

Tuna Fishing in the South Pacific

(Review of SPC Technical Paper No. 149)

By Dr R. S. Mathieson*

This Technical Paper is a timely appraisal of the present and prospective socio-economic effects of the growing incidence of the Japanese tuna fisheries in the South Pacific.

PROFESSOR Doumenge of the University of Montpellier's faculty of arts and social science reviews the expansion of the tuna industry since 1955. The longline fishing boats of Japanese, South Korean, Formosan, and Okinawan registry supply tuna to shore bases operated by American or European interests. Here, the fish are either canned as in Pago Pago, American Samoa, or undergo freezing and cold storage preparatory to shipment overseas, mainly to United States canneries. Freezing operations take place at Pallicolo, Espiritu Santo (New Hebrides); Levuka, Ovalau Island (Fiji); and Nouméa (New Caledonia).

In discussing operations at these centres, Professor Doumenge's treatment is somewhat uneven because detailed data were not available for all areas. Generally, material on demographic trends and prospective population pressures is adequate, and there are succinct judgments on possible downturns in the economies of some islands unless corrective actions are taken.

Fisheries specialists will find the New Hebrides study particularly rewarding as it assembles sufficient technical data (catch, catch composition, and fishing effort) for detailed analyses of production trends, labour requirements, and income generation to be made. Professor Doumenge has not fully exploited these data, however, and there is room for further analysis when used in conjunction with other bio-geographical data known to be available for the area under study.

Increase in Longlining

In the waters of the island territories studied, longlining for tuna has increased tremendously, especially since 1958. Over 180 boats now work in the area and annual production is assessed at 40,000 to 50,000 metric tons. American Samoa alone contributes about 25,000 tons consisting mainly of whitemeat alba-

F. Doumenge, 'The Social and Economic Effects of Tuna Fishing in the South Pacific,' South Pacific Commission, Technical Paper No. 149, Noumea, 1966, Australian price \$1.25, available in either English or French editions.

core tuna destined for the Van Camp and Star Kist canneries at Pago Pago which employ some 784 persons and support a community of more than 7,000 people. The fishing boats land fish at contract prices for the season. A large segment of fishing company revenue is remitted to Japan, etc. Moreover, the 'value added by manufacture,' and grading, deep freezing, storage, and shipment revenues accrue to United States or to other outside interests. Only wages arising from the employment of

indigenes, and to a minor extent, company taxation and service industries income remain to 'pump prime' the local economies.

As Doumenge points out, even this injection is much lower in the case of simple freezer-storage operations than with fully integrated canneries. It is only the Pago Pago plants which provide really useful employment opportunities, and so halt the emigration of the young people.

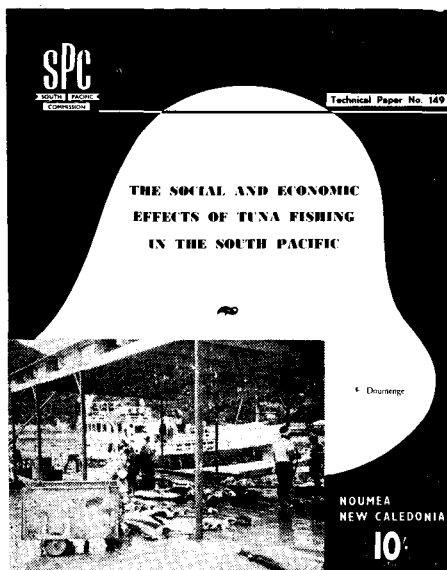
It seems clear that if the tuna fisheries are going to have the desired multiplier effect on territorial employment and gross domestic product, then rather more processing of the labour-intense kind and some changes in fiscal matters are desirable.

Professor Doumenge's paper underscores two major problems—

- (a) the need to check emigration, particularly of young people, from resource-poor islands; and
- (b) the mounting risk that continued 'bonanza' tuna fishing may go beyond the threshold of prudence considering the proper conservation of these resources.

Both of these problems can only be solved by further study. The need to extend the data collection of the sort begun by Professor Doumenge to all of the territories of the South Pacific is patent.

Although he envisages that some means of population movement control and further fisheries research should be undertaken soon, Professor Doumenge stops short in suggesting the appropriate authority. It is implicit, this reviewer feels, that the South Pacific Commission is the most qualified authority to co-ordinate biological and socio-economic research on the region's tuna fisheries. It would undoubtedly enjoy the support and co-operation of the territorial authorities. If Professor Doumenge's work has done no more than point to a need for further work then this technical paper is well merited.



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