

Pacific tuna stock assessment requires regular tagging experiments

Under the auspices of the Pacific Tuna Tagging Programme (PTTP), which has provided crucial data for the assessment of the regional tuna stocks (<http://www.spc.int/tagging/webtagging/>) since 2006, the Pacific Community (SPC) is implementing a new tagging experiment from September to October 2017. The regularisation of large tuna tagging events on an annual basis was recommended during the last Scientific Committee (SC12 – August 2016) and confirmed at the 13th Regular Session (December 2016) of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) as a high priority in order to provide regular data inputs for stock assessment and ecosystem science purposes. This 2017 tagging cruise will focus on skipjack and yellowfin tuna.

To undertake this work, SPC has chartered a pole-and-line vessel from the National Fisheries Development's (NFD) fishing fleet based in Noro, Western Province, Solomon Islands. This vessel, FV *Soltai 105*, has already served as a research platform during a large part of the PTTP and the experience of its crew members represents a major asset in the success of our tagging experiment. Once again, the scientific team reflects the Pacific multiculturalism with no less than seven different nationalities participating to the cruise.

The research cruise is expected to start from Noro around mid-September this year and last 50 days. It is planned to release tagged tuna in the waters of Papua New Guinea (PNG) during the first three weeks of the charter before moving to the Solomon Islands exclusive economic zone for the remainder of the cruise. The research methods will be identical to previous tagging campaign work, i.e. tuna fishing using pole-and-line techniques to support tuna tagging and biological sampling, and baiting operations using the traditional Japanese bouke-ami technique.

For the in-and-out country clearances, refuelling/provisioning and for crew change, the ports of call will be Buka and Kavieng in PNG and Noro in Solomon Islands.

The Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands Fisheries Authorities are collaborating on the project, and providing the required research permits, assistance with the vessel in-country clearance formalities, and national scientific personnel for the cruise.

Tag recovery

For this tagging programme to be successful, the recovery of tags is a priority; therefore, the training of a new Tag Recovery Officer (Patteson Omi Clifford, see Figure 3) was conducted in Honiara. Patteson, a debriefer for the Solomon Islands Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in Honiara, first started as a fisheries observer and has collected data as well as biological samples. He has now become a Tag Recovery Officer and is coordinating tag recovery for Solomon Islands. At Soltuna, in Noro, Tag Recovery Officer Solomon Kakana (see Figure 4) was briefed on new data collection standards.



Figure 1. FV *Soltai 105*, Noro fishing base, Western Province of Solomon Islands, July 2017 (image: Bruno Leroy).

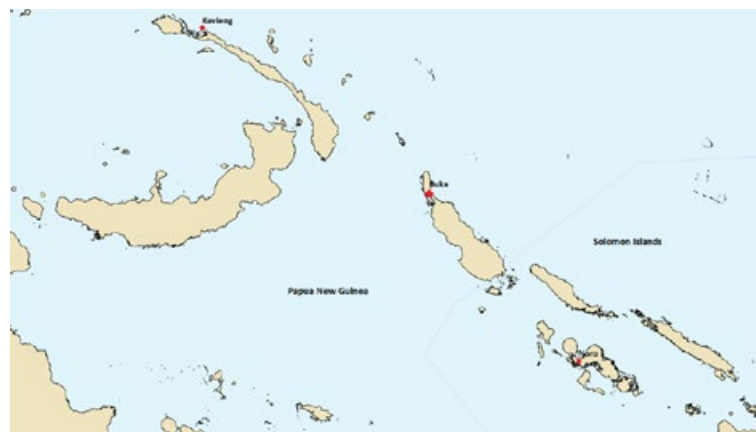


Figure 2. Approximate research area for the cruise.




Figure 3. Solomon Kakana (left) and Patteson Omi Clifford, Tag Recovery Officers from Noro and Honiara, Solomon Islands, respectively.

As focal points for tag recovery in-country, Patteson's and Solomon's contribution to tagging will help better understand valuable tuna stocks. A tag recovery also nets a reward for the finder. A conventional tag is worth USD 10 whereas an archival tag is worth USD 250. Archival tags must be recovered very carefully as there have been incidents of tags being damaged when they are removed. Information pertaining to when, how and where tags were recovered can be difficult to find. Having Tag Recovery Officers who are able to discuss the registering of such information with the finders is therefore essential.

For more information on our tagging projects and to report tags, please visit our website:


www.spc.int/tagging



4th Western Pacific Tuna Tagging cruise on its way

The area of research is shifted to PNG and Solomon Is.

Keep an eye out and report the tags !



It is planned to deploy a minimum of **20,000 conventional tags and 20 archival tags** on yellowfin and skipjack tunas.

The vessel leaves on 17 September from Noro and will return on 6 November.

Please look for tagged fish and contact us!


1. Fill in tag recovery form. 2. Submit it online.
3. Find the closest place to retrieve your reward at: www.spc.int/tagging

Information needed for each tagged fish:

- THE SPECIES
- LENGTH
- DATE + POSITION OF CAPTURE
- FISHING VESSEL NAME + GEAR TYPE
- FINDER NAME
- WHEN THE TAG WAS FOUND: exact date at best
- HOW THE TAG WAS FOUND: during fishing, well transfer, transhipment, or unloading

FOR A DART TAG


US\$10



Tuna with a yellow tag will sometimes have a second dart tag.

FOR AN ARCHIVAL TAG


US\$250



Please be careful when removing the archival tag, avoid pulling the antenna. Wash the tag and keep it in a dry place.

OBSERVERS,

IF YOU ENCOUNTER A TAGGED FISH, PLEASE COLLECT SAMPLES !



Sept. 2017











