

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF BLUEFIN TUNA FISHING IN CYPRUS

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Introduction

Systematic fishing of bluefin tuna was not carried out in Cyprus in the past by Cypriot fishermen. It was caught sporadically on the swordfish surface long lines and the price offered for it in the local market was very low.

Fishing and processing of the fish, in such a way, so that this could meet the requirements of a fresh product in the Japanese market for sushi and sushimi started in the waters around Cyprus during November-December 1993.

Trials were carried out during that period by a number of swordfish fishing boats after the keen interest of a Japanese private firm, which sent to the island, after the Fisheries Department of Cyprus prepared the ground, a group of experts to help local fishermen organise the fishing and processing of the fish properly, offering very rewarding prices for the right product.

Method of fishing

The method of fishing employed by swordfish fishermen is a rather special kind of hand line that was constructed locally with the help of the Japanese experts. The hand-line consists of eight meters of steel wire (2mm thick), that is joined by pressure with the help of a special presser, to 8 meters of white soft

monofilament line, 3mm diameter. A special hand-made Japanese hook, made of steel is connected to the hand-line.

The fish were located usually at waters with a depth of about 80 meters, but were found concentrated in the zone between 35-50 meters below the surface. Sardines were thrown in the sea or knife-cut mackerels kept in a net bag hanging in the sea, were used to attract the fish. Bluefin tunas were clearly spotted on the echosounder by their characteristic slightly upward quick movement.

Processing

Processing of this fish, in order to maintain its freshness and quality, until it reaches the market is actually the most difficult part of the whole operation since quick, delicate and very careful action is demanded both during the pulling up of the fish from the sea on board the vessel and for its special treatment and processing that immediately must follow.

Two vertical cuts under the pectoral fins and a round cut on the tail are made in order to take the blood out and clean the fish with water. Blood letting is a must in order to drop the temperature of the fish as much as possible in limited period of time for preservation and freshness purposes. Then the fish is headed and gutted carefully whilst the spinal cord is destroyed

by passing through it a piece of monofilament line 3mm diameter.

The fish is placed horizontally in a plastic bag with some sea water and then it is covered all around with small pieces of ice leaving a hole so that a thermometer can be placed in the cut under the pectoral fin to check periodically the temperature of the fish.

If the above processing procedure is carried out correctly the fish can stay in the bag for as long as one week without any negative repercussions to the quality of the fish.

Further special processing (Thorough cleaning, treatment with ice, salt, water etc,) is carried out on a land based processing unit where the fish is continuously checked for its quality (condition of fish both external and internal, oil content, chemical changes of the flesh, t° etc.) until it is finally packed in a wooden box ready for export.

Catch

During November-December 1993 14 bluefin tunas with total weight of 1629kg were sent to Japan and marketed, there, as fresh.

Exported fish 1993.

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of fish</u>	<u>Weight* (kg)</u>
9/11/93	1	80
21/11/93	1	117
30/11/93	1	169
3/12/93	2	202
6/12/93	3	393
6/12/93	1	177
9/12/93	1	97
11/12/93	1	90
12/12/93	1	93
13/12/93	1	133
21/12/93	1	78
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Total	14	1629
Mean Weight		116.4

* Weight of fish is the dressed weight i.e. gutted, gilled, headed, fins off, tail off.

During the same period another seven tunas were caught, but were considered by the Japanese experts to be of low quality so they were marketed locally at much lower prices.

During 1994 between January-end of May, another eleven fish with total weight 1696 kg, were exported to Japan.

Exported fish, 1994

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of fish</u>	<u>Weight (kg)</u>
3/3/94	1	177
5/4/94	1	168
8/9/94	1	144
12/4/94	1	150
13/4/94	1	196
9/5/94	1	132
14/5/94	1	105
17/5/94	1	183
17/5/94	1	234
18/5/94	1	119
18/5/94	1	88
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Total	11	1696
Mean weight		154.2

Discussion

This new for Cyprus fishing activity is considered promising since the price offered for this new product is quite high. The fish during certain periods is abundant and is of good quality and in parallel it offers to swordfish fishermen, who for the time being are the only ones fishing for it, an extra income during the period which usually is idle for them.