

WP. 7
Lawson

THE AMERICAN SAMOA TUNA FISHERY HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS

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In 1954, a fleet of seven Japanese longliners began what has been termed "the beginning of the tuna fishery in American Samoa....." (Otsu, 1966). The cannery was first built in 1949 however, was never fully operational until these seven longliners off-loaded their catch. A second cannery, Star-Kist Samoa, Inc., began operating in 1963. Since then, nationality, size and composition of the fishing fleet have changed dramatically. The Japanese have disappeared from the American Samoa tuna longline fishery and were replaced by Koreans and Taiwanese. In the past few years, the Koreans have also shown a decline in their fleet and the tuna longline fleet is now almost exclusively composed of Taiwanese vessels.

The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries (now, National Marine Fisheries Service - NMFS) first began monitoring tuna longline landings from Pago Pago in 1962. In 1963, NMFS established a field station in American Samoa to monitor, collect data and to sample longliner landings on a regular basis; purse seiner landings have been sampled since 1970 and jigboat data and sampling since 1986. I have been monitoring the vessels since 1984 and previous to that served as an NMFS inspector at both Star-Kist and Van Camp.

U.S. purse seiners first began off-loading tuna from the western Pacific to American Samoa in 1970. The fishery expanded in the 1980's and with the inception of the Multilateral Treaty on Fisheries Between Certain Pacific Island States and the United States - South Pacific Tuna Treaty (SPTT) in June 1988, landings increased and production shifted from fancy white-meat canned tuna (albacore) to light-meat canned tuna (skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye). In 1986, the south Pacific, albacore, jigboat, troll fleet started and has been another source of white meat tuna for the canneries. In Figure 1, American Samoa landings of skipjack, yellowfin, albacore and others are shown for the years 1988 through 1992. As only a small percentage of the purse seine yellowfin landings are bigeye (approximately 10%) and large longline bigeye (over 80 lbs). is not acceptable for processing by the canneries, bigeye is included in the others category.

Logbooks are distributed to longliners and returned to NMFS on a voluntary basis; return rates have averaged around 27% for the past few years. Fifty fish length-frequency samples of albacore are obtained from most of the longliner landings; around 89% coverage. Yellowfin, bigeye and skipjack landings are also obtained if time is available but, sampling priority is first given to the purse seiners operating under the SPTT. Logbook and length-frequency data are collected and sent to the NMFS Honolulu Laboratory on a monthly basis for data entry and analysis. Currently,

sixty longliners, 59 Taiwanese and one Tongan, make regular deliveries to the two canneries in Pago Pago. The longliners average 3 trips per year with a carrying capacity of 120 to 700 short tons; average around 250 short tons.

Prior to the SPTT (June 1988), purse seine fishing data collection by NMFS was composed almost exclusively of results of interviews with vessel operators. Set positions, dates, type of set and catch were not available to the NMFS port samplers. Data was limited to general areas fished and length of the fishing trip. A few logbooks were obtained but most operators only gave month and area of capture. Length-frequency samples of skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye were obtained randomly throughout each vessel unloading at the canneries. With the inception of the SPTT, purse seiner logbook data was required to be submitted to NMFS by all U.S. purse seiners fishing under the SPTT. Length-frequency samples of skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye are now obtained at the canneries from selected wells; based upon capture area, month, set type and species. A minimum of thirteen samples, per month, per area, per species, are required in our sampling plan. In most cases the minimum sample requirements are met or exceeded from the American Samoa field station however, during certain times of the year, a split in the fishing fleet can occur and we have on occasion missed some area month requirements. A port sampling program was established on Tinian, Commonwealth of Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI), in 1992, to facilitate the collection of length-frequency data of month/areas not available in Pago Pago. The program was terminated in 1993 due to funding cuts and the resignation of the port sampler. Another port sampling program utilizing fisheries technicians from Saipan, CNMI is currently being investigated.

