



2020 report on North Pacific Albacore Troll season as another “oppressing & scratchy” year

OFAD/PATAI observed report aboard F/V OCEAN JOY

By captain John Harder

The 2020 North Pacific Troll season started out early for us. Ocean Joy, after fishing in the South Pacific this year, started out from American Samoa. We departed Pago Pago on April 22nd for the North Pacific fishing grounds in the WCPFC area, west of the dateline. We had reasonably fair weather on our 3-week journey to the North. We tried to get other vessels to join us for our western venture, but all other Albacore Trollers, that fished in the South Pacific, headed for the West Coast of North America for unloading & the start of their North Pacific season.

On May 12th, Ocean Joy was 33:42N x 171:41E. We had crossed a significant water break going from 70% to 64.3% F. We saw a heavy feed layer on the sounder & discolored green water that came & went. Some bird sign was detected also. Conditions started to look fishy, but no fish was caught. We noticed a Long Line vessel in the area to the East of us.

May 13th, position 43:51N x 171:13E, our water temperature dropped to 63.7%. Some bait sign appeared on the sounder, with more bird life around, but still no fish caught.

May 14th, Ocean Joy was at 35:50N x 170:24E & around the Emperor Seamount. There was more bait & bird sign in the area. Another Long Line vessel was working in the area. As we passed, we could see fish marks on the sounder, but nothing bit. This may have been Big Eye Tuna, or even Yellowfin, but no fish was caught. As we headed Northwest, then West, we ran into big bird schools & dolphin, whales & huge bait balls. We looked around the area, but never caught a single fish. The water was still off color. Not being a clear blue color, but green to blue green & full of life.

May 15th, Ocean Joy was at 36:10N x 169:30E. We ran into a pocket of warmer water. Water temp jumped up, from 62.7% to 64.0%. We had birds all around & more dolphin & whales in the area. We finally caught a few fish. As we moved closer to some jumpers spotted, we caught a few more fish. The crew shouted out “NET MARK”. I went to pick up my phone, used as a

camera & saw that it was dead. I put it on the charger & ran back to see the fish. Sure enough, light scratches went down the side of the fish as many seen before. For some reason, this net marked fish did me in. I should have expected it & I thought was prepared for this very thing. I was not. I was devastated. It was the straw that broke the camel's back. No way are we going to do this alone.

Prior to this moment, OFAD home base, using Global Fishing Watch & Marine traffic AIS tracking websites, had informed us that a vessel known as "net fishing" was spotted at 33.10N x 163:30E & was close to a fleet of vessels further to the West. Also spotted was a small fleet of vessels around 35N x 165E where water conditions looked good. There was a strip of warm blue water that ran to the North around the 159E longitude. Using Ocean-I global imaging, I could see that the best water conditions were further to the west of us & was our intentions to go that way. We were also informed that the Japanese Pole boats were having a record early start on their season close to their Coast. All indications were pointing to the West, except we were alone. I promised myself never to run alone years ago. That having a running partner increased our odds to finding & staying on the fish 100%. That for safety reasons alone was enough to always have a running partner in case something was to go wrong. If we were to break down, where would we get help? All the vessels in the area were from Asian countries & would they come to our assistance, if need be? I doubt it. My mentors & for fathers in the industry always stressed this particularly important issue to me. I am known to venture off by myself & many times got away with getting fixed up & making it back to port. In some cases, it was only through the "Grace of God" that we did so. Now here we were, all alone, breaking my vow to always have a partner boat around & thinking of going up against whatever driftnet activity that lies before us, to the West... We turned around & headed East. 10 fish caught with one being net marked.

May 18th, Ocean Joy was at 36:28N x 176:40E. We have been seeing lots of good bird & bait sign around and decided to shut down during the night. As we started up at daylight, we noticed the oil level, in the main engine, was a bit low. After adding some oil, then starting the engine, we noticed that there was a trace of oil in the water tank. This was alarming. By mid-day, more oil was showing up in the water & the oil pressure of the engine was a little lower than normal. After consulting with others, we suspected that the oil cooler had possibly sprung a leak. We had plenty of oil for the trip, but not going to be good if the water were to get into the engine oil! This would be drastic. We were glad that we were heading East and hoped to make it to the West Coast before things got worse. No fish caught in the area.

May 20th, around 36:48N x 177:30W. Shortly after our monthly safety drill of "firefighting", we ran across a wad of netting in the water. We got close enough to take pictures. It was too big to bring aboard, but still shows proof that gillnets & possibly pair trawling is being conducted. This wad of netting had 3 different types of corks (floats) & 3 or more types of netting entangled all together. No Albacore caught.



Wad of netting found on May 20th, 2020 at 36:48N x 176:26W.

