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**EFFECTS OF THE TUNA FISHERIES ON THE ECOSYSTEM OF THE**  
**EASTERN PACIFIC OCEAN**

**Robert Olson**

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

The FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries provides that management of fisheries should ensure the conservation not only of target species, but also of the other species belonging to the same ecosystem. In 2001, the Reykjavik Declaration on Responsible Fisheries in the Ecosystem elaborated this standard with a commitment to incorporate an ecosystem approach into fisheries management.

The IATTC has taken account of ecosystem issues in many of its decisions, and this report on the offshore pelagic ecosystem of the tropical and subtropical Pacific Ocean, which is the habitat of tunas and billfishes, has been available since 2003 to assist in making its management decisions. This section provides a coherent view, summarizing what is known about the direct impact of the fisheries upon various species and species groups of the ecosystem, and reviews what is known about the environment and about other species that are not directly impacted by the fisheries.

This review does not suggest objectives for the incorporation of ecosystem considerations into the management of tuna or billfish fisheries, nor any new management measures. Rather, its prime purpose is to offer the Commission the opportunity to ensure that ecosystem considerations are part of its agenda.

It is important to remember that the view that we have of the ecosystem is based on the recent past; we have almost no information about the ecosystem before exploitation began. Also, the environment is subject to change on a variety of time scales, including the well-known El Niño fluctuations and more recently recognized longer-term changes, such as the Pacific Decadal Oscillation and other climate changes.

In addition to reporting the catches of the principal species of tunas and billfishes, the staff has reported the bycatches of other species that are normally discarded. In this section, data on these bycatches are presented in the context of the effect of the fishery on the ecosystem. Unfortunately, while relatively

good information is available for the tunas and billfishes, information for the entire fishery is not available. The information is comprehensive for large (carrying capacity greater than 363 metric tons) purse seiners that carry observers under the Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program (AIDCP), and information on retained catches is also reported for other purse seiners, pole-and-line vessels, and much of the longline fleet. Some information is available on sharks that are retained by parts of the longline fleet. Information on bycatches and discards is also available for large purse-seiners, and for some smaller ones. There is little information available on the bycatches and discards for other fishing vessels.

## **2. IMPACT OF CATCHES**

### **2.1. Single-species assessments**

This section provides a summary of current information on the effects of the tuna fisheries on the stocks of individual species in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO). It focuses on the current biomass of each stock considered, compared to what it might have been in the absence of a fishery. The intention is to show how the fishery may have altered the components of the ecosystem, rather than the detailed assessments, which can be found in other sections of this report and in other IATTC documents. The section below frequently refers to comparisons with the estimated unexploited stock size. There are no direct measurements of the stock size before the fishery began, and, in any case, the stocks would have varied from year to year. In addition, the unexploited stock size may be influenced by predator and prey abundance, which is not included in the single-species analyses.

### **2.2. Tunas**

#### **2.2.1. Yellowfin**

The yellowfin stock changed into a higher recruitment regime in about 1983, but may have recently moved back into an intermediate recruitment regime. During 2005-2007, the yellowfin stock has been below the level corresponding to the maximum sustainable yield (27% of its unexploited size), but has increased to above that level in 2008. One estimate of the effect of this reduced stock size is that the predation by adult yellowfin on other parts of the ecosystem is reduced to about 35% of what it was in the absence of a fishery.

#### **2.2.2. Skipjack**

Skipjack assessments are far less certain than those for yellowfin and bigeye, in part because the fishery in the EPO does not appear to be having much impact on the stock. However, it appears that fluctuations in recruitment cause large variations in stock size.

#### **2.2.3. Bigeye**

Up to 1993, bigeye were taken mostly by longline fishing. The stock size in 1993 is estimated to have been 32% of its unexploited size. After 1993, purse seining for tunas associated with fish-aggregating devices (FADs) took significant quantities of small and medium-sized bigeye. In 2005, after several years of poor recruitment and excessive levels of fishing mortality, the stock size was estimated to be at about 14% of its unexploited size. Due to recent spikes in recruitment, the current level has slightly increased and stabilized at about 17%.

#### **2.2.4. Pacific bluefin**

It is considered that there is a single stock of Pacific bluefin tuna in the Pacific Ocean, given that spawning apparently occurs only in the western Pacific Ocean. However, tagging studies have shown that there is exchange of bluefin between the eastern and western Pacific Ocean. A preliminary stock assessment, carried out by the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like species in the North Pacific (ISC) in 2005, has indicated that the biomass of the spawning stock had local peaks during the early 1960s, late 1970s, and late 1990s, with a decline after the last peak. It was previously hypothesized that a strong recruitment event that had occurred in 2001 would maintain spawning stock

biomass above recent levels until 2010. Data collected more recently, however, indicate that the 2001 recruitment was not as strong as previously thought.

### **2.2.5. Albacore**

It is generally considered that there are two stocks of albacore in the Pacific Ocean, one in the North Pacific and the other in the South Pacific. An assessment for South Pacific albacore, done by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community in 2003, showed that the South Pacific stock was at about 60% of its unexploited size. An assessment by the ISC North Pacific Albacore Working Group in 2006 indicated that the biomass of the North Pacific spawning stock in 2006 was about 53% above its time series average.

## **2.3. Billfishes**

### **2.3.1. Swordfish**

The northeastern and southeastern Pacific Ocean stocks of swordfish are distinctly identifiable by genetics and fisheries analyses. Preliminary analyses of the status of the southeastern Pacific Ocean stock of swordfish indicate that the spawning biomass declined over the 1945-2003 period, and is now at about twice the level (~0.26) that will support the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) of 13,000-14,000 metric tons (t). Catches have been decreasing since about 2002. Recent harvests are on the order of 11,000 to 13,000 t annually.

The variations in standardized catch per unit of effort of swordfish in the northern EPO show no trend, suggesting that the catches to date have not affected the stock significantly.

### **2.3.2. Blue marlin**

There appears to be a single stock of blue marlin in the Pacific Ocean. The most recent stock assessments of blue marlin suggest that the current stock size is between 50 and 90% of the unexploited stock size.

### **2.3.3. Striped marlin**

Recent genetics analyses suggest that there are three stocks of striped marlin in the north and eastern Pacific Ocean. Spawning areas have been identified (by presence of larvae) off Japan/Chinese Taipei, Hawaii, and México, and no significant genetic differences have been found among individuals ranging from México to Ecuador. There was an indication that juvenile striped marlin from stocks off Hawaii may be present seasonally in the northern EPO off California, USA, but not off the coast of Mexico. The most recent assessments (2004) by the IATTC staff suggested that the then current size of the EPO (México/Ecuador) stock was about 50 to 70% of the unexploited stock size. Catches from the EPO have been declining since about 1997, with a new low annual catch of about 1,400 t in 2007 and an average annual catch of about 1,500 t since 2004, well below the estimated MSY of the stock. Fishing effort and catches have continued the decline noted in previous assessments, and it is considered that the striped marlin stock in the EPO is in good condition, with current and near-term anticipated fishing effort less than  $F_{MSY}$ .

An analysis by the ISC in 2007 of the status of an hypothesized single stock of striped marlin spanning the north Pacific from Japan to 140°W, utilizing catch-rate series, indicated a decline to 10-45% of the initial biomass.

### **2.3.4. Black marlin, sailfish, and shortbill spearfish**

No recent stock assessments have been made for these species, although there are some data published jointly by scientists of the National Research Institute of Far Seas Fisheries (NRIFSF) of Japan and the IATTC in the IATTC Bulletin series that show trends in catches, effort, and CPUEs.

## **2.4. Summary**

Preliminary estimates of the catches (including purse-seine discards), in metric tons, of tunas during 2008

and billfishes during 2007 in the EPO are as follows.

