NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN NEW CALEDONIA'S LONGLINE FISHERY

New Caledonia has been a sleeping giant in terms of domestic longline fisheries development. In 1983 there was only one registered domestic longliner, which landed about 60 tonnes of fish. By 1999 the fleet had grown to 13 vessels with annual landings of about 1800 tonnes of tuna and other species.

Unlike in some Pacific Island countries and territories, the exploitable resource and the available support infrastructure in New Caledonia have been underutilised. The total landed catch of all longline species could possibly be increased to 10,000 tonnes annually without overexploiting the resource. In fact, in 1962, the Japanese longline fleet landed over 11,000 tonnes of all species fishing from forty boats in the vicinity of New Caledonia.

New Caledonia has an EEZ of 1,740,000 km², which borders the EEZs of Australia, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu (Fig. 1). The EEZ also borders large areas of international waters to the southeast and southwest. The total land area of New Caledonia is 19,103 km² and the estimated population at mid-year 2000 was 212,700 inhabitants.

Development of a domestic longline fishery geared to exporting fresh fish is dependent on the development of a tourist industry with regular flights going to Japan and elsewhere. The most important component of infrastructure for the commercial longline fishery in the Pacific, aside from wharves and harbours, is availability of air cargo space so that fresh fish can be delivered to the main markets — Japan, USA, and Europe.

New Caledonia has well developed wharves and harbours and has a developing tourist industry, several flights weekly to Japan (five to Tokyo and two to Osaka) typically with about sixty tonnes of available cargo space.

By the end of 2001, this component of local infrastructure was underutilised by the fishing industry. So far, fish stocks and air cargo space have not limited domestic longline development in New Caledonia. Up until now, there just hasn’t been much development.

In contrast to New Caledonia, Fiji Islands and Australia to the west both have well-developed longline fisheries. Fiji Islands, which started modestly in the early 1990s with only a handful of boats landing less than 100 tonnes, now has a fleet of over 100 boats landing approximately 10,000 tonnes annually of tuna and other species. Most of the Fiji’s catch is destined for Japanese and US markets and the canneries in Fiji Islands and American Samoa. Fiji Islands registered boats have started branching out by fishing under access agreements in Vanuatu’s EEZ.

The longline fishery in eastern Australia has had a similar history of rapid growth. Prior to 1995 the eastern Australian longline fleet consisted of a few boats catching around 30 tonnes annually. Today the fleet fishing out of Mooloolaba in Queensland has over 125 boats and lands over 2000 tonnes of broadbill swordfish annually, most of which goes to US markets. The Mooloolaba longliners fish for broadbill swordfish in Australian and international waters bordering New Caledonia’s EEZ. Recent trends in New Caledonia are showing that the domestic longline fishery may be on the
verge of a rapid growth cycle similar to what happened in Fiji Islands and eastern Australia.

The 13 New Caledonian boats fishing during 1999 in New Caledonia all belonged to the same company, Navimon, based in Noumea. During 2001, Navimon sold one of their vessels and another was lost on the reef, reducing their fleet to 11 vessels. Navimon was the only company in New Caledonia during the late 1990s since two predecessors, Megu Caledonia and Toho Caledonia, finished operations.

Four new companies, however, started up during 2001 and more are in the planning stages. By the end of 2001 the fleet had grown to 18 vessels. The domestic longline fleet in New Caledonia could number up to 40 vessels by the end of 2002 and the total landed catch, including tunas and broadbill swordfish, could be around 6000 tonnes. The potential annual catch of all longline species could be 10,000 tonnes or more.

The four new longline companies include:

- Albacore, with one boat delivered in 2001 and another two coming in 2002;
- Pêcheries de Nouvelle-Calédonie, with six boats in 2001, ten boats by early 2002, and a processing plant at Koumac completed in 2001;
- Pescana, with eight boats planned for 2002 and a processing plant at Quai de Pêche in Noumea completed at the beginning of 2002; and
- Sodefish, with one boat built in Fiji Islands for early 2002 delivery and a processing plant at Quai de Pêche completed in 2001.