There are forty U.S. purse seiners currently licensed to fish under the SPTT and twenty-seven of these make regular deliveries to the two canneries in Pago Pago. Twelve purse seiners are based in Guam and will usually transship their fish out of Tinian, CNMI, but do make occasional deliveries to Pago Pago, either directly or via transshipment. The remaining U.S. vessel usually unloads in Australia but will also make occasional deliveries to American Samoa. Four Yap/FSM seiners also discharge tuna in Pago Pago on an intermittent basis. The U.S. purse seiners range in size from approximately 900 to 1,800 short tons carrying capacity and average about 4 trips per year.

Two jigboats first off-loaded albacore to American Samoa in February, 1986. Approximately 50 vessels have been participating in this fishery each year since then. Vessels average about two and a half trips per season and range in size from around 50 to 100 short tons carrying capacity; average of about 80 short tons. The 1993 south Pacific albacore season was a very poor and most of the jigboats did not even complete a trip (partial loads). Due to the poor fishing conditions last year, we are expecting only a few vessels in 1994. The south Pacific albacore season usually begins in late December and continues through April. The jigboats fish in an area between 35 to 45 degrees south latitude and 160 to 120 west longitude.

In order to keep the canneries operating on a regular schedule, tuna is also transshipped into American Samoa. With the decline of the longline fishery in recent years, longline and jigboat albacore is also delivered to the canneries, via containers and transshipment vessels. Skipjack and yellowfin transshipments from purse seiners and bait boats are also arranged by the canneries; usually during seasonal, off-peak periods. A small amount of salmon is also processed by one cannery and is delivered to Pago Pago via containers. Most transshipments out of American Samoa consists of miscellaneous fish species (marlin, shark, large bigeye, swordfish, etc.) discharged from the longliners to the canneries for further processing in Japan. Purse seiners occasionally transship tuna from Pago Pago harbor to other ports, (Puerto Rico, Thailand, Indonesia, etc.), usually when a long line of vessels are waiting to unload and/or when the fishing grounds are close to Samoa. Length frequency sampling of transshipment vessels discharging at the canneries are not normally obtained because month/area information is unavailable. Sampling of U.S. purse seiners transshipping out of Pago Pago is done however, as logbook information is obtained and verified before sampling.

Figure 2 shows landings in Am. Samoa by vessel type, purse seine, longline, jigboat and transshipment, for the five year period from 1988 through 1992. Total landings for the five years ranged from a high of 218,600 short tons in 1989 to a low of 158,100 short tons in 1990; average of 186,400 short tons for the five year period. The 1993 figures still being compiled and are unavailable at this time.

