

American Fishermen's Research Foundation News ©

American Fishermen's Research Foundation (AFRF) has been involved with representing the albacore fishing industry through 2013 at management venues with AFRF supporting research at sea through our 12-year archival tagging program, otolith sampling, and other data collection on albacore tuna. This information although generally not out front and visible to the public in most cases has proved invaluable in supporting the U.S. consumers, fishermen, and processors' access to the albacore resource at a time when there is much positioning, both politically and scientifically in international and federal management. AFRF tries to be a voice of reason in the process backed up by knowledge and data industry as collected since 1971

In Season Archival Tagging: After a rocky start in 2013 due to late arrival of tags from the manufacturer and testing prior to the trip. The government shutdown also delayed the trip be two weeks. However, AFRF and SWFSC managed to deploy 74 archival tags onboard the F/V Royal Dawn from October 23 - November 1 on a cruise extending from Westport, WA to San Francisco, CA. While not all the tags were deployed most were and the remainder can be deployed earlier in the 2014 season. Since there are leftover tags and secured funding for 2014 we feel an earlier trip in 2014 will be possible. AFRF encourages vessel owners to submit a request to AFRF for a charter application anytime to be considered for such a trip.

Recent Recoveries: The two archival tags recovered earlier this year off the Japanese coast have yet to have the data downloaded and processed for public consumption. The Japanese have told SWFSC representatives that the tags did work properly, so good data should be available. We expect to get some preliminary tracking information in time. The recovered tags were out for two years after being deployed off the Oregon coast. Tag recovery rewards are \$500.

Conventional Tagging: In addition to archival tagging, AFRF and SWFSC will be conducting conventional tagging in 2014 and are looking for a few good boats and dedicated captains who would be interested in deploying some conventional dart tags. They possibly would be trained the annual meeting in March. The number of tags would be something around 25 tags per trip. AFRF deployed many thousands of tags back in the 1980's with grant funding that has dried up, but did yield interesting results.

Let us know if you are interested in archival tagging and/or conventional tagging in 2014.

The cost of paying for each fish at market rate would be cost-prohibitive without other revenue. Thus, a possibility would be to pay a small amount of \$5 - \$10 per fish to fishermen dedicated to tagging and have a drawing at the seasons end for a higher award amount to the winner. Also, targeted fish would be smaller, less than 9 pounds preferably. The research is a vital component for management and backing up MSC requirements. In the coming weeks the AFRF board will determine how this project should be set up and what compensation can be given to the vessels, as well as sources of funding beyond AFRF.

At Sea Sampling: This is an ongoing project over the past four years to collect biological information off smaller albacore through their otoliths. WFOA and AAFA vessels have been taking part in these collections and the information gathered is quite good. We also continue to measure albacore on board for data collection and thanks all those that participate, especially those with small crews.

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Science Corner - By AFRF Science Consultant, Dr. Vidar Weststad

“Looking back and thinking about the future:”

First off, Happy New Year everyone. I hope you all had a good holiday and looking forward to the new year.

When I sat down to write this I realized it's been 10 years since I first attended the Albacore Working Group (ALBWG) on behalf of AFRF. I attended my first meeting of the North Pacific Albacore Workshop (established in 1974) in 2004 in Nanaimo, B.C. In the following year, 2005, the group became the Albacore Working Group under the International Scientific Committee and was charged with analyzing data and producing a stock assessment and recommendations to regional management authorities.

I'm a little shocked that 10 years has gone by as, at times, it seems like progress in understanding the population dynamics of albacore and the effects of fishing moves at glacier speeds; yet, on the other hand, there have been major strides in improving the assessment process and developing a scientifically acceptable transparent evaluation process. I would like to point out we have been fortunate to have a number of well qualified analysts from the member nations involved in the process who have contributed greatly to the advancement of the stock assessment. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Dr. John Holmes, the Albacore Working Group Chair, whose leadership and editorship of the Working Group reports has been very important in guiding the stock assessment to the quality it is today.

A significant recent milestone has been an independent peer review of the albacore stock assessment contracted through the Center for Independent Experts, the same group used to assess U.S. fishery stock assessments. This review largely found the albacore assessment was sound and suggested areas of improvement and analysis. In the 2014 rounds of the Working Group meetings, we addressed these comments and worked them into the forthcoming 2014 stock assessment.

At our most recent meeting in Shimizu, Japan, in October, we reviewed all of the agreed upon procedures and data sets to be used in the 2014 assessment. Looking back from the standpoint of 2004 I feel that the process has come a long way and that we have taken the stock assessment process to a point that it is very parsimonious in data use, is based on the most simple assumptions, and is one that is universally accepted as sound science. I find that very satisfying and a far cry from the process I stepped into 10 years ago where every piece of data was thrown into several different analytical models with several complicated hypotheses employed to assess the standing stock of albacore and appropriate harvest levels.

Looking back it's clear on the science side we have made progress in understanding albacore a lot better than we did a decade ago. Also not to be overlooked is the role of the cooperative efforts between AFRF and NMFS: this has been helpful in developing better biological data and the archival tagging program has been extremely enlightening on the aspects of albacore movement and behavior. So, from the perspective of 10 years, I have to say we have made some significant strides.

