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Cairns, AUSTRALIA

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**AMERICAN FISHERMANS RESEARCH ASSOCIATION AND THE AMERICAN  
ALBACORE FISHING ASSOCIATION**

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**WHY THE U.S.  
SOUTH PACIFIC  
ALBACORE TROLL  
FLEET IS DIFFERENT**

**A STATEMENT FROM THE  
AMERICAN FISHERMEN'S  
RESEARCH FOUNDATION**  
**and**  
**THE AMERICAN ALBACORE  
FISHING ASSOCIATION**

## 1. Exploration and Development of the Fishery

Starting in the mid-1980s the American Fishermens Research Foundation (a 501c(3) corporation funded by the harvester, processor, and supplier members of the Western Fishboat Owners Association) joined with the U.S. Government's Pacific Fisheries Development Foundation to explore and expand the troll fishery for South Pacific albacore.<sup>1</sup> The total budget for the first phase was \$287,800, the federal share \$115,000 and the AFRF's share \$172,800. The project was to send two to four albacore troll vessels, 60-80 feet in length, with crews of 2 to 4, to the South Pacific to develop a U.S. albacore fishery and to do albacore tagging. The U.S. vessels, in cooperation with New Zealand, were given permission (by Dr. Robin Allen, then with the New Zealand Government) to enter the New Zealand EEZ in the area near Chatham Island. New Zealand thought obtaining data from the U.S. cruises would be a good idea since:

. . . our knowledge of albacore distribution and commercial potential along the east coast is poor, these vessels would provide valuable data for expanding NZ albacore fishing . . . and an opportunity to see innovations used in the North Pacific high seas albacore trolling fishery.<sup>2</sup>

During February and March of 1986 two troll vessels, sometimes accompanied by NOAA's research vessel, the Townsend Cromwell, fished in waters between 38° and 41° S and 140° to 155° W and caught 100mt of albacore while tagging 702 albacore.

A second phase of the 3 year project followed, with the U.S. supplying \$360,000 and AFRF supplying \$180,000 for a total of over a half a million dollars, to send 6 U.S. troll vessels to fish for albacore during December 1986 to April of 1987. Eventually, 40 troll vessels went fishing in the area catching 4,000 mt in the 1987 to 1988 season, while tagging 1,247 albacore.

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<sup>1</sup> At that time most of the current members of the American Albacore Fishing Association were members of WFOA.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum of 4 Dec. 1986, Talbot Murray to Dr. Robin Allen and Tom Norris

A third phase was conducted in December 1988 to April 1989 at an additional cost of \$129,000 with the U.S. government and AFRF again sharing the costs. This part of the project was to send 40 albacore troll vessels to tag 2,000 albacore in the South Pacific fishing area.

The thrust of this effort was to develop a fishery which could deliver to the two canneries in American Samoa. Canneries in California and Hawaii had been closed. Also in 1988, there had been a large influx of Asian drift gillnet vessels taking albacore in the North and South Pacific. A log book sheet attached to one of the reports from the 1988-1989 season had the entry that “Because of gillnet [sic] damage, we are tagging small fish to get the quality of fish you specified . . . 75% of the fish we are catching are gillnet [sic] marked . . . .”<sup>3</sup>

The U.S. fleet was not alone in its efforts which resulted in the tagging of 3,783 albacore between 1986 and 1989. In cooperation with AFRF, New Zealand tagged 1,866 albacore and French Polynesia tagged 190. The New Zealand tagging occurred near shore on the west and east coast of the North Island. The U.S. tagging occurred between 170° and 140° W and 38° to 41° S.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. Historic Catch and Level of Effort**

The U.S. troll fleet for South Pacific albacore flourished from about 1987 through 2000. The fleet declined in the last several years, primarily because of higher insurance and fuel costs, and the reduction of cannery demand for troll caught fish in American Samoa, until recently. In addition some of the carrier vessels used by the fleet to transship to American Samoa have been taken out of service. During that time the canneries in American Samoa came to depend on foreign longline fleets for their source of albacore. As can be seen from the chart below, this fishery developed by the U.S. was once a 5,000 mt fishery employing over 50 vessels.