	PS			LP	LL	OTR	Total
	OBJ	NOA	DEL				
Yellowfin tuna	38,587	32,043	116,181	812	2	172	187,797
Skipjack tuna	161,721	134,171	8,854	499	0	278	305,524
Bigeye tuna	76,226	1,794	5	0	19,305	0	97,330
Pacific bluefin	0	4,406	0	15	0	0	4,421
Albacore tuna	0	10	0	0	73	0	1,266
Swordfish	<1	3	<1	0	4,353	4,377	8,734
Blue marlin	117	11	9	0	2,295	106	2,538
Striped marlin	19	9	8	0	1,400	6	1,442
Black marlin	62	10	11	0	37	0	120
Sailfish	2	20	28	0	790	32	871
Shortbill spearfish	<1	<1	<1	0	252	0	263

## 2.5. Marine mammals

Marine mammals, especially spotted dolphins (*Stenella attenuata*), spinner dolphins (*S. longirostris*), and common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*), are frequently found associated with yellowfin tuna in the size range of about 10 to 40 kg in the EPO. Purse-seine fishermen have found that their catches of yellowfin in the EPO can be maximized by setting their nets around herds of dolphins and the associated schools of tunas, and then releasing the dolphins while retaining the tunas. The incidental mortality of dolphins in this operation was high during the early years of the fishery, and the populations of dolphins were reduced from their unexploited levels during the 1960s and 1970s. After the late 1980s the incidental mortality decreased precipitously, and there is now evidence that the populations are recovering. Preliminary mortality estimates of dolphins in the fishery in 2008 are as follows:

Species and stock	Incidental mortality	
	Number	Metric tons
Offshore spotted dolphin		
Northeastern	179	12
Western-southern	165	11
Spinner dolphin		
Eastern	349	15
Whitebelly	170	10
Common dolphin		
Northern	107	8
Central	14	1
Southern	138	10
Other dolphins <sup>1</sup>	49	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,171</b>	<b>70</b>

Studies of the association of tunas with dolphins have been an important component of the staff's long-term approach to understanding key interactions in the ecosystem. The extent to which yellowfin tuna and dolphins compete for resources, or whether either or both of them benefits from the interaction, remain critical pieces of information, given the large biomasses of both groups and their high rates of prey consumption. Diet and stable isotope analyses of yellowfin tuna and spotted and spinner dolphins caught in multispecies aggregations by purse-seine vessels in the EPO demonstrate significant differences in food habits and trophic position of the three species, suggesting that the tuna-dolphin association is

<sup>1</sup> "Other dolphins" includes the following species and stocks, whose observed mortalities were as follows: Central American spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris centroamericana*) 9 (0.4 t); striped dolphins 24 (1.6 t); coastal spotted dolphins 4 (0.3 t); bottlenose dolphins 4 (0.4 t), unidentified dolphins 8 (0.4 t).

probably not maintained by feeding advantages. This conclusion is supported by radio tracking studies of spotted dolphins outfitted with time-depth recorders, which indicate that the dolphins feed primarily at night on organisms associated with the deep scattering layer, while food habits studies of yellowfin tuna show primarily daytime feeding.

During August-December 2006, scientists of the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) conducted the latest in a series of research cruises under the *Stenella* Abundance Research (STAR) project. The primary objective of the multi-year study is to investigate trends in population size of the dolphins that have been taken as incidental catch by the purse-seine fishery in the EPO. Data on cetacean distribution, herd size, and herd composition were collected from the large-scale line-transect surveys to estimate dolphin abundance. The 2006 survey covered the same areas and used the same methods as past surveys. Data from the 2006 survey produced new abundance estimates, and previous data were reanalyzed to produce revised estimates for 10 dolphin species and/or stocks in the EPO between 1986 and 2006. The estimates for northeastern offshore spotted dolphins for 2006 were somewhat greater, and for eastern spinner dolphins substantially greater, than the estimates for 1998-2000. Estimates of population growth for these two depleted stocks and the depleted coastal spotted dolphin stock, may indicate they are recovering, but the western-southern offshore spotted dolphin stock may be declining. The abundance estimates for coastal spotted, whitebelly spinner, and rough-toothed (*Steno bredanensis*) dolphins showed an increasing trend, while those of the striped (*S. coeruleoalba*), short-beaked common (Delphinus delphis), bottlenose (*Tursiops truncatus*), and Risso's (*Grampus griseus*) dolphins were generally similar to previous estimates obtained with the same methods.

Scientists of the NMFS have made estimates of the abundances of several other species of marine mammals based on data from research cruises made between 1986 and 2000 in the EPO. The STAR 2003 and 2006 cruises will provide further estimates of abundance of these mammals. Of the species not significantly affected by the tuna fishery, short-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*) and three stocks of common dolphins showed increasing trends in abundance during that 15-year period. The apparent increased abundance of these mammals may have caused a decrease in the carrying capacity of the EPO for other predators that overlap in diet, including spotted dolphins. Bryde's whales (*Balaenoptera edeni*) also increased in estimated abundance, but there is very little diet overlap between these baleen whales and the upper-level predators impacted by the fisheries. Striped dolphins (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) showed no clear trend in estimated abundance over time, and the estimates of abundance of sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) have tended to decrease in recent years.

Some marine mammals are adversely affected by reduced food availability during El Niño events, especially in coastal ecosystems. Examples that have been documented include dolphins, pinnipeds, and Bryde's whales off Peru, and pinnipeds around the Galapagos Islands. Large whales are able to move in response to changes in prey productivity and distribution.

## **2.6. Sea turtles**

Sea turtles are caught on longlines when they take the bait on hooks, are snagged accidentally by hooks, or are entangled in the lines. Estimates of incidental mortality of turtles due to longline and gillnet fishing are few. At the [4th meeting of the IATTC Working Group on Bycatch](#) in January 2004, it was reported that 166 leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and 6,000 other turtle species, mostly olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), were incidentally caught by Japan's longline fishery in the EPO during 2000, and that, of these, 25 and 3,000, respectively, were dead. At the [6th meeting of the Working Group](#) in February 2007, it was reported that the Spanish longline fleet targeting swordfish in the EPO averaged 65 interactions and 8 mortalities per million hooks during 1990-2005. The mortality rates due to longlining in the EPO are likely to be similar for other fleets targeting bigeye tuna, and possibly greater for those that set their lines at shallower depths for albacore and swordfish. About 23 million of the 200 million hooks set each year in the EPO by distant-water longline vessels target swordfish with shallow longlines.

In addition, there is a sizeable fleet of artisanal longline vessels that fish for tunas, billfishes, sharks, and

dorado (*Coryphaena* spp.) in the EPO. Since 2005, staff members of the IATTC and some other organizations, together with the governments of several coastal Latin American nations, have been engaged in a program to reduce the hooking rates and mortalities of sea turtles in these fisheries. Additional information on this program can be found in Section 8.2.

Sea turtles are occasionally caught in purse seines in the EPO tuna fishery. Most interactions occur when the turtles associate with floating objects, and are captured when the object is encircled. In other cases, nets set around unassociated schools of tunas or schools associated with dolphins may capture sea turtles that happen to be at those locations. The olive Ridley turtle is, by far, the species of sea turtle taken most often by purse seiners. It is followed by green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), and, very occasionally, by loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) and hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) turtles. Only one mortality of a leatherback turtle has been recorded during the 10 years that IATTC observers have been recording this information. Some of the turtles are unidentified because they were too far from the vessel or it was too dark for the observer to identify them. Sea turtles, at times, become entangled in the webbing under fish-aggregating devices (FADs) and drown. In some cases, they are entangled by the fishing gear and may be injured or killed. Preliminary estimates of the mortalities (in numbers) of turtles caused by large purse-seine vessels during 2008 are as follows:

	Set type			Total
	OBJ	NOA	DEL	
Olive Ridley	1.5	0.0	0.0	1.5
Eastern Pacific green	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Loggerhead	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hawksbill	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Leatherback	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Unidentified	1.5	0.0	0.0	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>

The mortalities of sea turtles due to purse seining for tunas are probably less than those due to other types of human activity, which include exploitation of eggs and adults, beach development, pollution, entanglement in and ingestion of marine debris, and impacts of other fisheries.

The populations of olive Ridley, green, and loggerhead turtles are designated as endangered, and those of hawksbill and leatherback turtles as critically endangered, by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

## 2.7. Sharks and other large fishes

Sharks and other large fishes are taken by both purse-seine and longline vessels. Silky sharks (*Carcharhinus falciformis*) are the most commonly-caught species of shark in the purse-seine fishery, followed by oceanic whitetip sharks (*C. longimanus*). The longline fisheries also take significant quantities of silky sharks, and a Pacific-wide analysis of longline and purse-seine fishing is necessary to estimate the impact of fishing on the stock(s). Preliminary estimates of indices of relative abundance of silky sharks, based on data for purse-seine sets on floating objects, show a decreasing trend during 1994-2006; the trends in unstandardized bycatch per set are similar for the other two types of purse-seine sets (standardized trends are not yet available). The unstandardized average bycatches per set of oceanic whitetip sharks also show decreasing trends for all three set types during the same period. It is not known whether these decreasing trends are due to incidental capture by the fisheries, changes in the environment (perhaps associated with the 1997-1998 El Niño event), or other factors. The decreasing trends do not appear to be due to changes in the density of floating objects.

