POTENTIAL CATCH OF THE PRESENT SAN PEDRO WETFISH FLEET

By

JOHN L. BAXTER¹ Marine Resources Branch, California Department of Fish and Game Sacramento, California and

C. E. BLUNT, JR.² Marine Resources Region, California Department of Fish and Game Long Beach, California

INTRODUCTION

We were asked to comment on the potential catch of the San Pedro wetfish fleet as based on past performances and reflected in our catch and effort data.

After evaluation of the large amount of data available we tabulated catch and effort from each log on a weekly basis by general fishing areas. We utilized fishing log data from 1968 and most of 1969, at least as much of it as time allowed. The work we did made it quite clear that a great deal more effort will have to be directed toward the collection and processing of log interview data.

By law, vessels fishing the northern anchovy, Engraulis mordax, for reduction are required to submit a record of fishing operations when landing their catch. Thus, the anchovy log program reflects effort from successful trips very well but reporting unsuccessful trips, which at times may be significant, is incomplete. Our log program will also require a great deal of additional effort to ensure that unsuccessful trips for mackerel (Pacific mackerel, Scomber japonicus and jack mackerel, Trachurus symmetricus), Pacific bonito, Sarda chiliensis, bluefin tuna, Thunnus thynnus, and other species are properly reported. Therefore, the catch per unit effort figures and other data presented must be considered preliminary and subject to possible change as a result of more complete analysis.

PRESENT FLEET

In 1947 the San Pedro wetfish fleet was made up of about 250 vessels. This fleet fished primarily for the Pacific sardine, *Sardinops caeruleus*. Shortly thereafter, the sardine fishery collapsed and by 1954 the fleet had shrunk to 137 boats. Ten years later only 54 boats remained in the fleet. At present the fleet includes but 29 active vessels. These range in registered length from 39 to 80 feet and can carry from about 25 to 150 tons of fish. An additional six vessels normally fish for tuna in tropical waters but occasionally fish for bonito and tuna (primarily bluefin tuna) locally and might enter the wetfish fishery under certain conditions. These vessels are 80 to 90 feet long and have a capacity of about 120 to 180 tons.

The daily capacity of the wetfish fleet as based on loads of anchovy is 2,450 tons. Our log book data, interviews, and landing figures show that the boats operate for an average of 15 or 16 days per month. This figure takes into consideration time lost to inclement weather, repairs, and rest periods. It does not include time lost because of strikes and other economic problems. At a fleet capacity of 2,450 tons and 15 operating days per month, the monthly capacity of the fleet is 36,750 tons. The annual capacity is 441,000 tons.

ASSIGNMENT OF EFFORT

We are quite aware of the problems inherent in assigning effort in a multi-species fishery, and plan to spend a great deal more time on this problem.

For the purpose of developing estimates of the potential catch of the wetfish fleet we computed catch per hour of scouting time for the San Pedro fleet during 1968 and most of 1969. The basic catch and effort data were obtained by our log and log-interview programs conducted in conjunction with routine age and length sampling at the waterfront. Skippers fishing for anchovies are required to make out a fishing log when landing their catch. Fishing and scouting information pertaining to jack mackerel, Pacific mackerel, sardines, bonito, and bluefin tuna are obtained each day through interviews with vessel skippers as they unload their catch or when they dock at San Pedro after an unsuccessful trip. Due to lack of manpower we have not been able to follow completely the daily activity of each vessel in the fleet; however, we believe that in most months we have obtained logs for about 90 percent of the fleet activity, especially during 1968.

Log catch and hours of scouting were summarized on a weekly basis for each month by general fishing areas. Fishing effort was assigned as either being (i) jack and Pacific mackerel, (ii) anchovy, (iii) bonito, and (iv) tuna (bluefin and albacore, Thunnus alalunga). We established 12 general areas off southern California and 1 for northern Baja California. Fishing effort was assigned on the basis of the species composition of the catch in a general area during the weekly summary. For example, if only mackerel were taken in an area, all effort in that general area was classified as mackerel effort. If only bonito were taken, the effort was classified as bonito effort. Occasionally both bonito and mackerel were taken in a general area, and when one or the other did not dominate by at least 80 percent of the weekly catch, the effort was not utilized in the catch-effort summation. During 1968 very little effort had to be eliminated for this

¹ Present address: National Marine Fisheries Service, Washing-

Present address: National Marine Fisheries Service, Washington, D.C.
Present address: Department of Fish and Game, Eureka, California.

reason simply because the tuna, mackerel, and bonito fishing areas were distinct during most of the weekly periods. Anchovy fishing areas are also distinct in that generally they are well outside the 50 fathom isobath as opposed to mackerel fishing which is well within it. During 1969 the fisheries were not as distinct with bonito being caught more often in mackerel areas, and bluefin tuna being taken closer to land masses in usual mackerel catch areas. In the case of tuna we were able to classify many trips as tuna trips by detailed information on the logs which the skippers supplied.