The New Caledonian company, Albacore, ordered a brand new longliner built in Tasmania, Australia by Allan Barnett Fishing Co, capable of freezing albacore on board for the canneries as well as storing fresh sashimi grade bigeye and yellowfin tuna for the Japanese market.

F/V Yellowfin (Figs. 2 and 3) is the first of three steel 20 m longliners that Albacore will have operating by the end of 2002. F/V Yellowfin began fishing in late 2001 and so far, according to Captain Soane Mataila, the results have been promising. F/V Yellowfin is 20 m LOA, 7 m beam, and 3 m draft. It has three RSW holds with 5 tonnes each capacity, a two tonne blast freezer, a thirty tonne holding freezer, and two, two-tonne bait freezers. The main engine is a 470 HP Caterpillar 3406.
Another new longline fishing company in New Caledonia had its origins in Tahiti. The president of the company, Claude Favy, also began his career in longline fishing in Tahiti. Claude and his partner, Mr Michel Friederich, were hydraulic engineers working on a hydro-electric project in Tahiti. Part of the project involved importing very large steel pipes from France. Claude and Michel figured out a way to make the pipes in Tahiti and saved millions of CFP on freight alone. With the money gained from that venture, they bought an entire fleet of longliners from a company that was having financial troubles, and organised Compagnie des Clippers du Pacifique Sud. By the late 1990s, there were too many boats fishing in Tahiti, so they decided to move the fleet to New Caledonia. The first boats arrived in Koumac, Northern Province, in March 2001. After that they began arriving two at a time from a New Zealand shipyard, Q-West Boat Builders in Wanganui, that was commissioned to stretch them from 16 m to 19 m and do complete re-fits.

The new company is called Pêcheries de Nouvelle-Calédonie (PNC). PNC is a joint venture between Claude and Michel, Sofinor (the nickel mining group in Northern Province), and the government of the Northern Province in New Caledonia. Karaavha 10, one of the first two PNC boats to arrive in 2001, is unique in that it is constructed of fibreglass and fitted with a Lindgren-Pitman (USA) longline system. All of the other Karaavhas (Figs. 4 and 5) are aluminium of the same design and fitted with Bopp (France) longline reels and line setters.

Each boat is capable of setting up to 2000 hooks per day and eight sets per trip. The fish holds will carry up to ten tonnes of iced fish. PNC has a ten-ton-a-day flake ice machine on the wharf and each boat will soon have its own on-board ice machine.

Besides the fleet of longliners, PNC operates a processing plant adjacent to Pandop Marina in Koumac (Fig. 6), where the fleet is based. PNC also has a small processing plant at Quai des Scientifiques (Scientists’ Wharf) in Noumea for local sales and distribution. The plant at Pandop was completed during 2001. It is well appointed and has been HACCP certified but is still awaiting EU approval for exporting products to EU countries. The plant has a receiving and

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**Figure 4 (top): F/V Karaavha 8 leaving for a fishing trip**  
**Figure 5 (bottom): Unloading fish from F/V Karaavha 3 at Koumac**  
[Photos: Steve Beverly]
chilling room, cutting room, packing room, and cold storage for packed fish cartons, as well as ample office space to administer and manage the fleet and plant. All incoming fish are either hung on a steel rack (Fig. 7) or packed in ice on pallets in the chill room (0°C) until their fate is decided. Albacore are finned and cleaned before being packed in ice.

They are later trucked to Noumea where they are frozen and containerised for shipment to one of the canneries in Pago Pago. Sashimi bigeye and yellowfin are weighed and graded before being packed in wet-lock cartons for shipment to the Japanese market, or are iced if packing is to occur the following day. Byproduct species such as opah, mahi mahi, and wahoo can be cut at the plant in Koumac or shipped to PNC’s other facility in Noumea, where they are processed for the local market. All fish are trucked to Noumea in refrigerated trucks using a private transport company. The advantage of being located in Koumac is that the fleet is closer to some of the better fishing areas. The disadvantage is that the processing plant is four hours away by road from Tontouta International Airport, the link to the Japanese market.