Scientists at the University of Washington are conducting an analysis of the temporal frequency of areas of high bycatches of silky sharks in purse-seine sets on floating objects, which will be useful for determining the effectiveness of area-time closures as a means of reducing shark bycatch. Results show that both model predictions and observed data tend to indicate that these bycatches occur most frequently

north of 4°N and west of 100-105°W. However, due to large tuna catches south of 5°N, the greatest reduction in bycatch from sets on floating objects with the least loss of tuna catch would be achieved north of approximately 6°N.

A sampling project has been initiated by scientists of the IATTC and the NMFS to collect and archive tissue samples for sharks, rays, and other large fishes for future genetics analysis. Data from the archived samples will be used in studies of large-scale stock structure of these taxa in the EPO, information that is vital for stock assessments and is generally lacking throughout the Pacific Ocean.

A stock assessment for blue sharks (*Prionace glauca*) in the North Pacific Ocean has been conducted by scientists of the NMFS and the NRIFSF. Preliminary results provided a range of plausible values for MSY of 1.8 to nearly 4 times the 2001 catch of blue shark per year.

Preliminary estimates of the discards (in metric tons) of sharks and other large fishes in the EPO during 2008, other than those discussed above, by large purse-seine vessels are as follows. Complete data are not available for small purse-seine, longline, and other types of vessels.

	Set type			Total
	OBJ	NOA	DEL	
Sharks	231	36	27	294
Rays (Mobulidae and Dasyatidae)	4	33	11	48
Dorado ( <i>Coryphaena</i> spp.)	1,143	21	2	1,166
Wahoo ( <i>Acanthocybium solandri</i> )	242	1	<1	243
Rainbow runner ( <i>Elagatis bipinnulata</i> ) and yellowtail ( <i>Seriola lalandi</i> )	75	36	<1	111
Black skipjack	2,283	172	106	2,561
Bonito	52	13	0	65
Unidentified tunas	9,151	3,040	363	12,554
Unidentified billfishes	11	3	5	19
Other large fishes	17	7	3	27

Apart from the assessments of billfishes, summarized in Sections G, H, and I of this report, and blue shark, there are no stock assessments available for these species in the EPO, and hence the impacts of the bycatches on the stocks are unknown.

The catch rates of species other than tunas in the purse-seine fishery are different for each type of set. With a few exceptions, the bycatch rates are greatest in sets on floating objects, followed by unassociated sets and, at a much lower level, dolphin sets. Dolphin bycatch rates are greatest for dolphin sets, followed by unassociated sets and, at a much lower level, floating-object sets. The bycatch rates of sailfish (*Istiophorus platypterus*), manta rays (Mobulidae), and stingrays (Dasyatidae) are greatest in unassociated sets, followed by dolphin sets, and lowest in floating-object sets. Because of these differences, it is necessary to follow the changes in frequency of the different types of sets to interpret the changes in bycatch figures. The estimated numbers of purse-seine sets of each type in the EPO during 1993-2008 are shown in Table A-7.

In October 2006, the NMFS hosted a workshop on bycatch reduction in the EPO purse-seine fishery. The attendees agreed to support a proposal for research on methods to reduce bycatches of sharks by attracting them away from floating objects prior to setting the purse seine. A feasibility study has been planned. The attendees also supported a suite of field experiments on bycatch reduction devices and techniques; these would include FAD modifications and manipulations, assessing behavioral and physiological indicators of stress, and removing living animals from the seine and deck (*e.g.* sorting grids, bubble gates, and vacuum pumps). A third proposal, which was likewise supported by the attendees, involves using IATTC data to determine if spatial, temporal, and environmental factors can be used to predict bycatches

in FAD sets and to determine to what extent time/area closures would be effective in reducing bycatches.

### **3. OTHER ECOSYSTEM COMPONENTS**

#### **3.1. Seabirds**

There are approximately 100 species of seabirds in the tropical EPO. Some seabirds associate with epipelagic predators near the sea surface, such as fishes (especially tunas) and marine mammals. Subsurface predators often drive prey to the surface to trap them against the air-water interface, where the prey become available to the birds. Most species of seabirds take prey within a half meter of the sea surface or in the air (flyingfishes (Exocoetidae) and squids (Ommastrephidae)). In addition to driving the prey to the surface, subsurface predators make prey available to the birds by injuring or disorienting the prey, and by leaving scraps after feeding on large prey. Feeding opportunities for some seabird species are dependent on the presence of tuna schools feeding near the surface.

Seabirds are affected by the variability of the ocean environment. During the 1982-1983 El Niño event, seabird populations throughout the tropical and northeastern Pacific Ocean experienced breeding failures and mass mortalities, or migrated elsewhere in search of food. Some species, however, are apparently not affected by El Niño episodes. In general, seabirds that forage in upwelling areas of the tropical EPO and Peru Current suffer reproductive failures and mortalities due to food shortage during El Niño events, while seabirds that forage in areas less affected by El Niño episodes may be relatively unaffected.

According to the *Report of the Scientific Research Program under the U.S. International Dolphin Conservation Program Act*, prepared by the NMFS in September 2002, there were no significant temporal trends in abundance estimates over the 1986-2000 period for any species of seabird, except for a downward trend for the Tahiti petrel (*Pseudobulweria rostrata*), in the tropical EPO. Population status and trends are currently under review for waved (*Phoebastria irrorata*), black-footed (*P. nigripes*), and Laysan (*P. immutabilis*) albatrosses.

Some seabirds, especially albatrosses and petrels, are susceptible to being caught on baited hooks in pelagic longline fisheries. Satellite tracking and at-sea observation data have identified the importance of the IATTC area for waved, black-footed, Laysan, and black-browed (*Thalassarche melanophrys*) albatrosses, plus several other species that breed in New Zealand, yet forage off the coast of South America. There is particular concern for the waved albatross because it is endemic to the EPO and nests only in the Galapagos Islands. Observer data from artisanal vessels show no interactions with waved albatross during these vessels' fishing operations. Data from the US pelagic longline fishery in the northeastern Pacific Ocean indicate that bycatches of black-footed and Laysan albatrosses occur. Few comparable data for the longline fisheries in the central and southeastern Pacific Ocean are available. At the 6th meeting of the IATTC Working Group on Bycatch in February 2007, it was reported that the Spanish surface longline fleet targeting swordfish in the EPO averaged 40 seabird interactions per million hooks, virtually all resulting in mortality, during 1990-2005. In 2007, the IATTC Stock Assessment Working Group has identified areas of vulnerability to industrial longline fishing for several species of albatross and proposed mitigation measures. In an externally-funded study, the IATTC staff is currently investigating the population status of the black-footed albatross in the entire North Pacific Ocean, taking into account the effects of fisheries bycatch.

#### **3.2. Forage**

The forage taxa occupying the middle trophic levels in the EPO are obviously important components of the ecosystem, providing a link between primary production at the base of the food web and the upper-trophic-level predators, such as tunas and billfishes. Indirect effects on those predators caused by environmental variability are transmitted to the upper trophic levels through the forage taxa. Little is known, however, about fluctuations in abundance of the large variety of prey species in the EPO. Scientists from the NMFS have recorded data on the distributions and abundances of common prey groups, including lantern fishes (Myctophidae), flyingfishes, and some squids, in the tropical EPO during 1986-1990 and 1998-2000. Mean abundance estimates for all fish taxa and, to a lesser extent, for squids



increased from 1986 through 1990. The estimates were low again in 1998, and then increased through 2000. Their interpretation of this pattern was that El Niño events in 1986-1987 and 1997-1998 had negative effects on these prey populations. More data on these taxa were collected during the NMFS STAR 2003 and 2006 cruises, and are currently being analyzed.

The Humboldt or jumbo squid (*Dosidicus gigas*) populations in the EPO have increased in size and geographic range in recent years. In addition, in 2002 observers on tuna purse-seine vessels reported increased incidental catches of Humboldt squid taken with tunas, primarily skipjack, off Peru. Juvenile stages of these squid are common prey for yellowfin and bigeye tunas, and other predatory fishes, and Humboldt squid are also voracious predators of small fishes and cephalopods throughout their range. Large Humboldt squid have been observed attacking skipjack and yellowfin inside a purse seine. Not only have these squid impacted the ecosystems that they have expanded into, but they are also thought to have the capability of affecting the trophic structure in pelagic regions. Changes in the abundance and geographic range of Humboldt squid could affect the foraging behavior of the tunas and other predators, perhaps changing their vulnerability to capture. A recent sampling program by the IATTC staff, to examine possible changes in foraging behavior of yellowfin tuna, is described in Section 4.