RESOURCE BASE

The species normally considered as the resource base for the San Pedro wetfish fleet are Pacific mackerel, sardines, jack mackerel, anchovies, squid (*Loligo opalescens*), bonito and bluefin tuna. The populations of sardines and Pacific mackerel are at extremely low levels. There is a moratorium on sardine fishing (15 percent tolerance allowed with mixed catches), and Pacific mackerel are caught in only small quantities in conjunction with fishing for the other species. Therefore, these species are not regarded as part of the resource base at this time.

Biomass estimates for northern anchovies and jack mackerel have been published based on egg and larva surveys by the U.S. Bureau of Commercial Fisheries (now National Marine Fisheries Service). These show a biomass of 4 to 6 million tons of anchovies (50 percent off California), (Messersmith et al, 1969), and 1.4 to 2.4 million tons of jack mackerel in the CalCOFI area (Blunt, 1969). The proportion of jack mackerel off California has not been estimated. We have no estimate of squid biomass; however, it has been generally acknowledged as very large. The squid catch off California has ranged between 4,000 and 12,-000 tons per year since 1961.

The amounts of bonito and bluefin tuna that might be harvested off California under the right conditions are indicated by California Department of Fish and Game catch records. These data show that as much as 9,000 tons of bonito have been caught in California waters. During the mid-1930's the California catch of bluefin tuna was about 9,000 tons per year. In recent years the bluefin tuna catch reached a high of 8,500 tons in 1962.

POTENTIAL CATCH

For this symposium we are interested in the potential catch of our present fleet, fishing in their normal areas and with current gear and operating methods. We are confronted with the imponderable question "What species do you want to base the estimates on, and how much effort do you want to spend on each?" We know full well that economics and institutional problems have direct consequences upon what the fishermen catch. In 1969 the anchovy catch increased to about 50,000 tons as compared to 15,500 tons for 1968, generally because more effort was put into the anchovy fishery.

Based on the catch rates of the fleet during 1968 and most of 1969 (Table 1), and assuming complete effort toward anchovy fishing except during the

TABLE 1 Southern California Wetfish Fleet Preliminary Log Catch, Effort, and Catch per Effort Data

Year/ Month	Log Scouting Hours					Log Catch (Short Tons)				Catch per Effort (Tons/Hour)			
	Mackerel	Bonito	Anchovy	Bluefin Tuna	Total Scouting Hours	Mackerel	Bonito	Anchovy	Bluefin Tuna	Mackerel	Bonito	Anchovy	Bluefin Tuna
1968													
Jan.	733	1,496			2,229	1,454	583			1.98	.39		
Feb	1,057	804			1,861	1,051	203			.99	.25		
Mar	388	242			625	282	80		.	.74	.33		
Apr	788	189	9.5		987	2,062	82	20		2.62	.43		
May	1,201	145			1,346	3,057	118			2.55	.81		
June	952				952	3,194				3.35			
July	459	•-		862	1,321	1,304			81	2.84			.09
Aug	253	830		1,516	2,599	997	1,135		365	3.94	1.37		.24
Sept	577	1,228		724	2,529	992	1,123		180	1.72	.91		.24
Oct	778	•-	128.	261	1,167	2,254		2,309	191	2.90		18.0	.73
Nov	1,034		370.5		1,405	3,619		5,005		3.50		13.5	
Dec	795	98	237.5		1,131	3,558	363	3,051		4.48	3.70	12.8	
1969													
Jan	716	667	202		1,585	1,613	438	1,358		2.25	.66	6.7	
Feb	756		69		825	2,088		322		2.76		4.7	
Mar	809		136	'	945	2,973		1,767		3.7		13.0	
Apr	651		589		1,240	1,560		7,855		2.40		13.3	
May	845		328		1,173	1,515		3,753	+-	1.8		11.4	
June	1,384				1,384	2,029	100		110	1.5			
July	1,194	408		407	2,069	3,041	188	1 070	110	2.5	.5	<u> </u>	.2
Aug.			231					1,979				8.0	
Dept			942					14,808				15.4	
Non			093					10,011				14.4	
Dec.			{ I										
Dec													

