

The Oregon 1994 Commercial Fishery  
for Albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*)

by

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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 2.8 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 1994 fishery off Oregon, and the associated sampling activities.

1994 FISHERY DEVELOPMENT

The 1994 albacore season off Oregon essentially began in late July when offshore boats started making landings (one isolated landing of fish caught near Midway Island occurred in June). During July approximately 78,967 lb were delivered. August was a big month for the fishery with 2,272,223 lb being landed in Oregon. The fishery slowed in September and October when 1,410,822 lb and 853,094 lb were delivered, respectively. Few deliveries occurred in November as the fishery basically ended. Oregon's preliminary total for landings in 1994 was 4,685,937 lb. This was a slight decrease from the 1993 level of 4,754,450 lb but still the second highest level in the last decade (Table 1). Newport received 57% of the Oregon deliveries; Astoria was second with 13% and Charleston third with 11%. Astoria's share was smaller this year, compared to its 27% of total Oregon landings in 1993. Garibaldi landings increased from 2% of the total in 1993 to 9% this year. Several other ports received deliveries also.

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 from \$0.82 to \$0.90/lb and chilled fresh tuna from \$0.65 to \$0.70/lb. During 1993, small fish ( $\leq 9$  lb and termed "peanuts") were separated out and received a lower price. This did not appear to occur in 1994, possibly due to lower numbers of small fish being delivered. Fishermen selling albacore off their boats directly to consumers received \$1.25 to \$1.50/lb.

Most fishermen delivering frozen tuna to Oregon processing plants were paid for only 30% of their catch's value initially, with the remaining payment later in the year. One of the reasons Astoria received fewer landings this year was that many of the boats fishing north chose to deliver their catch into Ilwaco, Washington, where they were getting paid for 50% of their catch's value immediately.

Albacore fishermen reported exceptionally good fishing throughout the season this year in waters 800 miles or more off the coast. Most of this offshore fleet was fishing in an area approximately 42 to 45°N latitude and 140 to 145°W longitude; trips consistently averaged 200 to over 400 fish/day. Fishermen reported this was the best fishing they had seen in several decades. This offshore fishery was so productive that relatively few of the large freezer boats chose to fish off Canada this year. Boats that did make the journey north to Vancouver Island in late August and September found only variable fishing success.

Most smaller boats spent the season fishing from 50 to 150 miles off the central Oregon coast. A few "hot spots" developed sporadically throughout the season off Astoria and Cape Blanco to

Brookings, as well as further south into California. Most of the boats fished in an area approximately 44 to 46°N latitude and 125 to 127°W longitude. Through early and mid-August boats in this area were averaging 100 to 200 fish/day. As the season progressed, catches dropped to about 30 to 60 fish/day. Some fishermen believed the unusually warm water (68 to 70°F) which moved into this area for a time in late August slowed the catch rate. In September, several periods of bad weather kept boats in port for a number of days. Schools of albacore became more scattered in September and October.

The average size of albacore caught off Oregon this year was 13 to 15 lb. Most of a given day's catch was 12 to 13 lb fish ("school fish"), with a small percentage of large (20 to over 25 lb) fish. The offshore fleet and those boats fishing off Canada reported a day's catch averaging anywhere from 15 to 25 lb. Few fish below nine lb were reported in catches.

This year showed a sizable increase in the sport or recreational fishery for albacore off Oregon. This was probably due to two reasons. One reason was the severely-restricted ocean salmon fishery and the other was the availability of albacore close to shore, as near as 25 miles early in the season. Charter boat operators promoted albacore trips and many private boat anglers also made albacore trips, especially in August. Approximately 100 to 125 charter trips were made for albacore out of Oregon ports during the 1994 season. Although sampling of the recreational fishery was not extensive, it is estimated that the total recreational catch (charter and private boat) for albacore this year was about 75,000 to 100,000 lb. This recreational catch estimate is not included in Tables 1 or 2.

Two government and fishery interactions caused some amount of interruption and delay in the albacore fishery this year. In mid-August, an incident with the U. S. Coast Guard caused a problem for a few days. Albacore fishermen were being boarded by the Coast Guard and cited for not maintaining a required tuna logbook. The confusion was resolved when NMFS determined that this requirement pertained only to vessels fishing for yellowfin tuna. For those participating in the directed albacore fishery, tuna logbooks were strictly voluntary.