Some small fishes, many of which are forage for the larger predators, are incidentally caught by purse-seine vessels in the EPO. Frigate and bullet tunas (*Auxis* spp.), for example, are a common prey of many of the animals that occupy the upper trophic levels in the tropical EPO. In the tropical EPO ecosystem model (Section 7), frigate and bullet tunas comprise 10% or more of the diet of eight predator categories. Small quantities of frigate and bullet tunas are captured by purse-seine vessels on the high seas and by artisanal fisheries in some coastal regions of Central and South America. The vast majority of frigate and bullet tunas captured by tuna purse-seine vessels is discarded at sea. Preliminary estimates of the discards, in metric tons, of small fishes by large purse-seine vessels with observers aboard in the EPO during 2008 are as follows:

	Set type			Total
	OBJ	NOA	DEL	
Triggerfishes (Balistidae) and filefishes (Monacanthidae)	124	7	<1	132
Other small fishes	91	<1	<1	91
Frigate and bullet tunas ( <i>Auxis</i> spp.)	1,085	941	<1	2,026

### 3.3. Larval fishes and plankton

Larval fishes have been collected by manta (surface) net tows in the EPO for many years by personnel of the NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center. Of the 314 taxonomic categories identified, 17 were found to be most likely to show the effects of environmental change. The occurrence, abundance, and distribution of these key taxa revealed no consistent temporal trends. Recent research has shown a longitudinal gradient in community structure of the ichthyoplankton assemblages in the eastern Pacific warm pool, with abundance, species richness, and species diversity high in the east (where the thermocline is shallow and primary productivity is high) and low in the west (where the thermocline is deep and primary productivity is low).

The phytoplankton and zooplankton populations in the tropical EPO are variable. For example, chlorophyll concentrations on the sea surface (an indicator of phytoplankton blooms) and the abundance of copepods were markedly reduced during the El Niño event of 1982-1983, especially west of 120°W. Similarly, surface concentrations of chlorophyll decreased during the 1986-1987 El Niño episode and increased during the 1988 La Niña event due to changes in nutrient availability.

The species and size composition of zooplankton is often more variable than the zooplankton biomass. When the water temperatures increase, warm-water species often replace cold-water species at particular locations. The relative abundance of small copepods off northern Chile, for example, increased during the 1997-1998 El Niño event, while the zooplankton biomass did not change.

Copepods often comprise the dominant component of secondary production in marine ecosystems. An analysis of the trophic structure among the community of pelagic copepods in the EPO was conducted by a student of the Centro Interdisciplinario de Ciencias Marinas, Instituto Politécnico Nacional, La Paz, Mexico, using samples collected by scientists of the NMFS STAR project. The stable nitrogen isotope values of omnivorous copepods were used in a separate analysis of the trophic position of yellowfin tuna, by treating the copepods as a proxy for the isotopic variability at the base of the food web (see next section).

#### 4. TROPHIC INTERACTIONS

Tunas and billfishes are wide-ranging, generalist predators with high energy requirements, and, as such, are key components of pelagic ecosystems. The ecological relationships among large pelagic predators, and between them and animals at lower trophic levels, are not well understood. Given the need to evaluate the implications of fishing activities on the underlying ecosystems, it is essential to acquire accurate depictions of trophic links and biomass flows through the food web in open-ocean ecosystems, and a basic understanding of the natural variability forced by the environment.

Knowledge of the trophic ecology of predatory fishes has historically been derived from stomach contents analysis. Large pelagic predators are considered efficient biological samplers of micronekton organisms, which are poorly sampled by nets and trawls. Diet studies have revealed many of the key trophic connections in the pelagic EPO, and have formed the basis for representing food-web interactions in an ecosystem model (IATTC Bulletin, Vol. 22, No. 3) to explore indirect ecosystem effects of fishing. The most common prey items of yellowfin tuna caught by purse seines offshore are frigate and bullet tunas, squids and argonauts (cephalopods), and flyingfishes and other epipelagic fishes. Bigeye tuna feed at greater depths than do yellowfin and skipjack, and consume primarily cephalopods and mesopelagic fishes. The most important prey of skipjack overall were reported to be euphausiid crustaceans during the late 1950s, whereas the small mesopelagic fish *Vinciguerrria lucetia* appeared dominant in the diet during the early 1990s. Tunas that feed inshore utilize different prey than those caught offshore. For example, yellowfin and skipjack caught off Baja California feed heavily on red crabs, *Pleuroncodes planipes*. More recently, diet studies have become focused on understanding entire food webs, initially by describing the inter-specific connections among the predator communities, comprising tunas, sharks, billfishes, dorado, wahoo, rainbow runner, and others. In general, considerable resource partitioning is evident among the components of these communities, and researchers seek to understand the spatial scale of the observable trophic patterns, and also the role of climate variability in influencing the patterns.

While diet studies have yielded many insights, stable isotope analysis is a useful complement to stomach contents for delineating the complex structure of marine food webs. Stomach contents represent a sample of only the most-recent several hours of feeding at the time of day an animal is captured, and under the conditions required for its capture. Stable carbon and nitrogen isotopes, however, integrate information on all components of the diet into the animal's tissues, providing a recent history of trophic interactions and information on the structure and dynamics of ecological communities. More insight is provided by compound-specific isotope analysis (CSIA) of amino acids. In samples of consumer tissues, "source" amino acids (*e.g.* phenylalanine, glycine) retained the isotopic values at the base of the food web, and "trophic" amino acids (*e.g.* glutamic acid) became enriched in  $^{15}\text{N}$  by about 7‰ relative to the baseline. In CSIA, predator tissues alone are adequate for trophic-position estimates, and separate analysis of the isotopic composition of the base of the food web is not necessary. A recent analysis of the spatial distribution of stable isotope values of yellowfin tuna in relation to those of omnivorous copepods showed that the trophic position of yellowfin tuna increased from inshore to offshore in the EPO, a characteristic of the food web never detected in diet data. The diet data for the same yellowfin samples analyzed for isotope content showed comparable variability in the trophic position of yellowfin, but did not show an inshore-offshore gradient in trophic position.

A short-term study was conducted in 2006 to examine the stomach contents of recently-captured yellowfin tuna to detect possible changes in their foraging behavior relative to that of previous years.

Single-species stock assessments are not designed to consider the effect of trophic interactions (*e.g.* predation, competition, and changes in trophic structure) on the stock in question. Prey populations that feed the apex predators also vary over time (see 3.2 Forage), and some prey impart considerable predation pressure on animals that occupy the lower trophic levels (including the early life stages of large fishes). Stomach samples of a ubiquitous predator, such as yellowfin tuna, compared with previous diet data, can be used to infer changes in prey populations by identifying changes in foraging behavior. Changes in foraging behavior could cause the tunas, for example, to alter the typical depth distributions while foraging, and this could affect their vulnerability to capture. Stomach samples of yellowfin tuna were collected from purse-seine sets made on fish associated with dolphins during the fourth quarter of 2006, and compared with samples from dolphin sets made during 2003-2005 in the same fishing area. Of special interest were the inter-annual differences in predation on the Humboldt squid because of recent changes in its abundance and geographical range (see 3.2 Forage). The amount of fresh squid tissue in the yellowfin stomachs was very low, and there were no differences in the diet proportions by weight from year to year. Cephalopod mandibles (or beaks), however, are retained in the stomachs, and the percent occurrence of Humboldt squid mandibles decreased by 21 percent between 2004 and 2006. Interannual differences in predation on other diet components were small. *Auxis* spp. were eaten in significantly greater quantities ( $p < 0.05$ ) in 2005 and 2006 compared to 2003 and 2004, and significantly more Pacific flatiron herring (*Harengula thrissina*) and chub mackerel (*Scomber japonicus*) were eaten in 2006 than in the previous three years. Overall, there is no convincing evidence of substantial changes in the trophic structure having taken place during 2003-2006, based on the food habits of yellowfin tuna caught in association with dolphins.

## 5. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT<sup>2</sup>

Environmental conditions affect marine ecosystems, the dynamics and catchability of tunas and billfishes, and the activities of the fishermen. Tunas and billfishes are pelagic during all stages of their lives, and the physical factors that affect the tropical and sub-tropical Pacific Ocean can have important effects on their distribution and abundance. Environmental conditions are thought to cause considerable variability in the recruitment of tunas and billfishes. Stock assessments by the IATTC have often incorporated the assumption that oceanographic conditions might influence recruitment in the EPO.