TABLE 2

HYPOTHETICAL EFFORT ALLOCATION Based on 1968 and 1969 Log Data (Assumes availability and catchability equivalent to 1968 and 1969, also assumes acod economic conditions and demand for fish)

	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUN.	JUL.	AUG.	SEP.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
						Percent /	llocation					
Mackerel	50	50	50	50	50	90	30	30	30	35	45	45
Bonito	20	20	20	20	20	10	30	30	10	10	10	10
Anchovy	30	30	30	30	30				20	35	45	45
Tuna							40	40	40	20		
						Hours of	Scouting					
Mackerel	1.015	943	1.015	1.015	1,160	2,506	1,114	1,114	835	812	979	914
Bonito	406	377	406	406	464	278	1,114	1,114	278	232	218	203
Anchovy	609	565	609	609	696				557	812	979	914
Tuna							1,484	1,484	1,114	464		

Fleet gross 2,450 tons/day 36,750 tons/month 441,000 tons/year

Ave. 15 days fishing/month

Ave. 5 hours scouting/day

29 purse seiners

summer closure, the present fleet could conceivably catch approximately 210,000 tons of anchovies per year. If they fished for mackerel and tuna during the May 15 through September 14 period (closed to anchovy fishing for reduction) they could potentially catch 12,000 tons of mackerel and 700 tons of tuna. In conjunction with mackerel scouting they could bring in 2,300 tons of bonito. As based on 1968 data this would assume complete effort on mackerel in June and 60 percent effort on mackerel and bonito and 40 percent effort on tuna during July, August, and the first half of September. These estimates, of course, assume equivalent availability as occurred in 1968 and 1969.

A more realistic situation would be to assume the effort allocation itemized in Table 2. This resembles the fleet's effort allocation during 1968 and 1969, and assumes good demand for the northern anchovy. It also assumes equivalent abundance and availability as in the base period. The potential catch under this situation would be 32,000 tons of mackerel, 4,000 tons of bonito, 75,000 tons of anchovies, and 1,200 tons of tuna. The tuna catch could very well reach 2,000 and 3,000 tons, or higher, in some years since the abundance, availability, and catchability of this transoceanic migrant may change significantly from year to year. (Table 2.)

These estimates of potential catch are somewhat hypothetical since their attainment depends on a number of assumptions. These are:

- 1. Good economic demand.
- 2. All vessels fish approximately 15 days each month, and average 5 hours of scouting per day.
- 3. Allocation of effort is as indicated in Table 2.
- 4. Availability and catchability of the exploited fish stocks is equivalent to the base years.
- 5. Catch per unit of scouting effort observed during months of base years will be maintained with higher fishing intensity.

COMMENTS ON FISHING STRATEGY

During the process of examining individual logs it became evident that the allocations of effort by certain vessels appear not to have been the most prudent decisions. For example, during August 1968 vessels were spending days scouting for tuna with no catch. A total of 1,520 log hours was spent scouting with a subsequent catch of only 0.2 tons of tuna per scouting hour, or \$60 per hour. Meanwhile, mackerel and bonito received only 1,080 hours of effort combined. Mackerel and bonito catch rates were 3.9 and 1.4 tons per hour respectively. At the prevailing prices paid to the fishermen, this amounts to \$295 per hour of mackerel scouting and \$140 per hour of bonito scouting. Some vessels departed areas of apparently good mackerel fishing (2 to 4 tons per scouting hour) where they had made catches in order to search for tuna with the hope of a bonanza catch. After spending 20 to 40 hours scouting with no success, they returned to quickly make 30 to 50 ton sets on mackerel.

TABLE 3 Dollar Return per Hour of Scouting During 1968 Anchovy---\$17 per ton Mackerel---\$75 per ton

	October	November	December
Anchovy	306	229	218
Mackerel	217	262	336

It is also of interest to note that the dollar return per hour of anchovy scouting in 1968 (as based on the price of fish to the fishermen) rivaled the return for mackerel (Table 3).

During 1969 (anchovy price increased to \$20 per ton), the return per hour of anchovy scouting was \$172 for September, \$314 for October, and \$288 for November.

REFERENCES

- Blunt, C. E., Jr. 1969. The jack mackerel (Trachurus symmetricus) resource of the eastern North Pacific. Mar. Res. Comm., Calif. Coop. Ocean. Fish. Invest., Rept. 13:45-52.
- Messersmith, J. D., J. L. Baxter and P. M. Roedel. 1969. The anchovy resources of the California Current region off California and Baja California. Mar. Res. Comm., Calif. Coop. Ocean. Fish. Invest., Rept. 13: 32-38.