

**ANALYSIS OF THE CATCH RATE OF JUVENILE BIGEYE
(*THUNNUS OBESUS*, LOWE, 1839) DEPENDING ON THE DEPTH
OF THE PURSE SEINE NET USED BY THE TROPICAL FLEET**

Alicia Delgado de Molina¹, Javier Ariz¹, J. Carlos Santana¹ and Begoña Sotillo²

SUMMARY

*This document presents several results obtained in the ABYSS project whose main aim is to study the possible relationship between the catch rate of juvenile bigeye and the depth of the purse seine net in order to implement the most suitable management measures using the results obtained. The project was undertaken between June 2008 and April 2010. Temperature and depth loggers were deployed in the nets of 11 tuna purse seiners operating under the Spanish flag in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. 1648 sets were analyzed, which provided 61933 tons of tropical tuna: yellowfin (*Thunnus albacares*, Bonnaterre, 1788), skipjack (*Katsuwonus pelamis*, Linnaeus, 1758) and bigeye (*Thunnus obesus*, Lowe, 1839). The depth of the nets used ranged from 220 to 309 metres and the fishing depths reached varied between 65 and 226 metres. This means that the percentage of mean depth vis-à-vis net size was 56.73% (range between 20% and 83%). The speed of the falling net varied between 0.1 and 0.2 metres per second. In addition to the analysis of the catches estimated by the skipper, the study was made using specific composition data of the catch corrected by multi-species sampling. On this assumption, the analysis was reduced to 400 sets with 17230 tons of catch. No differential bathymetric distribution was observed between the three species in any of the oceans and in either of the two analyses undertaken (with and without specific correction).*

RÉSUMÉ

*Ce document présente les résultats obtenus dans le cadre du projet ABYSS dont l'objectif principal est l'étude de la relation pouvant exister entre le taux de capture du thon obèse juvénile et la profondeur du mouillage du filet de senne en vue de mettre en œuvre les mesures de gestion les plus adéquates conformément aux résultats obtenus. Le projet a été mené entre le mois de juin 2008 et le mois d'avril 2010. Des enregistreurs de température et de profondeur ont été déployés dans les filets de 11 senneurs thoniers opérant sous pavillon espagnol dans les océans Atlantique, indien et Pacifique. 1648 sorties ont été analysées, représentant une capture totale de 61.933 tonnes de thonidés tropicaux : albacore (*Thunnus albacares*, Bonnaterre, 1788), listao (*Katsuwonus pelamis*, Linnaeus, 1758) et thon obèse (*Thunnus obesus*, Lowe, 1839). La profondeur des filets oscillait entre 220 et 309 m, tandis que la profondeur de pêche variait de 65 m à 226 m. Cela signifie que le pourcentage de la profondeur moyenne par rapport à la taille du filet était de 56,73 % (dans une fourchette oscillant entre 20 % et 83 %). La vitesse de chute du filet variait entre 0,1 et 0,2 mètres par seconde. Outre l'analyse des prises estimées par le capitaine, l'étude a été réalisée en utilisant les données de composition spécifique de la prise corrigée par un échantillonnage plurispécifique. Sur la base de ce postulat, l'analyse a été réduite à 400 sorties représentant 17.230 tonnes de prises. Aucune distribution bathymétrique différentielle n'a été observée entre les trois espèces dans aucun des océans et dans aucune des deux analyses entreprises (avec et sans correction spécifique).*

RESUMEN

En este documento se presentan algunos de los resultados obtenidos en el proyecto ABYSS, cuyo objetivo principal es el estudio de la posible relación entre la captura de patudo juvenil y la profundidad de calado de la red de cerco para poder tomar después las medidas de gestión más convenientes, acordes con los resultados obtenidos. Se desarrolló entre junio de 2008 y abril de 2010. Se utilizaron registradores de temperatura y profundidad que se situaron en las

¹Instituto Español de Oceanografía, Centro Oceanográfico de Canarias, Apdo. de Correos 1373, 38080, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain.

