



OFAD, together with Pacific Albacore Trollers Ass. Int. (PATAI)

Observed Reports on South Pacific Albacore Troll seasons 2019 – 2020

Conducted in the WCPFC area

By Captain John Harder- F/V Ocean Joy

OFAD & PATAI would like to start out by saying many grateful thanks for the upgraded surveillance & law enforcement effort made in the South Pacific. We understand that USCG, together with Canada- "Operation Driftnet" conducted with Fijian Ministry of Fisheries & PIFFA; over 100 vessels were observed and documented with pictures taken. Without knowing the details, you guys must have stirred things up because we got some fish to catch! Much respect going out to Interpol, Sea Shepherd, & not forgetting Global Fishing Watch (GFW) & Marine traffic, tracking AIS. We have noticed a big change in our fishery!

The 1st time in over 15 years, the South Pacific Albacore Troll season 2019, was prosperous!

For whatever reason, a sizable run of Albacore was waiting for the few boats that fished that season. Only 8- 9 trollers working together, in traditional areas, enjoyed exceptional fishing most of the season. All boats averaging over 1 ton per day, while some vessels catching 2-4 tons on good days. Weather was a bit of an issue. Average wind was 20+ kts with higher winds towards the end of the season. A lot of choppy days, but still fishable. All boats filled up with fish, with some vessels making multiple trips into New Zealand. Average catch per vessel was over 100 tons, with over 1,000 tons caught for the season. Most all the fish went to the fresh frozen loin market in North America yielding a much higher price than the existing cannery price. This was more than double the yield of tonnage from the previous year of only around 450 tons landed & with more fishing effort.

3-year class & scathed (marked) by driftnets.

Right away, captains & crew of the jig fleet could not help noticing driftnet marks & scratches on 1-3 out of 10 fish being caught. The markings appeared to be deep and easy to detect. The run of fish had been fished by driftnets. One cannot help to wonder if the IUU driftnet fleet was interrupted, one way or another, and allowing the fish to migrate down from the North West. Less net-marked fish came later in the smaller mixed grade of 12-13 lbs. Yet still detecting 1 out of 10 fish scathed albacore, by driftnets, towards the end. Average weight of the Albacore was

in the 15-16 lb. range putting the run in the 2-3-year class with some mixed 12-13 lb. fish caught later in the season.

All in all, this was a pleasant surprise for the Pacific Albacore Troll fleet in the South Pacific. Even though IUU driftnet activity was detected by the net-marked tuna, with more pressure from law enforcement, there is hope for the future of our South Pacific Albacore Troll fishery.

2020 South Pacific Albacore Troll season started out similar as the previous season.

With a BANG! Early arriving jig boats landed in the fish the 1st week of December 2019 & by the 1st of the year, 2020, some smaller boats were on their way to New Zealand for unloading. The Troll fleet had doubled in size, compared to the year before, amounting to around 20 vessels participating in the fishery. The area of the fishing grounds was around 100 square miles and not far from the previous year. The body of fish & fishing conditions were not as much as 2019, but the cooperation of the Troll fleet, working together, allowed the vessels to capitalize on the schools of fish, resulting in high yields once again. By the middle of the season, it was not uncommon for 2-4 vessels to work in 1 small area or share 1 school of fish by passing the spot of fish to one another. It was great to see the group of boats working together so all could benefit by the area & staying located on the productive spots. The vessels averaged well over 1 ton per day & ending up with over 100 ton per vessel for the season. The fleet yielded well over 2,000 tons for the 2020 season. This was astonishing to have 2 productive seasons, back-to-back.

2-3-year fish with little to NO net-marks.

As a repeat of the 2019 season, the fish started out averaging 15 lbs., but quickly dropped to a 13 lb. average mix. There were some noticeably light net marks on some of the early fish that were caught. This was only 1 out of possibly 50 fish caught, but then turned into a clean run of 13 lb. Albacore. This proved to be a fresh run of fish & not last year's run returning to the grounds. At the end of season, Smaller 9-10 lb. Albacore started showing up mixed with some skipjack moving in from the West. The Troll fleet started to move off, as not to fish on next year's fish. Boats ventured off to the East & North looking in other potential fishy areas with no avail.

New Chinese & Taiwanese fleet detected.

As the Trollers vacated the area & started heading North to get ready for the up and coming North Pacific season, we could not help noticing that a potential Long Line fleet started forming just Northwest of where we were fishing. OFAD vice president, Bud Harder, monitoring Global Fishing Watch & AIS tracking websites, reported Chinese & Taiwanese vessels, registered in Vanuatu, started to congregate & grow in their fleet size by late April & early May. If, in fact, that these vessels were Long Line vessels, The Albacore Troll fleet would have nothing to worry about. Long Line & Trollers are compatible & can fish hand in hand as both fisheries are "Hook & Line" fisheries. If these vessels are to be IUU driftnet vessels then our Troll fishery, along with

the Albacore stocks, will be depleted once again. Only time will tell whether next year's fish will have net-marks on them. At least we will have a good idea from where they come from.

In conclusion, OFAD & PATAI want to again say we are forever grateful for the upgraded law enforcement from all nations & all parties involved in eliminating IUU driftnet & or otherwise IUU fishing! We feel this has made a dramatically positive impact in the Ocean & in our South Pacific Albacore Troll fishery. We only hope & pray that this will continue as a normal, year to year, occurrence & not just a one-time thing. We would like to add that we have been with VMS via Inmarsat & new VMS & AIS that conforms with the UN & WCPFC from 1991 to the present day, while other nations fishing in international waters have yet to register their vessels. We view this as totally unacceptable & discriminating. We are also deeply concerned in the growth of the Chinese & Taiwanese "offshore" fishing fleet as there was to be a cap on fishing effort. Why is their fleet still growing? We only hope that next year, and the years to come, will be as productive as this 2020 season.

Regards, John Harder- Captain of F/V Ocean Joy

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Ocean Friends Against Driftnets (OFAD)- www.Oceanfad.org

Pacific Albacore Tuna Association International (PATAI)- www.pataintl.com