Different types of climate perturbations may impact fisheries differently. It is thought that a shallow thermocline in the EPO contributes to the success of purse-seine fishing for tunas, perhaps by acting as a thermal barrier to schools of small tunas, keeping them near the sea surface. When the thermocline is deep, as during an El Niño event, tunas seem to be less vulnerable to capture, and the catch rates have declined. Warmer- or cooler-than-average sea-surface temperatures (SSTs) can also cause these mobile fishes to move to more favorable habitats.

The ocean environment varies on a variety of time scales, from seasonal to interannual, decadal, and longer (*e.g.* climate phases or regimes). The dominant source of variability in the upper layers of the EPO is often called the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). The ENSO is an irregular fluctuation involving the entire tropical Pacific Ocean and global atmosphere. It results in variations of the winds, rainfall, thermocline depth, circulation, biological productivity, and the feeding and reproduction of fishes, birds, and marine mammals. El Niño events occur at 2- to 7-year intervals, and are characterized by weaker trade winds, deeper thermoclines, and abnormally-high SSTs in the equatorial EPO. El Niño's opposite phase, often called La Niña (or anti-El Niño), is characterized by stronger trade winds, shallower thermoclines, and lower SSTs. Research has documented a connection between the ENSO and the rate of primary production, phytoplankton biomass, and phytoplankton species composition. Upwelling of nutrient-rich subsurface water is reduced during El Niño episodes, leading to a marked reduction in primary and secondary production. ENSO also directly affects animals at middle and upper trophic

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<sup>2</sup> Much of the information in this section is from Fiedler, P.C. 2002. Environmental change in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean: review of ENSO and decadal variability. *Mar. Ecol. Prog. Ser.* 244: 265-283.

levels. Researchers have concluded that the 1982-1983 El Niño event, for example, deepened the thermocline and nutricline, decreased primary production, reduced zooplankton abundance, and ultimately reduced the growth rates, reproductive successes, and survival of various birds, mammals, and fishes in the EPO. In general, however, the ocean inhabitants recover within short periods because their life histories are adapted to respond to a variable habitat.

The IATTC reports monthly average oceanographic and meteorological data for the EPO, including a summary of current ENSO conditions, on a quarterly basis. In 2007, oceanographic and meteorological data indicated that La Niña conditions intensified during the second, third, and fourth quarters. In 2008, somewhat weaker La Niña conditions prevailed during the first quarter, followed by near neutral conditions during the second and third quarters. Mild La Niña conditions developed during the fourth quarter of 2008.

Variability on a decadal scale (*i.e.* 10 to 30 years) also affects the EPO. During the late 1970s there was a major shift in physical and biological states in the North Pacific Ocean. This climate shift was also detected in the tropical EPO by small increases in SSTs, weakening of the trade winds, and a moderate change in surface chlorophyll levels. Some researchers have reported another major shift in the North Pacific in 1989. Climate-induced variability in the ocean has often been described in terms of “regimes,” characterized by relatively stable means and patterns in the physical and biological variables. Analyses by the IATTC staff have indicated that yellowfin tuna in the EPO have experienced regimes of lower (1975-1982) and higher (1983-2001) recruitment, and possibly intermediate (2002-2006) recruitment. The increased recruitment during 1983-2001 is thought to be due to a shift to a higher productivity regime in the Pacific Ocean. Decadal fluctuations in upwelling and water transport are simultaneous to the higher-frequency ENSO pattern, and have basin-wide effects on the SSTs and thermocline slope that are similar to those caused by ENSO, but on longer time scales.

There is evidence that the North Pacific Ocean is currently in a cool regime, while no such evidence is apparent for the equatorial Pacific.

Environmental variability in the tropical EPO is manifested differently in different regions in which tunas are caught. For example, SST anomalies in the tropical EPO warm pool (5° to 20°N, east of 120°W) have been about one-half the magnitude and several months later than those in the equatorial Pacific NIÑO3 area (5°S to 5°N, 90° to 150°W).

## **6. AGGREGATE INDICATORS**

Recognition of the consequences of fishing for marine ecosystems has stimulated considerable research in recent years. Numerous objectives have been proposed to evaluate fishery impacts on ecosystems and to define over-fishing from an ecosystem perspective. Whereas reference points have been used primarily for single-species management of target species, applying performance measures and reference points to non-target species is believed to be a tractable first step. Current examples include incidental mortality limits for dolphins in the EPO purse-seine fishery under the AIDCP. Another area of interest is whether useful performance indicators based on ecosystem-level properties might be developed. Several ecosystem metrics or indicators, including community size structure, diversity indices, species richness and evenness, overlap indices, trophic spectra of catches, relative abundance of an indicator species or group, and numerous environmental indicators, have been proposed. Whereas there is general agreement that multiple system-level indicators should be used, there is concern over whether there is sufficient practical knowledge of the dynamics of such metrics and whether a theoretical basis for identifying precautionary or limit reference points based on ecosystem properties exists. Ecosystem-level metrics are not yet commonly used for managing fisheries.

New methods of ordination, developed by scientists at the Institute of Statistical Mathematics in Tokyo, Japan, have produced indices of association related to different groupings of catch and bycatch species for floating-object sets of the purse-seine fishery. The preliminary indices show clear large-scale spatial patterns, and relationships to environmental variables, such as SST, chlorophyll-a density, and mixed

layer depth. Information on relationships between indices of species association and environmental characteristics may help to guide the development of approaches for bycatch reduction.

Ecologically-based approaches to fisheries management place renewed emphasis on achieving accurate depictions of trophic links and biomass flows through the food web in exploited systems. The structure of the food web and the interactions among its components have a demonstrable role in determining the dynamics and productivity of ecosystems. Trophic levels (TLs) are used in food-web ecology to characterize the functional role of organisms, to facilitate estimates of energy or mass flow through communities, and for elucidating trophodynamics aspects of ecosystem functioning. A simplified food-web diagram, with approximate TLs, of the pelagic tropical EPO, is shown in Figure J-1. Toothed whales (Odontoceti, average TL 5.2), large squid predators (large bigeye tuna and swordfish, average TL 5.2), and sharks (average TL 5.0) are top-level predators. Other tunas, large piscivores, dolphins (average TL 4.8), and seabirds (average TL 4.5) occupy slightly lower TLs. Smaller epipelagic fishes (*e.g.* *Auxis* spp. and flyingfishes, average TL 3.2), cephalopods (average TL 4.4), and mesopelagic fishes (average TL 3.4) are the principal forage of many of the upper-level predators in the ecosystem. Small fishes and crustaceans prey on two zooplankton groups, and the herbivorous micro-zooplankton (TL 2) feed on the producers, phytoplankton and bacteria (TL 1).

In exploited pelagic ecosystems, fisheries that target large piscivorous fishes act as apex predators in the ecosystem. Over time, fishing can cause the overall size composition of the catch to decrease, and, in general, the TLs of smaller organisms are lower than those of larger organisms. The mean TL of the organisms taken by a fishery is a useful metric of ecosystem change and sustainability because it integrates an array of biological information about the components of the system. There has been increasing attention to analyzing the mean TL of fisheries catches and discards since a study demonstrated that, according to FAO landings statistics, the mean TL of the fishes and invertebrates landed globally had declined between 1950 and 1994, which was hypothesized by the authors of that study to be detrimental to the ecosystems. Some ecosystems, however, have changed in the other direction, from lower to higher TL communities. Given the potential utility of this approach, TLs were estimated for a time series of annual catches and discards by species from 1993 to 2007 for three purse-seine fishing modes and the pole-and-line fishery in the EPO. The estimates were made by applying the TL values from the EPO ecosystem model (see Section 7), weighted by the catch data by fishery and year for all model groups from the IATTC tuna, bycatch, and discard data bases. The TLs from the ecosystem model were determined by average diet estimates for all species groups. The TLs of the summed catches of all purse-seine and pole-and-line fisheries were fairly constant from year to year, varying by less than 0.1 TL (Figure J-2: Average PS+LP), and there is no indication of declining trends over the 15-year period. The catches of large yellowfin ( $\geq 90$  cm, TL 4.66), skipjack (TL 4.57), small yellowfin ( $< 90$  cm, TL 4.57), and large bigeye ( $\geq 80$  cm, TL 5.17) contributed 36, 34, 19, and 6 percent, respectively, to the overall TL (4.63) during 1993-2007. The retained and discarded catches of all other species and groups contributed less than 5 percent of the overall TL of the catches, including small bigeye (4.7%, TL 4.53) and all the bycatch species. In general, the TLs of the unassociated sets and the pole-and-line fishery were below average and those of the dolphin sets were above average for most years (Figure J-2). The TLs of the floating-object sets varied more than those of the other set types and fisheries, primarily due to the inter-annual variability in the sizes of bigeye and the amounts of skipjack caught in those sets. The TLs of floating-object sets were positively related to the percentage of the total catch comprised of large bigeye ( $p < 0.001$ ) and negatively related to the percentage of the catch comprised of skipjack ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Figure J-3).

