

March 2007 Australian (Port Lincoln Site Visit) Southern Bluefin Tuna Farming
Operations Actual Conditions Observation Visit Report

Due to Japan's concerns that the Australian southern bluefin tuna (SBT) farm operations study agreed on at CCSBT13 was not making progress, we made a visit to Port Lincoln, where we conducted observational activities, in March of this year. This is a report of the activities carried out during that five-day on-the-spot observation.

1. Overview

The observation period was from 19 to 23 March 2007. The members of the Japanese delegation are as per Attachment 1. The details of the activities carried out during the observation visit were: (1) Aerial survey departing from Port Lincoln; (2) Observation of the transfer of fish from a towing cage into a farming pen; (3) Asking DAFF and AFMA questions; and (4) Asking local industry people questions.

2. Results

1. Aerial survey departing from Port Lincoln

An aerial survey conducted from onboard an aeroplane, which departed from Port Lincoln, allowed us to get an idea of the scale of Australian farming operations. While the photographs and footage taken are currently undergoing analysis, the preliminary figure from what we observed in the field was that there are some 180 to 200 farming pens. Given that the local officer of the private company that works on behalf of AFMA (Protec Marine) explained to us that there were only around 140 farming pens, there is a large gap in the numbers.

2. Observation of the transfer of fish from a towing cage into a farming pen

We observed 2,800 fish being transferred into a farming pen from a towing cage that had housed and towed 11,000 SBT for two weeks. On the surface of the towing cage we observed large numbers of SBT that we think were injured while being caught in the roll nets or during towing and we also saw SBT that actually died while we were observing (we caught the dead SBT on film). In addition to these dead fish, we also observed in the field large numbers of SBT that were behaving abnormally and which we are pretty certain would die within a few hours or days.

In terms of transfer into the pen, not only did Protec Marine spend a great deal of time doing the set up for the fish count (the work was stopped part way through), but the count also involved using the footage from one video camera and people counting the number of fish.

The explanation given by the Protec Marine officer was that according to the results of the 40-fish sampling, the average weight of the SBT that had been towed was 17.1 kg (the Japanese delegation did not observe the 40-fish sampling in question being done). We obtained the opinion from the scientist in our delegation (Japan's leading expert on Northern Bluefin Tuna farming) that as a result of visual observation of the fish being transferred from the towing cage concerned into the pen that the average weight was definitely in excess of 20 kg (there was a sprinkling of SBT of between 35 to 40kg).

Also, during the observation period, feeding vessels were observed entering and leaving port everyday going out to feed the fish in the pens. We also observed on site that some of those ships were landing around 20 rather large SBT (thought to have died during the feeding period).

3. 40-fish sampling

We did not any opportunity to observe a 40-fish sampling being done during this visit. Therefore, we asked the Australian side to take video footage of 40-fish sampling being conducted and provide it to the Japanese side.

4. Asking DAFF and AFMA questions

We asked Mr Simon Veitch (DAFF) and Mr Malcolm Southwell (AFMA) a number of questions while we were there; however, there were some questions we were unable to get clear answers on. The questions that we did not get clear answers on are as shown in Attachment 2.

5. Asking local industry people questions

We interviewed local industry representatives and scientists mainly about the number of pens and growth rates during the farming period.

We obtained information from Company A on the number of pens each of the 11 Port Lincoln farming companies own individually. Local scientist, Mr David Ellis, said that the average growth rate is double, and explained that there would be a considerable number of individuals that grew more than double, however, local operators (three people) clearly stated that growth rates are between 1.5 and 1.7 times. We recognized that there is a large difference between the growth rate

(approximately double) reported to the CCSBT by the Australian government and the figure given by the local operators.

3. Conclusions

There are many points regarding Australian farm operations that were unclear during this observation visit, firstly, we concluded that the following three points need to be clarified as soon as possible. Also, we are prepared to circulate the footage and photographs we took during this visit to CCSBT members.

(1) Mortality rates during capture, towing, and farming

Local operators explained that considerable deaths occur at capture, during towing, and immediately after transfer into the pens, and the Japanese delegation also witnessed large numbers of SBT in a pretty bad state. Firstly, Australia should submit data (number of dead fish, date of death, weight and length information on SBT that have died) to the CCSBT regarding SBT that have died at each separate stage of the process; at capture, during towing, and during farming. An AFMA officer explained to us they know what these mortality numbers are.

(2) 40-fish sampling

We observed in the field that the towing cages we observed contained rather large SBT, and there was a discrepancy between the average weight (20 kg or more) estimate based on visual observation by our delegation's scientist and that based on the 40-fish sampling (17.1 kg). In regards to the 40-fish sampling, which heretofore, has been pointed out as having its problems, firstly, the techniques should be immediately disclosed to all CCSBT members and to the SC external scientists and observation opportunities provided.

(3) Growth rate during farming

The Australian government has reported to the CCSBT that the average growth rate during the farming period is approximately double. If the Australian government report is correct and the average growth rate is double, that means that there are large numbers of SBT that show growth rates in excess of double during the three-to-six-month farming period in the waters off Port Lincoln where the maximum water temperature is around 20 degrees Celsius. In contrast, local operators the Japanese delegation came into contact with during this visit said that the growth rate is between 1.5 and 1.7 times. As there is so much doubt over the growth rate during the farming period, the growth rate should be immediately verified by means of verification tests.

We also received information that rather a lot of local sardines with a low fat content are being fed to SBT recently. Data, including the composition of feed being given to SBT, should be disclosed to CCSBT members in order to verify the growth rate.

4. Acknowledgements

We would like to express our appreciation to the Australian side for their arrangement of the aerial survey, etc. during the delegation's visit on this occasion.

Attachment 1

Mr. Yukito Narisawa Planner, Far Seas Fisheries Division, JFA

Mr. Satoshi Shiozawa Scientist, National Research Institute of Aquaculture

Mr. Kaoru Haneda Haneda Suisan, Industry representative

Mr. Keita Kagoo Taiwa, Industry representative

Mr. Masamichi Motoyama National Ocean Tuna Fisheries Association

Mr. Nozomu Miura Japan Tuna Fisheries Co-operative Association

Ms. Kumi Koike Interpreter

March 2007 Port Lincoln Site Visit Repeat Questions

We asked DAFF and AFMA a number of questions on 21 March 2007, however, we did not receive clear answers on the questions listed below.

1. Questions related to the scale of farming operations

We would like information on the number of pens and a nautical chart indicating their locations to be provided for the Port Lincoln farming operations, which are managed by the State of South Australia. Also, what are the arrangements concerning the details of the permits for setting up pens? How many feeding vessels are there? What are the details of the permits for feeding vessels? How many pens can be covered by one feeding vessel?

2. Mortality rates and distribution of SBT that die

Farming operation mortality rates are managed by AFMA, so we would like them to provide the mortality rates at capture, during towing, and during farming from the year 2000. Also, to which stage does the mortality rate of 3.58% for the 2005-2006 fishing season submitted as a summary by the Australian government refer? We saw many dead fish being landed locally, are these fish supplied to local restaurants? Please provide data on how dead SBT are treated and the distribution of such fish within Australia.

3. Residues in farmed SBT

A DAFF official told us that Australia responsibly carries out quality control from the production stage of agricultural and fisheries export products and that they would promptly provide data on residual dioxins and PCBs in export SBT while we were there, however we have not received the data. We would like the most recent data to be provided.

Translated by Secretariat