

THE OREGON 1997 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 4.5 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 1997 fishery off Oregon, and the associated sampling activities.

**1997 FISHERY DEVELOPMENT**

The first deliveries of albacore into Oregon during 1997 occurred in June as coastal vessels found warm water and albacore nearshore. June landings totaled 42,699 lb. Landings into Oregon began increasing in July. Though good catches were sporadic, vessels delivered 1,156,147 lb this month. In August and September, landings increased substantially, with 4,490,337 lb and 2,895,876 lb delivered, respectively. The fishery slowed during October and ended around the middle of November. About 368,722 lb were landed into Oregon during October and 183,182 lb during November. The preliminary total for 1997 commercial landings is 9,137,067 lb; this is a two percent increase over 1996 and the highest recorded level in the last decade (Table 1). Newport and Astoria each received 43 percent of the Oregon deliveries, and Charleston received seven percent. Several other ports received deliveries also. Astoria received the majority of the Canadian vessel landings into Oregon.

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 \$.80/lb, and the value of fresh tuna was about \$.65 to \$.70/lb. Small fish ( $\leq 9$  lb and termed "peanuts"), when abundant in the catch, were separated out and received \$.10 to \$.25/lb. Some albacore destined for specialty markets received over \$1.00/lb. Fishermen selling directly off their boats to consumers asked for \$1.50/lb. Many fishermen chose to deliver part or all of their catch to chartered carrier vessels offshore.

The 1997 albacore fishery was characterized by a moderate offshore fishery and a good nearshore fishery. Offshore vessels found productive fishing in the area of 40° to 46° N latitude and 145° to 160° W longitude. Nearshore vessels ranged between 35° N to 50° N latitude and from the coast out to about 130° W longitude. In October, deteriorating weather caused most vessels to end their season.

Catch per Unit Effort (CPUE) decreased in 1997 as compared with 1996. In part, this may be due to an increase in effort. In 1997, approximately 568 vessels landed albacore into Oregon ports, up from 383 vessels in 1996. An estimated 1,276 trips were made into Oregon in 1997, with an average of about 7,000 lb landed per trip. In 1996, about 800 trips were made into Oregon averaging about 11,000 lb each.

The average size of albacore delivered to Oregon processors this year was approximately 15 lb, though a lot of variability was seen. In late August and September, many vessels reported large volumes of peanuts being caught.

During the 1997 season, there was a large effort directed to albacore by the sport or recreational fishery. Warm water nearshore resulted in albacore being caught as close as 10-15 miles off the beach, though most charter boats fished about 30 to 50 miles out. Charter and private boat albacore were landed in ports from Garibaldi to Brookings. It is estimated that the total recreational catch (charter and private boats) for albacore in 1997 was about 170,000 to 175,000 lb. This recreational catch estimate is not included in Table 1.

Fishermen reported heightened tension among the albacore fleet in 1997. The recent large increase in fleet size apparently resulted in more interference among vessel fishing patterns, more competitiveness in locating fish, and less willingness to share fishing information. Some vessels mentioned they would like to see some sort of limited entry permit system for albacore. Another point of dissension during the 1997 fishing season was among vessels who fished on the abundance of peanuts and those who picked up their gear and moved or came in. Vessels who sold their catch off the boat directly to the public found a willing market for small fish. However, small fish are unprofitable for canneries, and buying stations would only purchase small quantities of peanuts. Vessels not fishing on the small fish accused those that were of destroying next year's catch. The mandatory logbook requirement for all vessels fishing under a High Seas Fishing Permit was not enforced during 1997 as expected, but will probably become effective in 1998. Late in 1997 an amendment to the 1981 Canada/U.S.A. Albacore Tuna Treaty expanded port access along the coast for tuna boats. In Oregon, Newport joined Astoria and Coos Bay on the list of ports allowing Canadian vessel landings.

Oregon albacore sampling in 1997 followed the same guidelines as in 1996. Logbooks were distributed, completed logbooks were collected or interviews conducted, and length frequencies (in Newport and Charleston) 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 50 logbooks was distributed to fishermen. Logbook collections attempted (contacts) numbered 293, a seven percent increase over 1996. These contacts resulted in the collection of 127 North Pacific Albacore Voluntary Logbooks and 69 logbook transcriptions, for a total of 196 trips from which data were collected; this is a five percent increase over the total number collected in 1996. During 1997, 59 trips were sampled for length frequency, and a total of 7,710 fish was measured. Number of measured fish decreased five percent from 1996.

## **SUMMARY**

Oregon's albacore landings in 1997 were over nine million lb. Though average weight of landing decreased in 1997, increased fleet size and trip activity resulted in the highest recorded landings total since 1978. Warm water nearshore resulted in a strong inshore fishery. The recreational fishery contributed an estimated 175,000 lb in 1997. Logbook sampling activity increased for the fourth year in a row, and length frequency sampling decreased slightly.

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TABLE 1  
Oregon Commercial Landings of Albacore  
1988-1997

YEAR	LANDINGS (pounds)
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
1997	9,167,738

## APPENDIX A

### 1997 U.S. ALBACORE SEASON SUMMARY

PORT CODE OR NAME	ASTORIA	NEWPORT	CHARLESTON	TOTAL COAST
No. of Logbooks Issued	4	32	14	50
No. of Collections of Logbook Data Attempted	63	188	42	293
No. of Interviews/Transcriptions Collected	10	46	13	69
No. of Logbooks Collected	33	76	18	127
Landings from Logbook-Sampled Trips (lb) <sup>1</sup>	2,682,715	3,265,896	174,754	6,123,365
No. of Trips Sampled for Length-Frequency	0	57	2	59
No. of Fish Measured	0	7,576	134	7,710
Estimated Total No. of Trips <sup>2</sup>	225	513	194	1,276
Estimated Total No. of Vessels <sup>3</sup>	135	215	89	501
Estimated Total Jig Landings (lb)	3,966,798	3,934,620	640,873	9,167,738
Estimated Total Bait Landings (lb)				0
Estimated Total Jig & Bait Landings (lb)				0
Estimated Total Gillnet Landings (lb)				0
Estimated Total Landings/Other Gear Types (lb)				0
Estimated Sport Total Landings (lb)				175,000
Estimated Total Landings (lb)	3,966,798	3,934,620	640,873	9,342,738

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

<sup>2</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>3</sup> Some vessels landed in more than one port during the season.