Pescana is another new joint venture company operating in New Caledonia, but this time with a foreign interest. The partners are a long established fishing company from New Zealand, Sun Fish, and a New Caledonia shipping company, Sofrana, who have joined forces as Pescana. Pescana has a new processing plant in Nouville (Fig. 8), situated beside Navimon’s processing plant. According to the Director, Mr Bernard Nazaire, Pescana’s plan is to have a fleet of at least eight longliners operating sometime in 2002. Pescana also plans to...
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process fish for other independent operators.

Pescana’s plant in Nouville is state-of-the-art for fresh fish processing plants. All fish will be delivered from the boats docked at Quai de Pêche in insulated boxes in a slurry. After weighing and grading, the fish will either be processed as fresh export fish and packed into wet-lock cartons or will be further processed for the local market.

Pescana has engaged a professional fish grader from Australia, Mr John Streets. John was trained in Japan and will pass his knowledge of fish grading on to a local counterpart over the next three years. The packing room features a gel ice machine (Fig. 9) capable of producing thousands of 1 kg packs of gel ice per day, sealed in leak-proof polyethylene pouches.

The plant will comply with all HACCP and EU standards for export packing houses. In addition, Pescana has installed a 25-ton a day flake ice machine (Fig. 10) that has an auger delivery system capable of delivering ice directly to the fish holds of the longliners. This is a first for Noumea. Pescana will not only supply ice to their own fleet but will be marketing ice to other fishing boats.

In August 2001 SPC’s Fisheries Development Officer, Steve Beverly, visited Alloy Fabricators boat building yard in Lami, Fiji, along with the owner of Sodefish and the captain of the new boat being built for Sodefish (see SPC Fisheries Newsletter #98).

The boat, F/V Warren (Figs. 11 and 12), is now completed and was recently ferried to Noumea. Owner Pita Mourin and Captain Stephane Gil reported that the trip over from Fiji was a real test of the boat. They encountered winds of 45 knots and eight-metre seas during most of the five-day voyage. According to Pita and Stephane, F/V Warren performed very well.

F/V Warren, which was named after its designer, Warren Ellcot, of Tahiti, is 18.78 metres long with a beam of 5.8 metres and a draft of 2.2 metres. It is powered by a Cummins 380 HP diesel engine. The wheelhouse electronics include a MaxSea system that is operated by a PC.

The software package includes a plotter with chart cards showing bathymetric data in 3D and a receiver that can download weather and oceanographic information. The fishing gear

Figure 9 (top): Pescana’s gel ice machine
Figure 10 (bottom): Pescana’s 25-ton-a-day flake ice machine

[Photos: Steve Beverly]
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Figures 11 and 12: F/V Warren

[Photos: Steve Beverly]

consists of a Smart Reel and line setter made in Fiji by Seamech Hydraulics. All fish will be chilled in a refrigerated slurry box on deck before being packed in ice in the fish hold.

Even though the Warren is Pita Mourin’s first venture into longline fishing, he is not new to fishing in New Caledonia. He has a 12 metre bottom longliner, F/V Thalassa, that has been one of the most successful snapper boats fishing out of Noumea. He and his wife, Maggy Maillet, market all of their snapper and other species from a stall at the local fish market at Port Moselle in Noumea. They also have a new processing plant located at Quai de Pêche that is HACCP and EU certified so they will soon be exporting fresh and value added fish to foreign markets. Pita’s future plans include ordering more boats similar to

Warren, but longer by four or five metres.

More boats are on the way and it will be very interesting to see how longline fishing develops in New Caledonia during 2002. All of the new players will be building on experiences learned from the pioneers and they should do well. The resource and the infrastructure are there. The only thing missing is qualified captains and engineers to man the growing fleet but this problem is being addressed by l’Ecole des Métiers de la Mer. The development of longline fishing in New Caledonia will bring with it not only investment and foreign earnings but jobs for locals as more people are trained and gain experience. The future looks bright for domestic longline fishing in New Caledonia.