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FIRST RESULTS OF TUNA POLE-AND-LINE FISHING IN NEW CALEDONIA

Paper presented by New Caledonia

In August 1981, the first pole-and-liner of the Transpeche Company, the "Coralie", arrived in Noumea. In June 1982, after 9 months of operation (of which 1 month was spent on the slip), the total tuna catch was 572 tonnes, which is an average of 71 tonnes per fishing month. The catch per tuna fishing day was 5.4 tonnes.

This very reasonable daily catch rate should have produced a larger total catch, but various kinds of difficulties kept the number of tuna fishing days down.

1. Bait fishing

Fishing for live bait has taken up a major part of the "Coralie"'s time. More than half of the fishing trip often had to be devoted to live bait fishing, for the following reasons:

- Need to survey fishing grounds and test possible fishing methods, in addition to the work done by ORSTOM. At present "Coralie" uses a bouki-ami net. Very successful beach seining trials were conducted and all pole-and-liners will be equipped with beach seines as from July 1982.

As it is difficult to handle a purse seine from a Japanese pole-and-liner because of the powerful in-sucking of water into the bait tanks, it is necessary to use a specially equipped launch which will arrive in July 1982.

- The presence of predators (Mackerel tuna, Spanish mackerel) was a problem on some fishing grounds because of the exclusive use of the bouki-ami net.

- Seasonal variations in bait fish stocks make it difficult to catch sufficient quantities of good quality live bait during the cool season (approximately from July to November).

To improve this situation, the Transpeche Company is planning to set up a team specifically for bait fishing. This team is to operate successively in St. Vincent, Harcourt and Prony bays.

A specialised bait-fishery is fully justified in view of the arrival of two additional pole-and-liners some time in July 1982. The bait fish will be captured with a beach seine or a purse seine, in the day time or at night, from specially equipped launches. It will be stored in floating bait containers.

## 2. Tuna fishing

Though there were no major problems here, it must be noted that the "Coralie" has up to now always operated alone and thus did not have the benefit of information from other vessels, apart from a few Japanese ones licensed to fish in the Economic Zone. Furthermore, the 1981/1982 season appears not to have been a very good one for tuna fishing, going by the catch data of the Japanese pole-and-liners per day spent in the New Caledonian EEZ: 6.3 t against 8.2 t for the 1980/1981 season and 9.2 t in 1979/1980.

## 3. Storing of catches

The absence of a cold store has been a serious handicap for the Transpeche Company, making it impossible to pre-schedule the activities of its pole-and-liner, since the latter's landings had to be timed to coincide with departures of refrigerated ships or availability of refrigerated containers.

The opening, in July 1982, of a permanent cold store of 3,300 m<sup>3</sup> at Noumea harbour and, very shortly, of a fishing wharf as well, will allow more rational management of the pole-and-liners.

## 4. Training of crews

To start with, the Coralie's crew was made up of 10 Japanese, 10 Indonesian and 10 local seamen. After a few months of operation and training, the proportion of local seamen could be increased to over 50 per cent.

Experience has shown that local fishermen adapt well to this type of fishing, and it should soon be possible to have crews composed of roughly 10 Japanese and 20 locals.

However, it must be underlined, that there is a total lack of trained, local ship's officers and engineers. A considerable training effort is to be made in the Territory over the next few years to solve this problem.

## Conclusion

The first months of operation of a pole-and-liner in the waters of New Caledonia are not representative of the real potential of this fishery, as results have been adversely affected by the survey and training activities which Transpeche had to conduct, as well as by lack of land-based facilities.

As from mid-1982, fishing will be carried out by a fleet of 3 ships, which should improve catches. At the same time, the setting up of a specialised bait fishery will allow the pole-and-liners to spend less time in the lagoon fishing for bait, and this will increase the number of tuna fishing days outside the reef.

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