

THE OREGON 1996 COMMERCIAL FISHERY
FOR ALBACORE (*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 close to four 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 1996 fishery off Oregon, and the associated sampling activities.

1996 FISHERY DEVELOPMENT

The first few deliveries of albacore into Oregon during 1996 occurred in June from vessels that fished near the Hawaiian Islands. By mid- to late July, landings into Oregon began increasing, with 733,135 lb delivered that month. Landings in August and September increased substantially, with 3,477,632 lb and 3,691,098 lb delivered, respectively. During October, the fishery slowed and was basically finished by early November. About 880,992 lb were landed into Oregon during October and 113,653 lb during November. The preliminary total for 1996 landings is 8,925,927 lb; this is a 77 percent increase over 1995 and the highest recorded level in the last decade (Table 1). Newport received 55 percent of the Oregon deliveries, Astoria was second with 25 percent, and Charleston third with about 17 percent. 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. In general, the ex-vessel value of frozen tuna was about \$0.81/lb until early October when it rose to \$0.86/lb. The value of fresh tuna was about \$0.70/lb. Small fish (≤ 9 lb and termed "peanuts") were not separated from catches this year, as their presence was infrequent. Some albacore destined for specialty markets received over \$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 1996 albacore season was characterized by a very strong offshore fishery and a good inshore or coastal fishery off Oregon. Throughout most of the season, larger

vessels found productive fishing in the area of 40° to 45° N latitude and 150° to 155° W longitude. Some vessels also fished between 140° to 150° W longitude with good success. By late September, effort offshore declined as the weather worsened, and by late October and early November, only a few vessels remained in this area. Smaller vessels fished closer inshore at 43° to 46° N latitude and 125° to 127° W longitude during August and September. The fishery off Vancouver Island was poor this year, resulting in a large influx of Canadian vessels fishing off the U.S. West Coast and landing into Oregon. In October, most of the fleet moved south to fish off Southern Oregon and California. By November, few vessels were landing albacore into Oregon.

The average size of albacore delivered to Oregon processors this year was in the 10- to 13-lb range with some larger fish mixed in.

During the 1996 season, there was a small sport or recreational fishery for tuna. Approximately 30 to 35 charter trips were made for albacore out of Oregon ports. Most of these were out of central coast charter offices. Catch rates averaged about 40 fish per boat. Only a small number of private boats made albacore trips. 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 20,000 to 25,000 lb. This recreational catch estimate is not included in Table 1.

A change this year affecting many albacore fishermen was the implementation of the High Seas Fishing Compliance Act. All U.S. vessels fishing beyond 200 miles off the Pacific Coast were required to purchase a High Seas Fishing Permit. This new requirement, along with speculation about mandatory logbooks next year, heightened concern that regulation and management of the albacore fishery is fast approaching. Approximately ten percent of vessel operators contacted refused to participate in the voluntary logbook program this year; another 16 percent did not keep a logbook or record of their trips. Fishermen were also talking about the large increase in fleet size this season and wondering if albacore might become a limited entry fishery. Much of the fleet size increase could be attributed to Canadian vessels landing albacore into Oregon ports, some of it going to Newport. In late September, a complaint filed with the National Marine Fisheries Service noted that Newport was not one of the designated landing ports under an annual U.S./Canada agreement. For the remainder of the season, vessels from Canada were prohibited from delivering fish into Newport. Lastly, a continuing concern among vessel operators was the appearance of drift-net marked fish in their catches. Some fishermen felt the incidence of net-marked fish and floating pieces of net were higher than in the past several years and were worried that illegal drift-netting was escalating.

Oregon albacore sampling in 1996 followed the same guidelines as in 1995. 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 (lb) 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 23 logbooks was distributed to fishermen. Logbook collections attempted (contacts) numbered 275, a 38 percent increase over 1995. These contacts resulted in the collection of 91 North Pacific Albacore Voluntary Logbooks and 96 logbook transcriptions for a total of 187 trips from which data were collected; this is a 24 percent increase over the total number collected in 1995. During 1996, 62 trips were sampled for length frequency, and a total of 8,134 fish was measured. Number of measured fish increased 65 percent over 1995.

SUMMARY

Oregon's albacore landings in 1996 were almost nine million lb, the highest level since 1978. A very strong offshore fishery and increased fleet size, with many new vessels landing albacore into Oregon, contributed to the high volume of deliveries. Catch and effort in the nearshore commercial fishery were also good. The recreational fishery contributed little to Oregon's albacore landings. Sampling activity and data collection increased for the third year in a row.

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TABLE 1
Oregon Commercial Landings of Albacore
1987-1996

YEAR	LANDINGS (pounds)
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
1996	8,948,355

APPENDIX A

1996 U.S. ALBACORE SEASON SUMMARY

PORT CODE OR NAME	ASTORIA	NEWPORT	COOS BAY	TOTAL COAST
No. of Logbooks Issued	4	16	3	23
No. of Collections of Logbook Data Attempted	49	217	9	275
No. of Interviews/Transcriptions Collected	5	91	0	96
No. of Logbooks Collected	29	58	4	91
Landings from Logbook-Sampled Trips (lb) ¹	1,735,887	4,188,201	60,593	5,984,681
No. of Trips Sampled for Length-Frequency	0	62	0	62
No. of Fish Measured	0	8,134	0	8,134
Estimated Total No. of Trips ²	121	363	199	804
Estimated Total No. of Vessels ³	59	163	103	388
Estimated Total Jig Landings (lb)	2,256,498	4,880,615	1,498,937	8,948,355
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)				25,000
Estimated Total Landings (lb)	2,256,498	4,880,615	1,498,937	8,973,355

¹ Includes landings from all collection attempts, whether successful or not, except for trips where landing weight was unavailable.

² 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.

³ Some vessels landed in more than one port during the season.