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<sup>3</sup> “Final Report for South Pacific Albacore Tagging Project, Saltonstall-Kennedy Cooperative Agreement NA89AA-H-00007 Awarded to American Fishermen’s Research Foundation”, October 11, 1989, William L. Perkins.

<sup>4</sup> “Summary of South Pacific Albacore Tagging Conducted During 1986-1989”, SWFSC Admin. Report LJ-89-15, Laurs and Nishimoto, at page 2.

Table 1<sup>5</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>Trips</u>	<u>Catch</u>	<u>Number of Vessels</u>
1987-88	91	3,558	43
1988-89	80	3,239	43
1989-90	76	3,995	39
1990-91	78	5,221	56
1991-92	65	3,097	55
1992-93	45	1,036	44
1993-94	17	2,236	14
1994-95	29	1,953	21
1995-96	55	1,964	53
1996-97	26	1,617	26
1997-98	38	1,701	36
1998-99	24	1,241	21
1999-2000	39	2,562	36
2000-01	39	2,128	33
2001-02	12	1,218	12
2002-03	14	1,678	14
2003-04	12	995	11
2004-05	8	725	8
2005-06	10	601	10
2006-07	6	271	6
2007-08	4	150	3
2008-09	4	237	4
2009-10	6	307	6
2010-11 <sup>6</sup>		471	10
2011-12		195	

Recent developments in the focus of a processor in American Samoa, improved freezing and transportation capabilities, and the growing public demand for fresh

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<sup>5</sup> These figures come from the Pacific Fishery Management Council's September 2011 SAFE report, and for whatever reason are slightly different from the figures reflected in WCPFC-SC9-2013/GN-IP-04 and WCPFC-SC9-2013/GN-IP-04.

<sup>6</sup> Figures on number of vessels and trips were not immediately available for 2011 and 2012.

and fresh frozen troll caught albacore all suggest that this U.S. developed South Pacific albacore fishery can be very important to the U.S. in the future.

### **3. No Scientific Evidence That The Troll Fishery Has Impact On The Stock**

Scientific papers from the SPC and the WCPFC-SC have repeatedly testified to the health of the South Pacific albacore stock. See WCPFC9-2012-IP.

### **4. AFRF Closing Statement From WCPFC-9**

It might be appropriate to repeat part of the AFRF Closing Statement in December of 2012.

As we have repeatedly indicated during informal discussions at these WCPFC meetings, the US albacore troll fleet is very concerned, as is TE Vaka Moana and the FFA about the large increase in longline effort.

Longline catches of South Pacific albacore have risen dramatically in recent years and we, as others, are disappointed that the Commission has not agreed upon conservation and management measures to protect this important resource.

Nevertheless it is prudent to repeat, as the most recent scientific studies before this Commission have proven, there is no scientific evidence, (nor was there when 2005-03 was accepted by the Commission), that the South Pacific albacore troll fishery has had, or is having, any adverse impact on the stocks. Nor has the effort in that fishery increased. The SPC, the SC, and the IATTC have all concluding that the South Pacific albacore stocks are above MSY. With no scientific basis to limit the effect of the U.S. troll fishery, the Commission should not agree to amending CMM 2005-03 or its replacement, CCM 2010-5 in any way that would inhibit the high seas U.S. troll fleet.

It should also be remembered that as long ago as 2005, and carried through to the current CCM on South Pacific albacore, the Commission is required to annually review the measure based on

sound scientific advice.<sup>7</sup> We look forward to working with our South Pacific friend and neighbors in crafting a scientifically based and effectively enforced measure to be approved at WCPFC-10.

## **5. Current AFRF and AAFA Position**

The position of the U.S. South Pacific albacore troll harvesters remains firm. There is no scientific or economic basis to close the high seas to the South Pacific albacore troll fishery. This fishery occurs entirely outside of any of the Pacific Island Countries' EEZs.

CAIRNS, AUSTRALIA DECEMBER 4, 2013

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<sup>7</sup> As far as we know this has never been accomplished.