AMERICAN SAMOA TUNA LANDINGS

t1

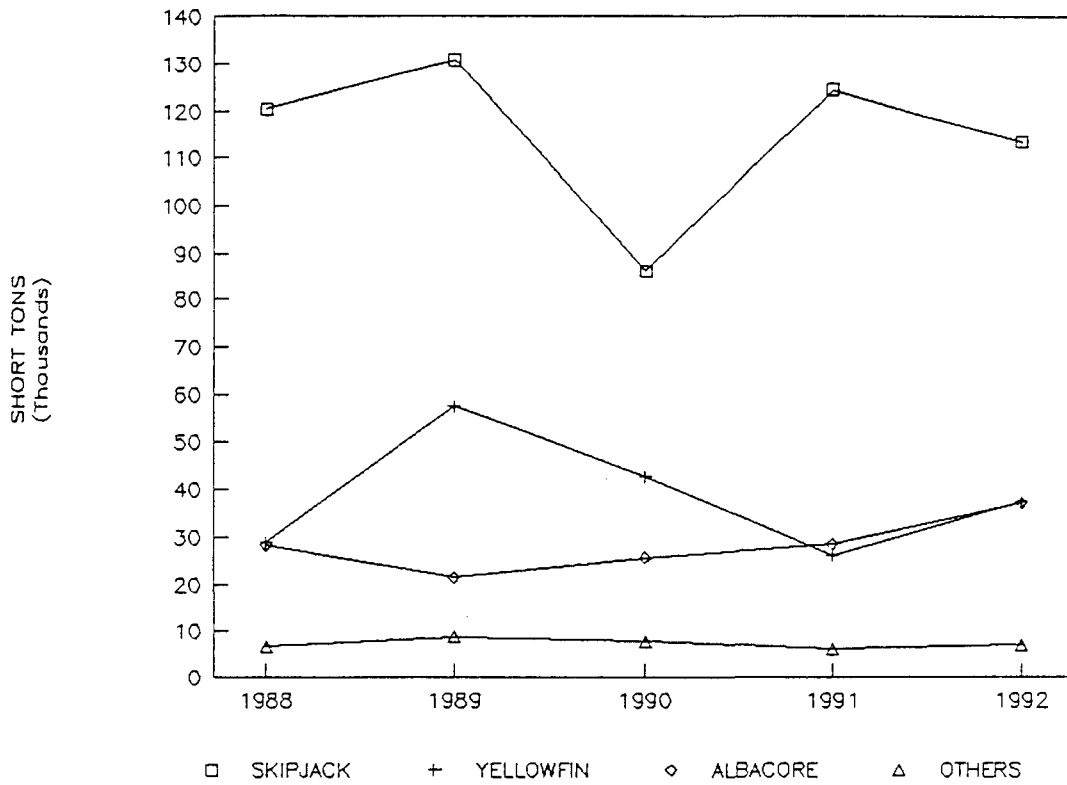


FIGURE 1

AMERICAN SAMOA LANDINGS BY VESSEL TYPE

t2

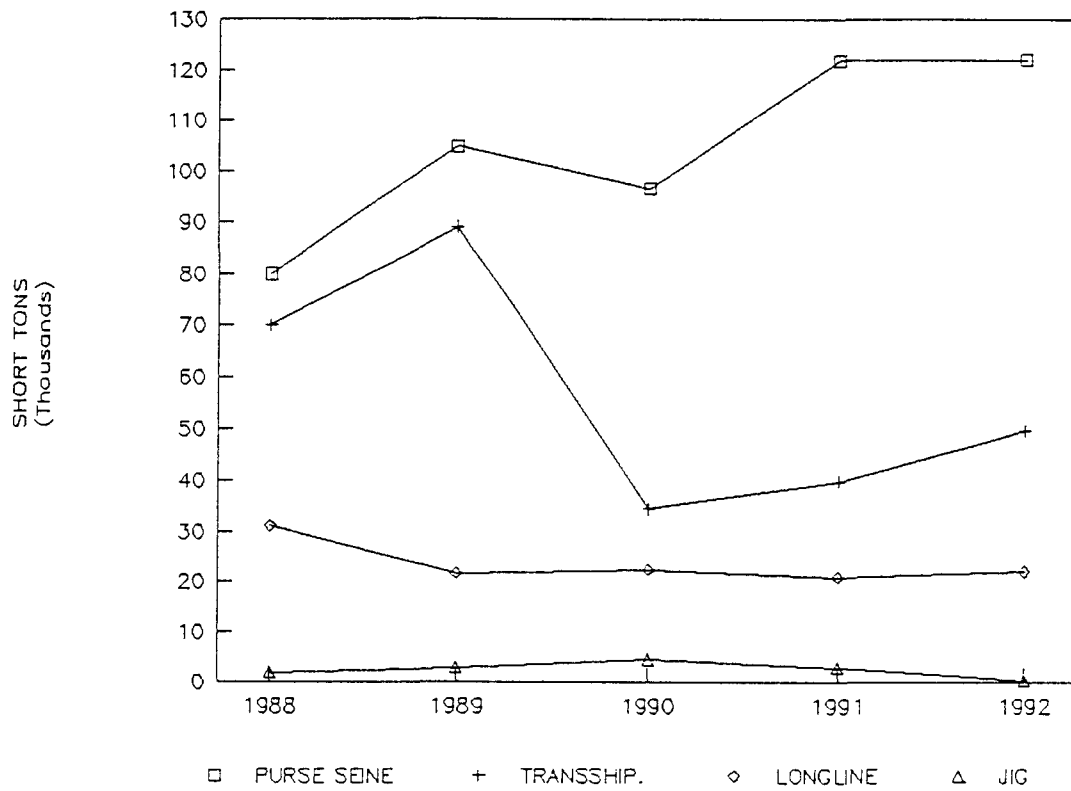


FIGURE 2