Now what's ahead? For certain we will have a new stock assessment in 2014 that will produce a new estimate of the abundance of albacore in the North Pacific and a range of harvest options the Regional Fishery Management Organizations can select to set harvest levels. I expect advice should not change dramatically from the most recent assessment, but one can't preclude surprises.

I would like to point out one thing that is often overlooked: most albacore are landed as bycatch in other target fisheries. The primary target species are skipjack and bigeye tuna. There is a growing concern that the rapid growth in these fisheries may not be sustainable; overfishing may already be occurring, as evidenced by reported range contraction and diminishing size of fish in the harvest. It's certainly not conclusive, but worthy of concern. For the North American albacore fishery that targets albacore, the problem is that should these species be

reduced in abundance, it is extremely likely this will lead to increased targeting of albacore and eventually a reduced harvest in the eastern Pacific. It is an issue that should be followed closely and brought to the attention of management bodies as a possible path to overharvest.

In March of 2013 the Albacore Working Group met in China hosted by Shanghai Ocean University. For the first time we received information on the Chinese tuna fisheries. We learned that China was fishing albacore, but as a bycatch in the bigeye longline fishery. We also learned that there was a potential albacore fishery in the south Pacific, but some target fishing may occur in the North Pacific. At the Shanghai meeting we learned that 10 Chinese vessels were involved in harvesting albacore, but it wasn't clear if it was 10 vessels the university was studying or the entire fleet. Recent publications indicate that the Chinese fleet maybe much larger. I think a better understanding of the size and scope of the Chinese fleet is an important issue for the future. It could have a significant impact on harvest advice. Likewise other nations are increasing the harvest of albacore in both the North and South Pacific and improvements in catch location is important to determine harvest relative to stocks.

To me one aspect of working with the albacore fishery is that although we have come a long way over the past 10 years there is still a lot to be learned and always a new and interesting twist. I'm hopeful that what we learn will help to make a more stable and profitable fishery. Not sure if I'll be around to do a review 10 years from now, but I think there will be some significant finding to write about.

I think the cliché "Think Globally, Act Locally" is important to keep in mind for the U.S. fleet. Things are very positive at the moment but events on the global level may rapidly turn things around. It's really important to keep an eye on the developments in Asia and to insure that management actions are taken that insure that albacore remain at sustainable levels and harvestable quantities continue to reach our shores.

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Discussion of potential cooperative research projects: AFRF President John LaGrange and AFRF Science Consultant Dr. Vidar Weststad met in LaJolla, CA on December 18th with Suzy Kohin, Steve Teo, and John Childers from SWFSC to discuss cooperative research and potential projects.

Suzy Kohin reviewed the status of preparations for archival tagging for next year and hopes of getting two trips in to deploy the tags. Discussion centered on the need to identify vessels early in order to arrange schedules to get the tags out at appropriate times.

The group also discussed how to utilize the fleet to gain knowledge on albacore size distribution in the catch through the season by getting a larger sample size of length observations from more vessels. This discussion included potential development of simple electronic methods to record observations that would be directly transmitted to NMFS.

There was also a discussion of using vessels to conduct an in season conventional tagging program to distribute tags during the fishery. For 2014 a pilot project is being considered that would follow the protocols of earlier AFRF tagging program with an objective of releasing up to 5,000 tags. In order to develop a program AFRF needs to survey the fleet and determine the number of vessels that would be willing to participate. We would also need to assess the amount of tags a vessel could deploy and what compensation needs to be provided to fishermen releasing tagged fish.

There was also a general discussion of improving data collection including logbook data by developing tablet-based applications and distributing tablets to the fleet. This could be a cooperative project that AFRF could possibly seek grant money to develop the apps and funding for tablets. Such a system could streamline data collection and processing and associated costs.

EVENTS:

65th Pacific Fisheries Technologists Conference: February 23-24, 2014, Monterey, CA,

See: <http://pftfish.net/index.htm>

Keynote speakers for the upcoming conference:

Dr Nick Ralston - University of North Dakota
Ocean Fish Consumption Does Not Cause Mercury Toxicity

Richard Draves - American Marine Ingredients
Making More Money from Seafood Processing Byproducts

Dr Timothy Harwood - Cawthron Institute, New Zealand
Assuring Seafood Safety through Industry-led Science: The New Zealand Experience

Information about the conference hotel can be accessed here: <http://pftfish.net/hotel-travel.htm>

We hope to see you and your colleagues at PFT 2014. Please help us by forwarding this invitation to anyone in your state, province or country that has an interest in advancing the seafood industry through scientific advances and technological innovations. T.C. Chadderton, President – PFT 2014 Conference Organising Committee

The 65th Tuna Conference: This event is being planned for May 19-22, 2014, at the Lake Arrowhead Conference Center in California. This year's theme will be "How do large pelagics work and what do they want?" Fish movements, growth, reproduction, and ultimately stock biomass and population structure are dependent on how organisms interact with their environments. Examining the response of different species to biological and physiological variables at different developmental stages provides insight into both the behavior and life-history of an organism and can be used to better understand requirements for fish survival and consequently where fish are likely to be found in space and time. The theme for this year's Tuna Conference will thus focus on what tunas, billfishes, and sharks "want" and how their basic needs influence behavior and ultimately shape management decisions. As always, we welcome all presentations on tuna and tuna-like species whether or not they conform to the theme.

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