

NOUVELLE-CALEDONIE

SERVICE D'ETAT
DES AFFAIRES MARITIMES

SERVICE TERRITORIAL
DE LA MARINE MARCHANDE
ET DES PECHEES MARITIMES

NEW CALEDONIA
TUNA FISHERY

Since the early 80's New caledonia has aimed at developing its own fleet of tuna fishing vessels.

As pole-and-lining rapidly showed its limits and purse-seine explanatory fishing trips were mainly unsuccessful, we turned to longlining and drew benefit from the expertise of Japanese fishermen and companies which used Nouméa as a home port close to their fishing areas in the Coral Sea.

During several years two different types of tuna longliners could be seen in New Caledonia :

- freezer vessels capable to stay at sea for more than one month sending their catch to the canneries in the region ;
- smaller longliners targetting for bigeye and yellowfin tuna to be exported to the fresh japanese sashimi market, having used monofilament gears since 1994.

Thus New Caledonia has been able to get practised crews and initiate commercial relationships with the main tuna buyers in the Pacific.

A. Catch statistics

Table 1 : Breakdown of the catch from the New Caledonian longliners since 1993

M. Tonnes (%)	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997 (*)
Yellowfin tuna	387 (29%)	390 (24%)	749 (53%)	495 (37%)	416 (39%)
Bigeye tuna	95 (7%)	70 (4%)	92 (6%)	208 (15%)	209 (20%)
Albacore	755 (56%)	840 (53%)	332 (23%)	414 (31%)	277 (26%)
Others	101 (8%)	300 (19%)	246 (18%)	236 (17%)	154 (15%)
TOTAL	1,338	1,600	1,419	1,353	1,056

(*) : Figures for 1997 are estimates

The total catch dropped down by 300 MT in 1997 when two longliners stopped fishing.

Therefore, last year, there was only one freezer vessel still operating and the fleet of monofilament longliners was composed of 6 vessels.

B. Trends in CPUE of yellowfin and bigeye tuna

Table 2 : CPUE (kilo per hundred hooks) by *traditional* (up) and *monofilament* longlines (down)

Traditional Monofilament	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Yellowfin	25.4	39.5	34.2	28.9	30.3
Tuna		12.6	12.6	12.0	12.8
Bigeye	1.6	1.4	2.2	2.5	1.3
Tuna		3.6	5.1	6.1	6.0

In 1997 the yields by monofilament were quite similar to these reported in 1996, indicating the crews have got a better experience. On the other side, the traditional longline reported worse CPUE of bigeye (-50%).

C. Trends in average weight of bigeye tuna

Table 3 : Average weight of bigeye (kilo) by *traditional* (up) and *monofilament* longlines (down)

Traditional Monofilament	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Bigeye	41.3	46.0	33.7	21.4	36.8
Tuna		34.4	28.1	29.7	33.4

Except in 1996 the average weight of « monofilament bigeye » has always be lower than that from the traditional gear whereas monofilament is supposed to catch more large bigeye. Actually, the catch of small bigeye is reported frequently in this fishery.

D. The markets

In 1997, 667 tonnes were exported, of which 344 were yellowfin and 207 were bigeye. More than one third of the total catch were sold on the local market in competition with fish from the small-scale fisheries.

E. The future

In 1998 a couple of projects might be concluded which could lead to a fleet of a dozen of small longliners. These vessels should have a longer cruising range than previously (up to 15 days) to explore new fishing areas since they would be based in new ports throughout New Caledonia.

As the local market is limited we must think of processing. One of the main objectives in the forthcoming years should consist in finding new markets on which low quality species could be sold after dressing.