl.com/qgx7hmd

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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.

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