The TLs were also estimated separately for the time series of retained and discarded catches of the purse-seine fishery each year from 1993 to 2007 (Figure J-4). The discarded catches were much less than the retained catches, and thus the TL patterns of the total (retained plus discarded) catches (Figure J-2) were determined primarily by the TLs of the retained catches (Figure J-4). The TLs of the discarded catches varied more year-to-year than those of the retained catches, and did not decline over time. The greatest variation occurred for sets on fish associated with floating objects, and those sets also had the greatest

bycatch species diversity. The lowest TL of the discarded catches occurred for both unassociated and floating-object sets in 1998. For unassociated sets, the marked reduction in TL during 1998 was due to increased bycatches of rays (TL 3.68), which feed on plankton and other small animals that occupy low TLs, and a reduction in the catches of large sharks (TL 4.93). From 1998 to 2001, the discarded catches of rays gradually declined in unassociated sets and those of large sharks and small yellowfin increased, resulting in a gradually increasing TL of the discarded catches over that interval. For floating-object sets, the discards of small epipelagic fishes (*e.g.* Clupeiformes, Nomeidae, Tetraodontiformes, and others; TL 3.19) increased and of large bigeye decreased from 1996 to 1998, lowering the TL over that interval. The TL increase in floating-object sets from 1998 to 2000 resulted from a reduction in the bycatch of small epipelagic fishes and an increase in discarded dorado (TL 4.66) and large bigeye.

## **7. ECOSYSTEM MODELING**

It is clear that the different components of an ecosystem interact. Ecosystem-based fisheries management is facilitated through the development of multi-species, ecosystem models that represent ecological interactions among species or guilds. Our understanding of the complex maze of connections in open-ocean ecosystems is at an early stage, and, consequently, the current ecosystem models are most useful as descriptive devices for exploring the effects of a mix of hypotheses and established connections among the ecosystem components. Ecosystem models must be compromises between simplistic representations on the one hand and unmanageable complexity on the other.

The IATTC staff has developed a model of the pelagic ecosystem in the tropical EPO (IATTC Bulletin, Vol. 22, No. 3) to explore how fishing and climate variation might affect the animals at middle and upper trophic levels. The ecosystem model has 38 components, including the principal exploited species (*e.g.* tunas), functional groups (*e.g.* sharks and flyingfishes), and sensitive species (*e.g.* sea turtles). Some taxa are further separated into size categories (*e.g.* large and small marlins). The model has finer taxonomic resolution at the upper trophic levels, but most of the system's biomass is contained in the middle and lower trophic levels. Fisheries landings and discards were estimated for five fishing "gears": pole-and-line, longline, and purse-seine sets on tunas associated with dolphins, with floating objects, and in unassociated schools. The model focuses on the pelagic regions; localized, coastal ecosystems are not adequately described by the model.

Most of the information describing inter-specific interactions in the model comes from a joint IATTC-NMFS project, which included studies of the food habits of co-occurring yellowfin, skipjack, and bigeye tuna, dolphins, pelagic sharks, billfishes, dorado, wahoo, rainbow runner, and others. The impetus of the project was to contribute to the understanding of the tuna-dolphin association, and a community-level sampling design was adopted.

The ecosystem model has been used to evaluate the possible effects of variability in bottom-up forcing by the environment on the middle and upper trophic levels of the pelagic ecosystem. Predetermined time series of producer biomasses were put into the model as proxies for changes in primary production that have been documented during El Niño and La Niña events, and the dynamics of the remaining components of the ecosystem were simulated. The model was also used to evaluate the relative contributions of fishing and the environment in shaping ecosystem structure in the tropical pelagic EPO. This was done by using the model to predict which components of the ecosystem might be susceptible to top-down effects of fishing, given the apparent importance of environmental variability in structuring the ecosystem. In general, animals with relatively low turnover rates were influenced more by fishing than by the environment, and animals with relatively high turnover rates more by the environment than by fishing.

## **8. ACTIONS BY THE IATTC AND THE AIDCP ADDRESSING ECOSYSTEM CONSIDERATIONS**

Both the IATTC convention and the AIDCP have objectives that address the incorporation of ecosystem considerations into the management of the tuna fisheries in the EPO. Actions taken in the past include:

## 8.1. Dolphins

- a. For many years, the impact of the fishery on the dolphin populations has been assessed, and programs to reduce or eliminate that impact have met with considerable success.
- b. The incidental mortalities of all stocks of dolphins have been limited to levels that are insignificant relative to stock sizes.

## 8.2. Sea turtles

- a. A data base on all sea turtle sightings, captures, and mortalities reported by observers has been compiled.
- b. In June 2003 the IATTC adopted a Recommendation on Sea Turtles, which contemplates “the development of a three-year program that could include mitigation of sea turtle bycatch, biological research on sea turtles, improvement of fishing gears, industry education and other techniques to improve sea turtle conservation.” In January 2004, the Working Group on Bycatch drew up a detailed program that includes all these elements, and urges all nations with vessels fishing for tunas in the EPO to provide the IATTC with information on interactions with sea turtles in the EPO, including both incidental and direct catches and other impacts on sea turtle populations. [Resolution C-04-07](#) on a three-year program to mitigate the impact of tuna fishing on sea turtles was adopted by the IATTC in June 2004; it includes requirements for data collection, mitigation measures, industry education, capacity building, and reporting.
- c. [Resolution C-04-05 REV 2](#), adopted by the IATTC in June 2006, contains provisions on releasing and handling of sea turtles captured in purse seines. The resolution also prohibits vessels from disposing of plastic containers and other debris at sea, and instructs the Director to study and formulate recommendations regarding the design of FADs, particularly the use of netting attached underwater to FADs.
- d. [Resolution C-07-03](#), adopted by the IATTC in June 2007, contains provisions on implementing observer programs for fisheries under the purview of the Commission that may have impacts on sea turtles and are not currently being observed. The resolution requires fishermen to foster recovery and resuscitation of comatose or inactive hard-shell sea turtles before returning them to the water. CPCs with purse-seine and longline vessels fishing for species covered by the IATTC Convention in the EPO are directed to avoid encounters with sea turtles, to reduce mortalities using a variety of techniques, and to conduct research on modifications of FAD designs and longline gear and fishing practices.
- e. In response to a request made by the Subsecretaría de Recursos Pesqueros of Ecuador, a program was established by the World Wildlife Fund, the IATTC, and the government of the United States to mitigate the incidental capture and reduce the mortality of sea turtles due to longline fishing. A key element of this program is the comparison of catch rates of tunas, billfishes, sharks, and dorado caught with J hooks to the catch rates using circle hooks. Circle hooks do not hook as many turtles as the J hooks, which are traditionally used in the longline fishery, and the chance of serious injury to the sea turtles that bite the circle hooks is reduced because they are wider and they tend to hook the lower jaw, rather than the more dangerous deep hookings in the esophagus and other areas, which are more common with the J hooks. Improved procedures and instruments to release hooked and entangled sea turtles have also been disseminated to the longline fleets of the region.

Through 2007, observers have recorded data on more than 1,100 fishing trips of the vessels that are testing the different hooks. The program was actively running in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, and Peru and under development in Mexico and Nicaragua. The program in Ecuador is being carried out in partnership with the government and the Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation of Japan, while those in other countries are currently funded by U.S. agencies. Initial results show that, in the fisheries that target tunas, billfishes, and sharks, there was a

significant reduction in the hooking rates of sea turtles with the circle hooks, and fewer hooks lodged in the esophagus or other areas detrimental to the turtles. The catch rates of the target species are, in general, similar to the catch rates with the J-hooks. An experiment was also carried out in the dorado fishery using smaller circle hooks. There were reductions in turtle hooking rates, but the reductions were not as great as for the fisheries that target tunas, billfishes, and sharks. In addition, workshops and presentations were conducted by IATTC staff members and others in all of the countries participating in the program.

