

THE OREGON 1995 COMMERCIAL FISHERY  
FOR ALBACORE (*THUNNUS ALALUNGA*)

by  
Rhonda Haynes

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Marine Region  
2040 SE Marine Science Drive  
Newport, OR 97365

This project was financed in part by the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission.

ALBACORE PORT SAMPLING PROGRAM  
Contract No. 95-88  
Annual Progress Report  
1 April 1995 through 31 March 1996

**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 three million pounds.

For the last several years, sampling of Oregon's albacore fishery has been a cooperative effort between Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries Service, and Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. This report documents the progress of the 1995 fishery off Oregon, and the associated sampling activities.

**1995 FISHERY DEVELOPMENT**

The 1995 albacore season in Oregon essentially began in early July when a few landings of fish caught near Midway Island occurred (one isolated landing took place in June). By late July, an offshore fishery developed, resulting in the delivery of some fairly large catches of fish to coastal processors. Total landings in Oregon for July were approximately 405,016 lb. The months of August and September showed the largest landings for the season with 2,575,946 lb and 1,934,536 lb delivered respectively. The fishery slowed during October and was basically over by the middle of the month. Only 114,371 lb were landed into Oregon during October and 3,572 lb during November. Oregon's preliminary total for landings in 1995 was 5,038,092 lb. This was an increase over the 1994 level of 4,695,264 lb and the highest recorded level in the last decade (Table 1). Newport received 55% of the Oregon deliveries; Astoria was second with 36%, and Charleston third with about 4%. Several other ports received deliveries also.

Prices paid to fishermen for tuna delivered to Oregon coastal buying stations varied between ports, processing plants and boats. Frozen tuna prices were down slightly from 1994 levels. In general, the exvessel value of frozen tuna was \$0.76 to \$0.80/lb and the value of fresh tuna was \$0.65 to \$0.70/lb. Small fish ( $\leq 9$  lb and termed "peanuts") were worth \$0.20 to \$0.25/lb. Some albacore destined for specialty markets received up to \$1.00/lb. Fishermen selling albacore directly off their boats to consumers asked for \$1.25 to \$1.50/lb. Many fishermen chose to deliver part or all of their catch to chartered carrier vessels offshore.

The 1995 albacore season was characterized by a fairly strong offshore fishery and a minimal inshore or coastal fishery off Oregon. Throughout most of the season, fishing was good in the area of about 42° to 46°N latitude and 142° to 152°W longitude. By mid to late September, offshore catches declined along with deteriorating weather. During August and September, some vessels fished in Canadian waters off Vancouver Island with fairly good success, though again in September bad weather hampered effort. The usual nearshore commercial fishery off Oregon never really developed in 1995. Fish inshore (50 to 150 miles off the coast) seemed scattered and hard to catch. Some effort occurred in August but dwindled fairly quickly. With a very good commercial Chinook salmon fishery under way, many smaller vessels chose to fish for salmon instead of tuna. The 1995 albacore season in Oregon was an unusually short one as bad weather and poor fishing resulted in most vessels ceasing operation in early October.

The average size of albacore delivered to Oregon processors this year was quite variable. In general, tuna from the offshore fishery averaged 15 to 20 lb, and those fish caught closer inshore averaged 10 to 15 lb. Fishermen also reported an abundance of peanuts in their catches which they feel is a good sign for next season's fishery.

During the 1995 season, there was a fairly active sport or recreational fishery for tuna. The severely-restricted ocean sport salmon fishery caused many charter boats to begin running albacore trips in August. Approximately 80 to 100 charter trips were made for albacore out of Oregon ports during the 1995 season. Success rates varied from zero to over 200 fish/boat. 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 80,000 lb. This recreational catch estimate is not included in Table 1.

A number of fishermen reported seeing fresh drift-net marks on some of their catch this year, as well as observing foreign boats they suspected were illegally drift-netting. At least one such vessel was apprehended by the Coast Guard in July.

Oregon albacore sampling in 1995 followed the same guidelines as in previous years except that length-frequency data (fork length taken as described in the Albacore Port Samplers Manual) were collected in Newport. Logbooks were distributed, completed logbooks were collected or interviews conducted, and length frequencies (in Newport) were obtained as often as possible throughout the season. The U.S. Albacore Season Summary form, attached as Appendix A, presents the data 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 interviews/transcriptions collected by port.
- d. Number of logbooks collected by port.

- e. Estimated total landings of albacore by port.
- f. Estimated number of trips by port.
- g. Estimated number of vessels by port.
- h. Estimated landings (lbs) by gear type.
- i. Total landings for sampled trips.

Also included in the season summary are the number of trips sampled for length-frequency and the number of fish measured.

A total of 41 logbooks was distributed to fishermen. Logbook collections attempted (contacts) numbered 199, an 11% increase over 1994. These contacts resulted in the collection of 68 North Pacific Albacore Voluntary Logbooks and 83 personal interviews/logbook transcriptions for a total of 151 trips from which data were collected; this is a 17% increase over the total number collected in 1994. During 1995, 51 trips were sampled for length frequency, and a total of 4,936 fish were measured.

## **SUMMARY**

Oregon's albacore landings in 1995 were over five million lb, the highest level in the last decade. A strong offshore fishery contributed to large deliveries of albacore being landed into the state. Catch and effort in the nearshore commercial fishery were low. In the recreational fishery, 80 to 100 charter boats trips were directed toward albacore this year. Sampling activity and data collection increased for the second year in a row.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I want to thank the many albacore fishing vessel operators who cooperated during our sampling program. Some of these busy people gave significant amounts of their time during fishing trip interviews. The help provided by Jerry Butler, Bill Barss, Gary Hettman, Tom Preston, Stacey Shapleigh and Lisa Johnson was also appreciated.

TABLE 1  
Oregon Commercial Landings of Albacore  
1986-1995

YEAR	LANDINGS (pounds)
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
1995	5,033,810

## APPENDIX A

### 1995 U.S. ALBACORE SEASON SUMMARY

PORT CODE OR NAME	ASTORIA	NEWPORT	COOS BAY	TOTAL
No. of Logbooks Issued	8	26	7	41
No. of Collections of Logbook Data Attempted <sup>1</sup>	46	143	10	199
No. of Interviews/Transcriptions Collected	11	69	3	83
No. of Logbooks Collected	15	52	1	68
Landings from Logbook-Sampled Trips (lb) <sup>2</sup>	1,339,971	3,556,042	27,379	4,923,392
No. of Trips Sampled for Length-Frequency	0	51	0	51
No. of Fish Measured	0	4,936	0	4,936
Estimated Total No. of Trips <sup>3</sup>	81	172	60	410
Estimated Total No. of Vessels <sup>4</sup>	46	117	36	229
Estimated Total Jig Landings (lb)	1,807,279	2,786,572	218,970	5,033,810
Estimated Total Bait Landings (lb)	0	0	0	0
Estimated Total Jig & Bait Landings (lb)	0	0	0	0
Estimated Total Gillnet Landings (lb)	0	0	0	0
Estimated Total Landings/Other Gear Types (lb)	0	0	0	0
Estimated Sport Total Landings (lb)				75,000
Estimated Total Landings (lb)	1,807,279	2,786,572	218,970	5,108,810

<sup>1</sup> Does not include contacts made to distribute logbooks if vessel had not yet fished.

<sup>2</sup> Includes landings from all collection attempts, whether successful or not, except for trips where landing weight was unavailable.

<sup>3</sup> May be an overestimate as often a trip had multiple fish tickets associated with it, though an effort was made to combine such tickets into one trip.

<sup>4</sup> Some vessels landed in more than one port during the season.