

THE OREGON 1998 COMMERCIAL FISHERY
FOR ALBACORE (*THUNNUS ALALUNGA*)

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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 annually. In the last decade, catches have averaged about 5.1 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 1998 fishery off Oregon, and the associated sampling activities.

1998 FISHERY DEVELOPMENT

Deliveries of albacore into Oregon began in mid to late June as vessels began landing fish caught offshore. However, a glut of albacore worldwide resulted in west coast jig vessels having difficulty finding buyers for their product, a situation that continued through most of the season. June landings totaled 859,704 lb. Landings increased in July to 1,204,977 lb and peaked in August at 4,052,118 lb. September landings decreased to 2,796,679 lb and landings continued dropping in October and again in November when the fishery ended. About 1,074,736 lb were unloaded in October and 386,890 lb in November. Much of the fish delivered late in the season had been caught earlier and retained on vessels in port. In spite of the market crisis, the preliminary total for 1998 commercial landings is 10,470,255 lb; this is a 14% increase over 1997 and the highest recorded level in the last decade (Table 1). The port of Astoria received the majority of the deliveries (64%). Newport was second, receiving 20% and Charleston third at about 10%. Ten other ports received deliveries also.

Prices paid to fishermen for albacore delivered to Oregon coastal buying stations varied greatly in 1998. When buyers were available, ex-vessel price to fishermen ranged from as low as \$.40/lb to about \$1.00/lb. Most fish were bought at \$.45/lb to \$.65/lb. Many fishermen sold fish directly off their boats to consumers for \$1.25/lb to \$1.50/lb.

Abundance of albacore in the North Pacific in 1998 was excellent and catch rates reflected this. Offshore vessels moved from the dateline east as the season progressed, concentrating most of their effort between 40° to 45° N latitude and 140° to 160° W longitude. Nearshore vessels found good availability of fish from 43° to 46° N latitude and 124° to 126° W longitude.

In 1998, approximately 400 vessels made landings into Oregon, a decrease from 1997. The estimated number of trips landed into Oregon ports also decreased from 1276 in 1997 to 873 in 1998. The average landing was about 12,000 lb.

The average size of albacore delivered to buyers in Oregon was approximately 11 to 13 lb. Slightly bigger fish were caught in the offshore areas.

During 1998, the recreational albacore fishery off Oregon contributed approximately 115,000 lbs to total landings. This recreational catch estimate is not included in Table 1. The charter boat fishery accounted for about 70% of the recreational landings with most of the effort occurring from the ports of Depoe Bay and Newport. Private boats made up the remaining 30% of landings with effort spread up and down the coast.

The 1998 season was distinguished by a very poor market situation for jig-caught albacore. Various factors contributed to a glut of albacore on the world market with the three major canners giving preference to foreign, long-line caught fish. As a result, U.S. fishermen found themselves virtually shut out of their traditional markets and scrambling to find alternates. Because of the marketing dilemma, many vessels returning to port with full loads sat for a month or more waiting for a buyer. Some eventually decided to unload their catch into cold storage facilities, not knowing when or how much they would be paid. Finally late in the season, some activity by the canneries began to move fish. Starkist and Chicken of the Sea began buying limited amounts of west-coast albacore and Bumblebee began buying for a new promotional campaign, an All-American Albacore label. In addition, funds were appropriated by the Department of Agriculture to purchase a large tonnage of surplus west-coast, U.S. caught, canned albacore for food banks and school lunch programs.

Oregon albacore sampling in 1998 followed the same guidelines as in 1997. 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 45 logbooks was distributed to fishermen. Logbook collections attempted (contacts) numbered 259, a 12% decrease from 1997. These contacts resulted in the collection of 85 North Pacific Albacore Voluntary Logbooks and 84 logbook transcriptions, for a total of 169 trips from which data were collected; this is a 14% decrease from the total number collected in 1997. During 1998, 30 trips were sampled for length frequency, and a total of 2,915 fish was measured. Number of measured fish decreased 62% from 1997. Sampling was difficult in 1998 because of several factors: A large number of vessels sat in port and didn't unload or unloaded partial trips. Many vessels sold a single trip's catch to several different buyers or even several different ports. Many vessels sold their catch directly off their boats making length frequency samples hard to obtain. Skippers were reluctant to give up logbook information because of confusion and anger over the marketing situation.

SUMMARY

Oregon's albacore landings in 1998 were about 10.5 million lb, the highest recorded landings total since 1978. Excellent availability of albacore both nearshore and offshore resulted in good catches, though market conditions prevented landings totals from being higher. The recreational fishery contributed an estimated 115,000 lb in 1998. Logbook and length-frequency sampling activity decreased, in part due to the sporadic buying situation throughout most of the season.

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TABLE 1. Oregon Commercial Landings of Albacore, 1989-1998

YEAR	LANDINGS (pounds)
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
1998	10,600,614

APPENDIX A

1998 U.S. ALBACORE SEASON SUMMARY

PORT CODE OR NAME	ASTORIA	NEWPORT	CHARLESTON	TOTAL COAST
No. of Logbooks Issued	12	20	13	45
No. of Collections of Logbook Data Attempted	60	144	55	259
No. of Interviews/Transcriptions Collected	5	59	20	84
No. of Logbooks Collected	30	41	14	85
Landings from Logbook-Sampled Trips (lb) *	5,532,433	2,591,974	784,145	8,908,552
No. of Trips Sampled for Length-Frequency	1	29		30
No. of Fish Measured	123	2,792		2915
Estimated Total No. of Trips **	197	284	187	873
Estimated Total No. of Vessels ***	111	127	89	371
Estimated Total Jig Landings (lb)	6,793,193	2,163,146	1,108,127	10,600,614
Estimated Total Bait Landings (lb)				
Estimated Total Jig & Bait Landings (lb)				
Estimated Total Gillnet Landings (lb)				
Estimated Total Landings/Other Gear Types (lb)				
Estimated Sport Total Landings (lb)	612	52,920	18,204	115,428
Estimated Total Landings (lb)	6,793,805	2,216,066	1,126,331	10,716,042

* Includes landings from all collection attempts, whether successful or not, except for trips where landing weight was unavailable. Landings from logbook-sampled trips may exceed total landings because some logbooks/interviews were collected from vessels which delivered to other states.

** 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.

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

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