May 23rd at 35:10N x 169:14W, Ocean Joy was seeing less & less sign. The water warmed up to 66.3%, but all the birds & bait marks thinned out. If anything, the dolphin & whales were working West. We felt sure that we left the best spot to be. Still not 0 Albacore running East.

May 27th, 36:14 x 158:20W with 62.2% sst, Ocean Joy still skunked since we tuned East. We noticed less oil in the water if we keep the engine running. No water in the oil during the change. Thank God. We just put it on course for the Cape Flattery & hope we run into something. Pray that we make it.

June 6th at 47:23N x 126:54W, Ocean Joy is 100 miles off the Coast. We will be in Port Angeles tomorrow morning for Customs Clearance at 9 am. We will get fixed up & get back out ASAP. We never caught a single Albacore Tuna the whole way back. Only bird sign was little tuna birds, but not many. No dolphin or whales. Verry dismal coming across.

July 1st, Ocean Joy departed Port Angeles for fishing at 9 am.

July 2nd, at 46:58N x 125:16, Ocean Joy caught our 1st Tuna. We ended up with 41 fish & no fish scratched. Felt good to finally catch one again. After going a long time without, one seems to wonder & worry. Hopefully, we have not lost the touch...

July 3rd, at 45:49N x 125:28W, Ocean Joy caught 30 fish & no scratched fish. 61.2 sst

July 4th, 44:51N x 126:19W, we caught 75 Albacore, no net marks. 61.0 sst. No production yet.



July 8th, at 45:05 x 126:38W, Ocean Joy caught 197 Albacore. 1st productive day of 1 ton. Also, the 1st sign of driftnet activity detected on our fish! This is 2 out of 7 fish detected with scratches for the day. There is no way we can take pictures of every fish, this year especially. We are a crew man short & I do not want to leave the wheel... We will do the best we can.



July 9th, 45:20W x 126:12, Ocean Joy caught 230 fish, seeing over at least 12 fish net marked. These are pictures of 2 of them. We finally get some production, and already see our doom. Are we ever going to see a clean, sustainable fishery again? To NMFS science center & NOAA, for every fish we see scratched, how many Albacore do not make it, or go missing...?



July 11th, 45:18N x 126:52W, we caught 41 fish & noticed 4 fish net marked. Here is 2 of them.



July 17th, 46:48N x 126:23W, Ocean Joy caught 145 fish. At least 12 fish were scathed from driftnets. We got to be high liners today. Not many boats broke 100 fish for the day.



July 18th, 46:31N x 128:21W, Ocean Joy observed over 15 fish with net marks while catching 194 fish. Close to 10%. All it takes is 1 net marked fish to violate our FREEDOM of the SEA!



July 25th, 46:20N x 131:09W, Ocean Joy detected 1 out of 50 fish caught had driftnet markings.

OFAD Vice President, Bud Harder, notified us that while he had been monitoring Global Fishing Watch (GFW) & AIS Marine Traffic, a large Chinese & Taiwanese fleet of fishing vessels have been around 40:30N x 174W for over a month now. He also mentioned how some were moving NE to 41:00N x 171:00W. Bud tried to notify Sea Shepherd to see if they would be interested to check them out. He tried notifying USCG 17th district Juno, Alaska, but no word back.





August 7th, at 44:42N x 129:21W, 1 out of 10 fish caught had driftnet marks on them.



08/10/20, Ocean Joy unloaded in Westport, WA. to Westport Seafoods.

Ocean Joy normally sells to the blast bled loin market that usually pays higher prices than cannery price. Because of the COVID epidemic, restaurants are closed & fresh frozen loins are not moving. Price dropped from 4,000 per ton to 3,800 per ton, down to 3,000 per ton, to not sure or not buying at all. Cannery price was holding at 3,400 per ton as of March, but then collapsed because of a major supply from Japan. The cannery price, now, is 2,800 to “Wild Planet” brand. That is what we sold our fish for. A 600\$ per ton loss in five months. For us, 30% decrease in price per ton. Not only do we catch less fish, but we get paid less for them. Funny that the price never drops in the store. Just at our end of the food chain. I guess I should be grateful I still have a job & we are. Word is on-line sales for canned Albacore went up 50% for a time. That is good news that more people are buying our canned fish. Hope it keeps up.





Back at sea & heading to the North West. 08/16/20N at 45:09 x 128:13W, this net mark, or scratch, or scrape, looks fresh!



08/26/20, at 48:00N x 128:00W in Canadian EEZ, driftnet marked fish.



08/26/20 at 48:00N x 128:00W, net marked fish.



08/27/20, 49:30N x 128:02W. This net mark looks fresh with the color change in it.



08/27/20, Picture was taken at 49:30N x 128:06W inside Canadian EEZ.



