

The Oregon 1993 Commercial Fishery

For albacore tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*)

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ALBACORE PORT SAMPLING PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

Oregon has had a directed commercial fishery for albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*) since 1936. Albacore landings have been highly variable, ranging from under a half million pounds to over 37 million pounds. In the last decade, catches have averaged about 2.5 million pounds.

For the last several years, sampling of the Oregon albacore fishery has been a cooperative effort between Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC). This report documents the progress of the 1993 fishery off Oregon and the sampling activities done.

1993 FISHERY DEVELOPMENT

The 1993 Oregon albacore fishery commenced in late July with a few deliveries into Oregon ports. By mid-August, the fishery was going strong with 1,243,704 pounds (lb) landed during the month. Landings increased to 2,657,152 lb during September, and then dropped to 613,174 lb during October. After this, landings tapered off considerably but continued through early November. Oregon's preliminary total for landings in 1993 was 4,727,533 lb. This was an increase over the 1992 level of 3,888,515 lb and represents the largest annual landings of the last decade (Table 1). Newport received 47% of the Oregon deliveries with Astoria second at 27% and Charleston third at 17%. Several other ports made up the rest of the landings.

Prices paid to fishermen varied between ports, processing plants, and boats. Albacore are delivered either frozen or chilled on ice. In general, frozen tuna was purchased at \$0.86/lb. Chilled fish brought a lower price, from \$.062 to \$0.74/lb. Small fish (less than 9lb and termed "peanuts") were sometimes separated out and received a lower price, approximately \$0.22 to \$0.30/lb. However, most plants did not separate peanuts unless there appeared to be a considerable amount of them.

A problem occurred this year with the selling of frozen albacore. Most Oregon processing plants were buying frozen tuna for shipment to a single out-of-state company that appeared to be sometimes late with payments. As a result, freezer boats were sometimes delayed up to ten days before they could unload. In October, it became difficult to sell frozen albacore anywhere in Oregon and boats began to deliver more into Washington and California. Because of this problem selling frozen fish and the relatively low price being paid for chilled product, many fishermen sold albacore off their boats directly to consumers for \$1.25 to \$1.50/lb.

Early in the season, albacore seemed to be quite scattered. Larger boats heading north from California and east from Hawaii were picking up some fish far offshore, but local boats found

fishing quite spotty within 100 miles of the coast. By mid-August, however, fishing improved within 50 to 100 miles off the central Oregon coast with average catches of 50 to 100 fish/day being reported. Catch rates remained fairly stable through September and then dropped off in October. Late in September and through October, the main body of effort shifted a bit south from Newport. Most boats were then fishing just north of Coos Bay from 50 to 150 miles offshore. Good catches were reported as far south as Cape Blanco in late October. The few Oregon boats that made the trip north to the fishing grounds off Canada reported spotty fishing but a good grade of larger fish. A few albacore boats were reported to be fishing far offshore near the international dateline (approximately 180° W Longitude) and consistently catching five tons per day. These reports led some fishermen with larger freezer boats to speculate they might not fish their usual 1994 winter South Pacific albacore fishery and just fish near Midway Island in the spring of 1994. The average size of albacore caught off Oregon was quite variable in 1993, with the average weight of a day's catch ranging from 12 to 20 lb. This was unlike 1992 when almost all fish were approximately 12 lb. (called "school fish" in the industry). Most fish were caught in 58 to 63°F water. Albacore fishermen reported very few drift-net marked fish this year; several years ago net-marked fish were often reported, but the incidence has been declining.

Oregon albacore sampling in 1993 was severely curtailed due to reductions in funding. Samplers did not collect length-frequency data. Logbooks were distributed and fishing information collected as opportunities occurred. A total of 27 logbooks were distributed to fishermen requesting them (Table 2). Table 2 also presents the summaries requested in Oregon's contractual agreement for albacore sampling funding. These are:

- 1 Number of logbooks issued by port.
- 2 Number of logbook collections attempted by port.
- 3 Number of logbooks collected by port.
- 4 Estimated landings (pounds) of albacore by port.
- 5 Estimated number of vessels by port.

Logbook collections attempted (contacts) numbered 120. These contacts resulted in the collection of 68 logbooks (each trip being considered a separate logbook). The reasons for a contact not resulting in a collected logbook were many and varied. Some of these included: (1) no logbook or fishing record was kept; (2) the skipper was not aboard and deckhand could not supply necessary information; (3) the logbook was not yet filled out and would be mailed later; (4) the skipper had given the logbook/interview to a sampler in a different port; and (5) the skipper refused to give any information to the state or federal government for fear that it might result in regulation of the tuna fishery in the future. Eight boats contacted refused to give information because of this last reason. Many of the same boats were sampled or contacted several times during the course of the season, resulting in multiple logbooks being collected from the same boat. The 68 logbooks collected were provided by 38 different boats during the season.

SUMMARY

Oregon's albacore landings in 1993 were the largest in ten years. Fish were fairly abundant reasonably close to shore and were available from late July through October and early

November. Fishermen encountered some problems selling frozen fish and generally received a low price for chilled albacore. Sampling activity was reduced from previous years due to limited funding.

Table 1. Oregon commercial landings of albacore, 1984-1993.

Year	Landings (pounds)
1984	1,630,763
1985	1,524,601
1986	2,461,004
1987	2,288,045
1988	3,967,120
1989	1,079,657
1990	2,079,312
1991	1,258,818
1992	3,888,515
1993	4,727,533 ¹

¹Preliminary

Table 2. Summary of 1993 Oregon albacore sampling activity and landings.

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Total ¹
<u>Astoria</u>						
# of logbooks distributed	0	0	1	1	0	2
# of logbook collections attempted	0	3	1	8	1	13
# of logbook (trips) collected	0	1	0	12	2	15
# of boats giving logbook data ²	0	1	0	4	1	6
# of vessels fishing ²	5	33	49	19	1	77
Landings (lbs)	7,435	298,735	785,653	178,344	25,100	1,295,267
<u>Newport</u>						
# of logbooks distributed	4	12	3	1	0	20
# of logbook collections attempted	14	40	23	8	0	85
# of logbook (trips) collected	0	7	23	9	0	39
# of boats giving logbook data ²	0	7	16	6	0	25
# of vessels fishing ²	18	114	136	59	3	199
Landings (lbs)	124,759	650,820	1,187,794	266,182	4,493	2,234,048
<u>Charleston</u>						
# of logbooks distributed	0	0	3	2	0	5
# of logbook collections attempted	0	1	18	3	0	22
# of logbook (trips) collected	0	1	9	4	0	14
# of boats giving logbook data ²	0	1	4	3	0	7
# of vessels fishing ²	10	39	49	20	1	85
Landings (lbs)	50,470	203,542	436,065	111,049	936	802,062
<u>State Total (all ports included)</u>						
# of logbooks distributed	4	12	7	4	0	27
# of logbook collections attempted	14	44	42	19	1	120
# of logbook (trips) collected	0	9	32	25	2	68
# of boats giving logbook data ²	0	9	20	13	1	38
# of vessels fishing ²	36	213	264	110	5	366
Landings (lbs)	185,534	1,250,377	2,670,887	617,123	30,529	4,754,450

- 1 The state total shown for the number of vessels fishing exceeds the listed port totals because some boats delivered only to smaller ports not shown.
- 2 Yearly totals for the number of boats providing logbook data and the number of vessels fishing is less than the sum of monthly totals because many boats participated in multiple months.
- 3 Preliminary