### **8.3. Seabirds**

- a. [Resolution C-05-01](#), adopted by the IATTC in June 2005, recommends that IATTC Parties and cooperating non-Parties, fishing entities, and regional economic integration organizations implement, if appropriate, the International Plan of Action for Reducing the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries; collect and provide information to the Commission on interactions with seabirds; and for the Working Group on Stock Assessment to present to the Commission an assessment of the impact of incidental catches of seabirds resulting from the activities of all the vessels fishing for tunas and tuna-like species in the EPO. This assessment should include identification of the geographic areas in which there could be interactions between longline fisheries and seabirds.
- b. The sixth meeting of the IATTC Working Group on Bycatch recommended that the Stock Assessment Working Group suggest possible mitigation measures in areas in which seabird distributions and longline effort overlap, and that the IATTC consider mitigation measures at its June 2007 meeting. It also recommended that seabird bycatch data be collected from all tuna longliners in the EPO.
- c. A population model for black-footed albatross is being developed to assess whether past and present levels of bycatch are likely to significantly affect their populations and to generate a protected species model that can be applied to multiple species and used to provide management advice. IATTC purse-seine observer data are being used also to plot seabird distributions.

### **8.4. Other species**

- a. In June 2000, the IATTC adopted a resolution on live release of sharks, rays, billfishes, dorado, wahoo, and other non-target species.
- b. [Resolution C-04-05](#), adopted by the IATTC in June 2006, instructs the Director to seek funds for reduction of incidental mortality of juvenile tunas, for developing techniques and equipment to facilitate release of billfishes, sharks, and rays from the deck or the net, and to carry out experiments to estimate the survival rates of released billfishes, sharks, and rays.

### **8.5. All species**

- a. Data on the bycatches of large purse-seine vessels are being collected, and governments are urged to provide bycatch information for other vessels.
- b. Data on the spatial distributions of the bycatches and the bycatch/catch ratios have been collected for analyses of policy options to reduce bycatches.
- c. Information to evaluate measures to reduce the bycatches, such as closures, effort limits, *etc.*, has been collected.
- d. Assessments of habitat preferences and the effect of environmental changes have been made.

## **9. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

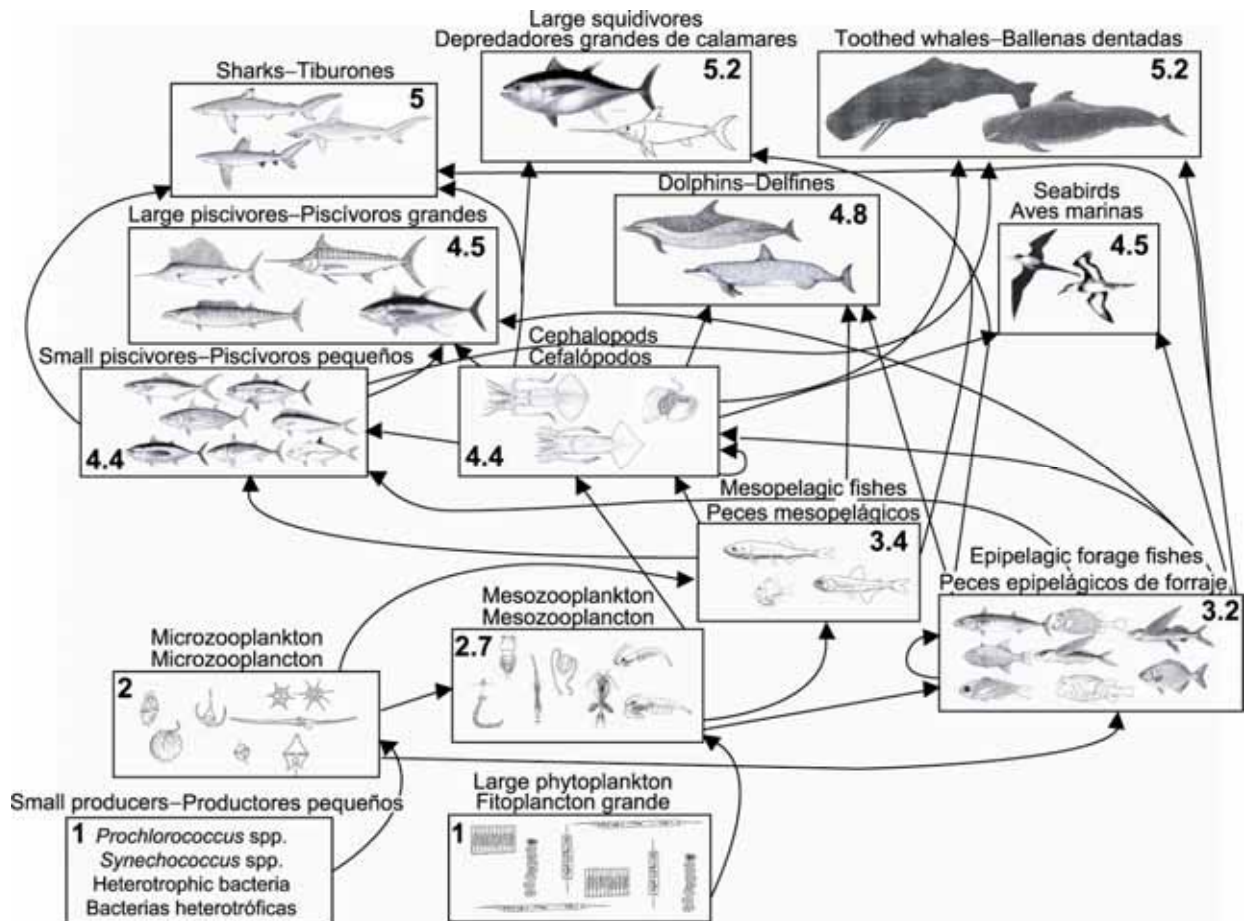
It is unlikely, in the near future at least, that there will be stock assessments for most of the bycatch species. In lieu of formal assessments, it may be possible to develop indices to assess trends in the status of these species. The IATTC staff's experience with dolphins suggests that the task is not trivial if relatively high precision is required.



An array of measures has been proposed to study changes in ecosystem properties. This could include studies of average trophic level, size spectra, dominance, diversity, *etc.*, to describe the ecosystem in an aggregate way.

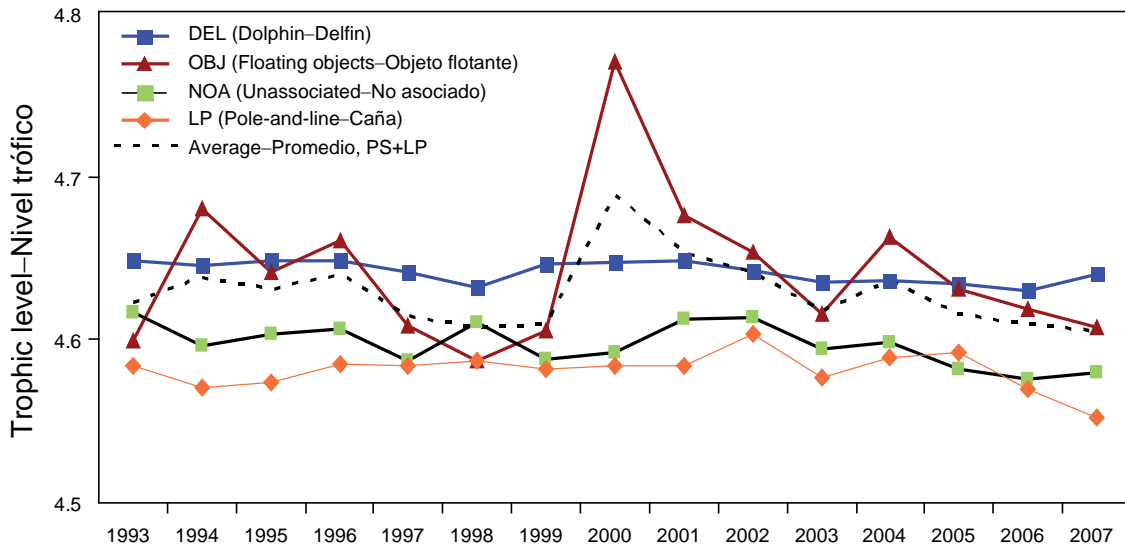
The distributions of the fisheries for tunas and billfishes in the EPO are such that several regions with different ecological characteristics may be included. Within them, water masses, oceanographic or topographic features, influences from the continent, *etc.*, may generate heterogeneity that affects the distributions of the different species and their relative abundances in the catches. It would be desirable to increase our understanding of these ecological strata so that they can be used in our analyses.