08/27/20, 49:30N x 128:02W, this fish mark is different. It does not look like a net mark, but more like a leader mark, except not long enough. Could be from rubbing on a rope of some kind. Then there are the markings towards the tail going vertically. This one is odd.



08/30/20, 48:45N x 128:18W, Net marked fish. Could be from a pair Trawl net too.



09/03/20, 49:40N x 129:04W, Light & fresh scratches. Just enough to take the slime off.



09/05/20, 50:47N x 131:56 off Canada. Looks like a hard rub here. These marks that look more like chafing. I wonder if this is from rubbing up against a Trawl net. We should ask fisheries if there is Pair Trawlers going after our Albacore. That wad of webbing we saw in May had a Trawl net of some sort mixed up with driftnet. If that is the case, we are truly decimated.



09/11/20, 50:39 x 131:55W, freshly net marked, scraped Albacore averaging 14 lbs.



09/12/20, 50:46N x 132:03W off Canada. Net marked, scratched Albacore.



09/13/20, 50:31N x 132:95W, Net marked Albacore. Marks up by its head too. Look closely.



Head shot picture of the same net marked Albacore Tuna.



09/13/20, 50:31N x 132:05W. 1 out of 10 fish caught are net marked like this.



09/14/20, 50:12N x 132:06W, net marked or scraped Albacore Tuna.



09/14/20, 50:12N x 132:06W, driftnet marked Albacore. Looks like it had net around its head, then slipped out. Then there is the hard rub on the side & scratches. Fact is, it is not a **clean** Fishery. This Sustainable Albacore Tuna Fishery is under oppression from driftnets, IUU or not.



Here is another shot of the head. Question to the scientific committee: How many get away?



09/22/20, 45:34N x 126:17 West of Astoria, OR. Fresh net marked 10 lb. Albacore. The only fish caught today.



09/26/20, 48:15N x 129:04W, net marked, scraped, scratched Albacore. 12 lb. fish.



10/01/20, 48:26N x 129:15W, net marked 18 lb. Albacore off Canada.



Another shot of the same big fish showing the belly side. Changing the angle of the picture makes a difference in the light. You can also see the lite scratches on the gill plate.

Ocean Joy fished till October 6th off the Coast of Canada, then head back to Westport, WA. for unloading & the end of another oppressed & scratchy year. Most boats called it quits a week ago, but we hung in for a while longer. Production was down from last year, for most boats. It was said that AAFA boats caught under 4,000 ton. Not sure about WFOA boats, but the blast market boats may have landed 2,000 ton altogether. That would put the total tonnage around 6,000 tons for the West Coast. I thought last year was bad, this year was worse.

Taking this time to make note of an incident, or encounter, with USCG cutter Access.

08/24/20, 46:45 x 125:44, Ocean Joy had been in the general area for the past few days. Lucky boats were yielding 1-2 ton per day, then it dried up. We only had 38 fish yesterday. Most boats had moved off, but we tried one more pass to the south, then move west. As the USCG cutter was in the area, conducting routine safety inspections, I took the liberty to talk to the CG & told CG that it was great that they care so much for our safety. That if only the CG would care that much about our fishery. CG replied that they do care considerably about our fishery & how do I came up with the CG not caring? I requested that they record a message, from the Albacore Tuna fishermen, and pass it on to their top Admiral in command. CG replied that he would & to go ahead and speak. This is basically what I said:

We are offended! We feel violated. That our Law of the Sea, "Freedom of Fishing", rights have been violated & stripped from us. Every time we pull up an Albacore that is scratched by driftnets, we are reminded of how YOU, USCG, have failed us & our fishery. United Nations passed a law to ban driftnets in 1989. USCG was named to enforce that law. It later became a moratorium on driftnets in 1992. Still USCG was appointed by the UN to enforce that law.

In 1992, a war was going on, between driftnets & trollers, over the harvesting of Albacore Tuna. We trollers had been losing the battle for the past 10 years. Was this the end of the war? We thought so. By banning driftnets, that would give Trollers the soul rights, with other hook & line fisheries, over the driftnets, to harvest Albacore tuna. When we heard of the "moratorium" on gillnets, we were opposed to it! We expressed, & still do, that we need a clean environment. No nets, no scratches. According to the "Law of the Sea", we are entitled to "Freedom of the Sea". That includes "Freedom of Fishing". Any Albacore taken by driftnets, takes away from our freedom. We were then told that the driftnet moratorium was to faze the fishery out, and only would only be for a few years. Shortly after, in 1993, our fishery already started to improve with not a scratch on the fish. For the next 8-10 years to follow we prospered again & became a healthy "in shore" & "offshore" fleet of vessels without a scratch on the fish. We thought we won the war, but the driftnets returned in 2002. We cried out and reported sightings & USCG responded, but no convictions made. Where is our protection? We are USCG documented vessels. If in time of war, we would gladly aid and assist the USCG, or Navy, or Nation, in any way needed. We are ready & proud to serve at any time. Will the USCG, or Navy return that loyalty? We must have no nets, no scratches to survive. We have tried hard to comply in every way given to us by the USCG & fisheries. We started using VMS, via Inmarsat tracking in 1991, we have a safety drill instructor & certified CPR & first aid instructor on board, Eperb & yearly