Another item caused a delay for some vessels late in the season. On 1 September 1994, a new safety regulation became effective. This required all documented vessels below 50 feet in length to carry an inflatable 4-person life raft. Many vessel operators who waited until near the effective date to purchase a raft found them to be temporarily unavailable due to high demand. A significant number of boats were unable to fish albacore for much of the month.

Oregon albacore sampling in 1994 followed the same guidelines as in previous years. No length-frequency data were collected. Logbooks were distributed and fishing information interviews were done whenever possible throughout the season. A total of 47 logbooks were distributed to fishermen requesting them (Table 2); this was a 74% increase over 1993. Table 2 also presents the summaries requested in Oregon's contractual agreement for albacore sampling funding. These are:

- a. Number of logbooks issued by port.
- b. Number of logbook collections attempted by port.
- c. Number of logbooks collected by port.
- d. Estimated landings (pounds) of albacore by port.
- e. Estimated number of vessels by port.

Logbook collections attempted (contacts) numbered 180, a 50% increase over 1993. These contacts resulted in the collection of 129 logbooks (each trip being considered a separate logbook); this is a 90% increase over the number collected in 1993. Of the 129 trips or logbooks collected, 67 (52%) were obtained through personal interviews; the remaining 48% consisted of collecting data sheets from a North Pacific Albacore voluntary logbook maintained by the

skipper. Reasons for a contact not resulting in the collection of a logbook or interview included some of the following: (1) no logbook or fishing record was kept; (2) skipper was not aboard and could not be contacted; (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 information to the state or federal government for fear that it might result in regulation of the albacore fishery in the future. Twelve 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 129 logbooks/interviews collected were provided by 67 different boats during the season.

### SUMMARY

Oregon's albacore landings in 1994 were only slightly below those of 1993, and were the second highest in the last decade. Much of the potential Astoria deliveries were diverted into Washington because of market considerations. Albacore were abundant relatively near shore, resulting in good fishing for smaller boats. The recreational fishery also benefited from this nearshore distribution; at least 100 charterboat trips were directed toward albacore. Larger freezer boats found very productive fishing approximately 1,000 miles offshore. Sampling activity and data collection increased over the 1993 level.

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Table 1. Oregon commercial landings of albacore, 1985-1994.

Year	Landings (pounds)
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	4,754,450
1994	4,698,223

Table 2. Summary of 1994 Oregon albacore sampling activity and landings.

	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Total <sup>1</sup>
Astoria							
No. of logbooks distributed	0	1	4	0	1	0	6
No. logbook collections attempted	0	3	14	14	5	3	39
No. logbook (trips) collected	0	2	8	9	5	9	33
No. boats giving logbook data <sup>2</sup>	0	2	6	6	3	3	17 <sup>2</sup>
No. of vessels fishing <sup>2</sup>	0	0	25	18	17	0	40 <sup>2</sup>
Landings (lbs)	0	0	126,779	218,067	258,106	0	602,952
Newport							
No. of logbooks distributed	0	1	19	7	2	0	29
No. logbook collections attempted	0	1	52	34	25	0	112
No. logbook (trips) collected	0	0	31	37	14	0	82
No. boats giving logbook data <sup>2</sup>	0	0	23	21	7	0	43 <sup>2</sup>
No. of vessels fishing <sup>2</sup>	1	5	112	86	44	2	158 <sup>2</sup>
Landings (lbs)	35,328	71,833	1,396,619	805,474	365,737	20,637	2,695,628
Charleston							
No. of logbooks distributed	0	1	6	4	1	0	12
No. logbook collections attempted	0	1	6	15	5	2	29
No. logbook (trips) collected	0	0	1	6	3	4	14
No. boats giving logbook data <sup>2</sup>	0	0	1	4	2	1	7 <sup>2</sup>
No. of vessels fishing <sup>2</sup>	0	3	49	22	8	3	64 <sup>2</sup>
Landings (lbs)	0	5,738	341,485	125,872	54,290	12,529	539,914
State Totals (all ports inc.)							
No. of logbooks distributed	0	3	29	11	4	0	47
No. logbook collections attempted	0	5	72	63	35	5	180
No. logbook (trips) collected	0	2	40	52	22	13	129
No. boats giving logbook data <sup>2</sup>	0	2	30	31	12	4	67 <sup>2</sup>
No. of vessels fishing <sup>2</sup>	1	10	239	172	83	6	328 <sup>2</sup>
Landings (lbs)	35,328	78,967	2,279,681	1,415,650	853,094	35,503	4,698,223 <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The state totals shown for the number of vessels fishing and pounds landed exceeds the listed port totals because deliveries occurred in smaller ports not shown.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Preliminary.