It is important to continue studies of the ecosystems in the EPO. The power to resolve issues related to fisheries and the ecosystem will increase with the number of habitat variables, taxa, and trophic levels studied and with longer time series of data.



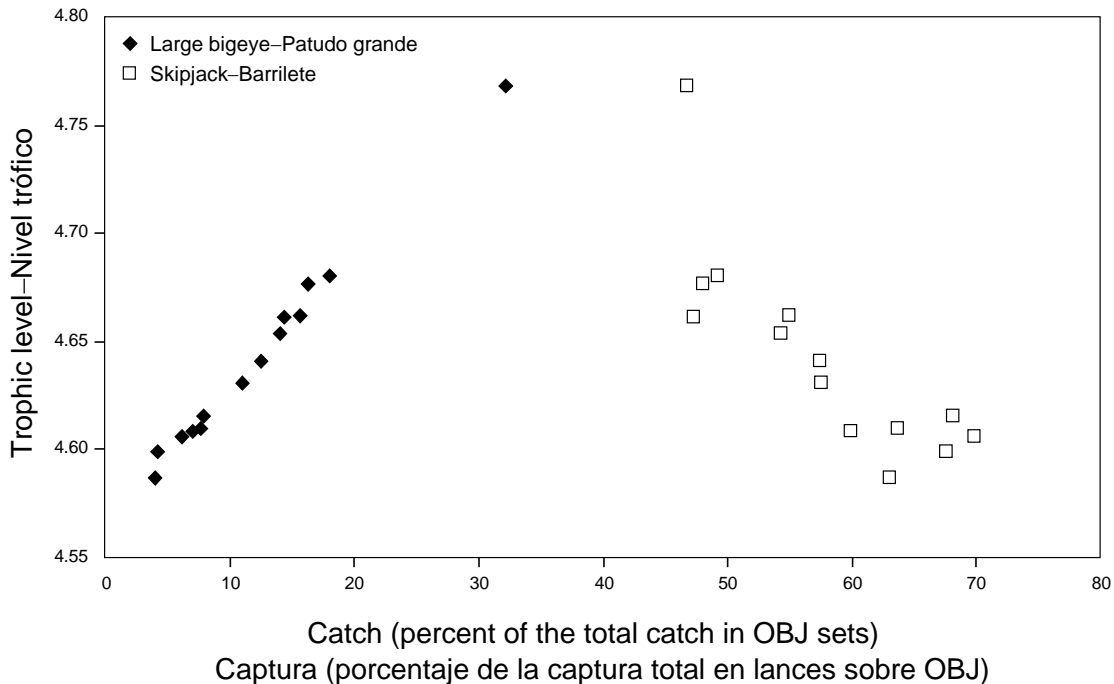
**FIGURE J-1.** Simplified food-web diagram of the pelagic ecosystem in the tropical EPO. The numbers inside the boxes indicate the approximate trophic levels of each group.

**FIGURA J-1.** Diagrama simplificado de la red trófica del ecosistema pelágico en el OPO tropical. Los números en los recuadros indican el nivel trófico aproximado de cada grupo.



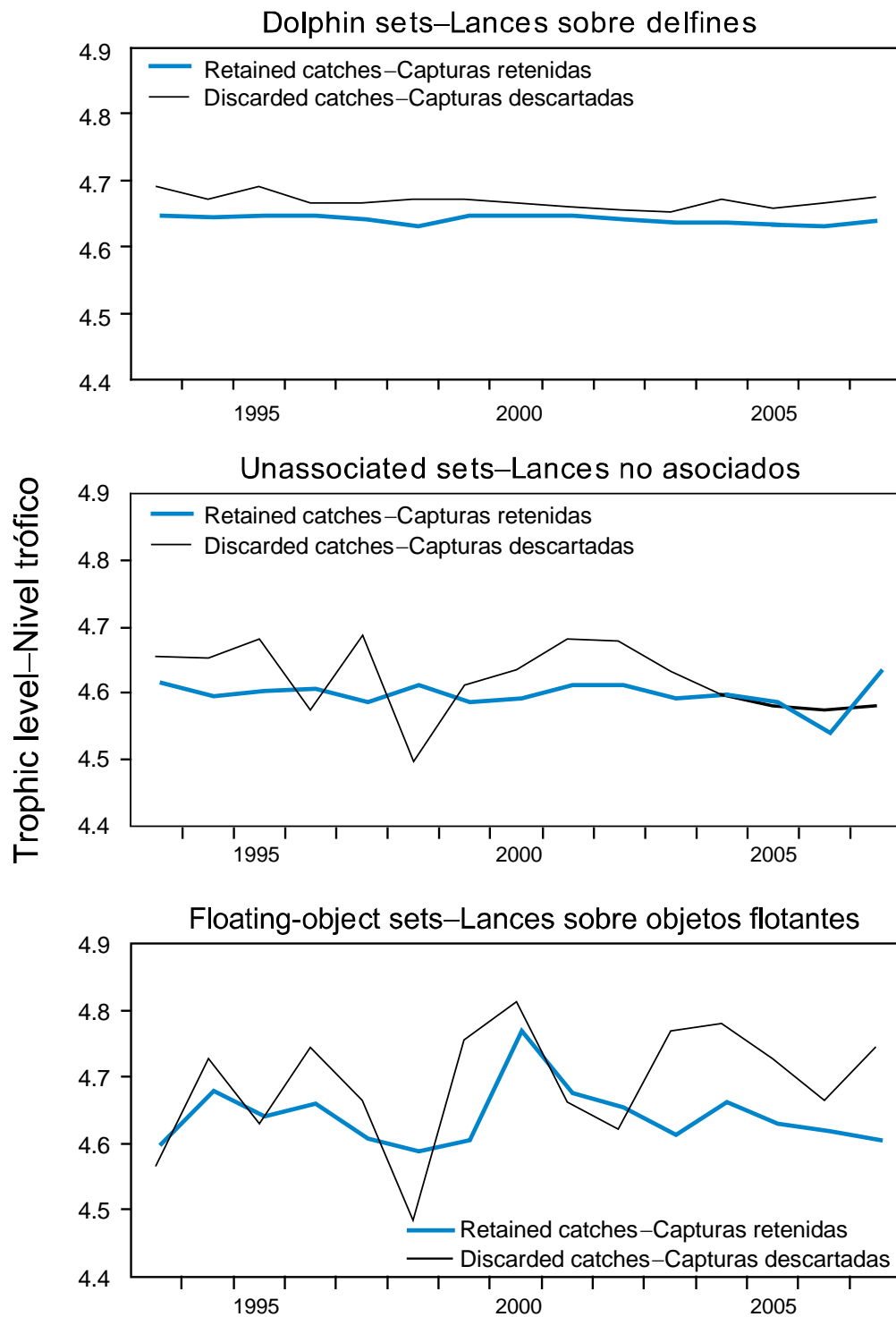
**FIGURE J-2.** Yearly trophic level estimates of the catches (retained and discarded) by the purse-seine and pole-and-line fisheries in the tropical EPO, 1993-2007.

**FIGURA J-2.** Estimaciones anuales del nivel trófico de las capturas (retenidas y descartadas) de las pesquerías cerquera y cañera en el OPO tropical, 1993-2007.



**FIGURE J-3.** Estimates of the trophic levels of the retained catches of large bigeye and of skipjack in floating-object sets (OBJ) in the tropical EPO, 1993-2006, versus the catches of large bigeye and of skipjack calculated as percentages of the total catches in floating-object sets each year.

**FIGURA J-3.** Estimaciones de los niveles tróficos de las capturas retenidas y descartadas en lances sobre objetos flotantes (OBJ) en el OPO tropical, 1993-2006, relativas a las capturas de patudo grande y barrilete, calculadas como porcentajes de las capturas totales en lances sobre objetos flotantes cada año.



**FIGURE J-4.** Trophic level estimates of the retained catches and discarded catches by purse-seine fishing modes in the tropical EPO, 1993-2007.

**FIGURA J-4.** Estimaciones del nivel trófico de las capturas retenidas y descartadas por modalidad de pesca cerquera en el OPO tropical, 1993-2007.