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EVOLUTION FUTURE DE LA PECHE AU GERMON EN NOUVELLE-CALEDONIE

Presenté par

R. Etaix-Bonnin

Service de la marine marchande et des pêches maritimes

B.P. 36

Nouméa

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ALBACORE FISHING IN NEW CALEDONIA: WHAT NEXT?

Albacore fishing in New Caledonia is about 10 years old. In 1983, japanese-typed longliners owned by a joint-venture company started to operate from Nouméa. They targeted striped marlin, bigeye, swordfish and yellowfin for the japanese sashimi market. Albacore was only a by-catch species sent frozen to canneries.

Recently, by the end of the 80's, as it appeared that prices were too low for frozen tuna, vessels of a new type were bought by the joint-venture company: on these longliners, unlike the larger ones, fish is kept chill in ice/seawater slurry during the 6 day fishing trip.

Only fish caught during the latest days of fishing are sent chill on a regular flight to Japan after being sorted at port by species, weight and quality.

The largest longliners store the frozen fish during their 40 day trips before unloading them onto freezers going to canneries.

In New Caledonia fishing for the high value species is seasonal: yellowfin from February to April, striped marlin from October-November to January. The fishing companies can't base all their activity on these species and have to draw benefit from by-catch, mainly albacore.

That is why in 1993, projects to develop tuna fishing in New Caledonia aim at getting more money from albacore by establishing fish storing and processing units and perhaps a local cannery.

II - INFORMATIONS WE NEED

To be more efficient fishermen need to know more on fish behaviour and the programme carried out by SPC to study albacore biology is of great help.

We also need informations on the markets (Asia, Europe, USA) to adapt the marketing strategy of our fishing companies to the international demand. So market studies or visits in major importing countries could be interesting.

We can also think of creating a Special Interest Group on albacore (and perhaps other pelagic species) to exchange on a regular basis informations on fisheries, marketing, etc... .

I - THE NEAR FUTURE

In 1990, as prices on the frozen tuna world market were very low, New Caledonia started to think of processing most of the albacore caught by the local longliners.

Some fishing companies around the world already prepare "cooked loins" before sending them to canneries. In USA, some boats are equipped with on-board freezing systems which can process up to one third of the daily catch. The loins so prepared, either fresh or frozen, are vacuum-packed and sold directly on the market.

This processing allow better prices for tuna which can therefore be sent to other markets than Japan, especially Europe to which freight cost is higher.

Therefore, it has been decided to study how to process loins from fish in Nouméa.

Besides, the storing capacity will have to be increased because it is planned that 6 new longliners will start to operate from Nouméa in 1993.

These boats will use the hawaiian longline technique and target sashimi species. The total catch of albacore will therefore increase as well as the need for frozen storage.

For in the near future, if total catch from the local longliners is sufficient, a cannery could be built at port.

And why not thinking of troll fishing on the 40s South?

It is likely that the surface fishery targeting South Pacific Albacore will continue to develop because catch can still increase of a few thousand tonnes corresponding to the activity of about 20 trollers.

The most efficient trollers now are about 25 meters long and are of 140 gross tons burden. They use 20 lines and have a freezing capacity of 50 to 100 tonnes. The crew is 2 or 3.

It is doubtful that such vessels could be based at Nouméa because yield ranging from 0.05 to 1 tonne per day is too low for a 6 month fishing season. And New caledonia is too far away (1,000 to 2,000 nautical milles) from the fishing zone.