survival raft certification, fire extinguishers, survival suits up to date, flares up to date, safety meetings logged once a month, AIS tracking devices, our crew have written contracts & are treated well, we have no slaves aboard, not smuggling drugs or people... Yes, granted, it is all for our own benefit. It is to make us safe, but we do all this for USCG, for compliance to the fisheries. All we ask, or need, in return, is NO NETS. We made it clear years ago, but Taiwan & China, and other nations still will not give it up. So, after almost 20 years of catching IUU net scratched Albacore Tuna & dealing with depleted stocks, we find this offensive! USCG should be ashamed. I am ashamed, knowing what is being done to our ocean & sustainable fishery. This is appalling to stand by and watch it happen.

I thanked the Captain & officer of the USCG cutter for listening & recording our message. I apologized for the outburst & did not mean any disrespect to the USCG. I honor our USCG & look forward to helping in any way, to aid in eliminating IUU fishing. We all agree, it is a big Ocean. I also had words with a fisheries officer aboard a Canadian Coast Guard vessel in Canada. I informed the officer of the net marked fish & sent him pictures. I explained that law enforcement needs to be increased. He assured me that Canada will continue working with the USCG, & other Nations in joint efforts to stop IUU driftnets. I thanked him dearly & only hope this to be true. I know that Canada & USCG, along with other Nations & Interpol have stepped up law enforcement in the South Pacific. We are forever grateful. Last year, in the South Pacific, we had a clean fishery with little to no scratched fish caught. We only hope & pray that it continues. In the meantime, the Albacore Tuna War will continue. This 2020 season will be added to the long list of losing battles for the sustainable Pacific Albacore Trollers. Still barely alive to fight another day.

List of requests:

To the United Nations:

Please hear the voice of the deprived fishermen. Give us a chance to stand before you and hear our plea. We are an existing fishery in international waters & claim our rights to "Freedom of fishing" that are being violated by IUU driftnets.

Strike the word "Moratorium" & stand strong on the word "Ban" in the law Banning driftnets in International waters.

Having a driftnet "moratorium" has turned the Ocean into a war zone. A losing battlefield for sustainable Tuna fisheries. Impose a total "BAN DRIFTNETS"

Make an ordinance, or ruling, to allow USCG & all Law Enforcement agencies, to scuttle(sink) any vessel having driftnets on board or using driftnets. These IUU vessels are **pirates** & should be treated as such. No more returning IUU driftnet vessels to state authorities, only the crew be returned.

Apply heavy sanctions on Taiwan & China for all Albacore Tuna products until they can prove that their IUU driftnet fleet no longer exist for 2 years running.

To the US President Trump, and President elect Biden:

We urge you to please exercise your Executive Order to Ban all driftnets in international waters. Please help protect our Ocean environment & US Documented fishing vessels that thrive on it. China & Taiwan are out of control & taking over the Pacific in their fishing efforts, especially their IUU fishing. This is partly our (US) fault for allowing this to happen for so long. Make it a total Ban on driftnets & have the Navy & USCG heavily enforce it always. Add heavy sanctions on all Taiwan & China Albacore Tuna products coming into the US until they stop driftnets for 2 years running.

To the US Congress, US State Department & to NOAA:

Stop all attempts to carry on this driftnet moratorium. Eliminate the moratorium & impose a solid Ban on driftnets. End all trade deals with Taiwan & China involving Albacore Tuna. Impose sanctions on all Albacore Tuna coming into the US from Taiwan & China until they show proof their IUU fleet no longer exist for 2 years running.

Pass a law allowing USCG, & or any law enforcement authorities, to scuddle IUU vessels using driftnets. We do not want pirates fishing in the Pacific any longer. This has gone on for too long.

Prepare to turn Midway Island into an unloading port & USCG station with a dock big enough to tie up a USCG cutter. This will be helpful to counter China's overtaking the South China Sea situation, while assuring US fishermen the protection needed in the area. This would give a, much needed, unloading port to fisherman fishing in the aera so far from land.

Thank you for the attention in this matter. Until next season, Fair thee well.

Regards, Captain John Harder- F/V Ocean Joy

Johnboyharder@gmail.com

Ocean Friends Against Driftnets- www.Oceanfad.org

Pacific Albacore Trollers Association- www.pataintl.com