²OPAGAC (Convenio ABYSS -OPAGAC-SGM).

redes de 11 atuneros cerqueros de bandera española que faenaron en los océanos Atlántico, Índico y Pacífico. Se analizaron 1648 lances que proporcionaron una captura total de 61.933 t de túnidos tropicales: rabil (*Thunnus albacares*, Bonnaterre, 1788), listado (*Katsuwonus pelamis*, Linnaeus, 1758) y patudo (*Thunnus obesus*, Lowe, 1839). Las redes empleadas tenían un calado comprendido entre 220-309 metros y las profundidades alcanzadas variaron entre los 65-226 metros. Esto supone que el porcentaje medio de calado con respecto al tamaño de la red fue del 56,73% (rango de 20-83%). La velocidad de caída de la red varió entre 0,1 y 0,2 m por segundo. Además del análisis de las capturas estimadas por el patrón se ha hecho el estudio con los datos de composición específica de la captura corregida mediante el muestreo multiespecífico habitual. Con este supuesto el análisis se redujo a 400 lances con 17.230 t de captura. No se observó una distribución batimétrica diferenciada entre las tres especies en ninguno de los océanos, en los dos análisis realizados (sin corrección y con corrección específica).

KEYWORDS

Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Ocean, tropical tuna, purse seine, catches, fishing effort, FADs, seamount, depth net

1. Introduction

The four Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) that manage tropical tuna in three oceans: ICCAT (International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas), IOTC (Indian Ocean Tuna Commission), IATTC (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission) and WCPFC (Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission) have detected a common problem in purse-seine fishery over FADs, involving the incidental catch of juvenile bigeye (*Thunnus obesus*, Lowe 1839). Several Scientific Committees of these RFMOs have considered regulatory measures aimed at modifying purse-seine nets under the assumption, not proven, that the greater the depth of the net, the higher the catch of juvenile bigeye.

The ABYSS project was carried out to analyze this assumption. The main aim of this project is to study the possible relationship between the catch rate of juvenile bigeye and the depth of the purse-seine net in order to implement the most suitable management measures according to the results obtained.

During several previous observer campaigns data were collected about the effective depth of the tuna purse-seine nets, but to date no analysis has been made to determine the possible relationship between the increased catch rate of bigeye and the use of deeper nets. The hypothesis is that the deeper the net, the higher the catch rate of bigeye, based on a possible stratification of the species in the water column under FADs.

If the increased catch rate of juvenile bigeye in association with net depth is demonstrated, consideration could be given to modifying fishing gear in order to reduce incidental catches, while attempting to secure the yield of the target species. Conversely, alternative measures would need to be sought.

This project has been undertaken by personnel from the Tropical Tuna Team of the Canary Islands Oceanographic Centre of the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO) on behalf of The Big Frozen Tuna Vessels Producers Association (OPAGAC) and financed by the General Secretariat of the Sea (Ministry of the Environment, Marine and Rural Affairs of Spain).

2. Methodology

The data was provided for 11 ships: 4 in the Atlantic, 3 in the Indian and 4 in the Pacific Oceans.

2.1 Duration and area of work

The project was implemented in the waters of the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans, and data was gathered between June 2008 and April 2010. 11 vessels provided the data: 4 in the Atlantic, 2 in the Indian and 4 in the Pacific oceans.

The working areas in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans were located as follows: between 16°N-13°S and 13°E-26°W; 14°N-16°S and 40°E-80°E; and 9°N-12°S and 137°E-098°W, respectively. **Figure 1** shows maps of the approximate area where fishing took place in each ocean.

2.2 Vessel characteristics

Table 1 outlines the main characteristics of the vessels participating in the project: date of entry into service, overall length (in metres), power (in hp) and hold capacity (in cubic metres).

All vessels participating in the project are freezer tuna purse-seiners operating under the Spanish flag and associated with OPAGAC.

2.3 Fishing gear characteristics

Table 2 lists, from lesser to greater depth, details about the purse-seine nets used by the vessels participating in this project: headline, leadline (chain) and depth, all measured in metres.

2.4 Sensor characteristics

Data collection was carried out using 26 autonomous temperature and depth loggers whose specifications were as follows:

Brand: **NKE**

Model: **SP2T300** (with protection)

Depth range: **0 - 300 m**

Accuracy: **0.90 m**

Temperature range: **-5°C to +35°C**

Accuracy: **0.05°C in the range 0 to +20°C / 0.1°C** outside this range 1sec response time (90%)

Internal clock with calendar (**+/-1.3 min/month**).

Sampling frequency of 1 sec to 99 h: It is possible to work using 2 different sampling frequencies for temperature profiles.

Memory range: up to 300 000 data (temperature + depth).

Power: permits up to 50 000 000 measurements (temperature + depth), over 3 years of constant operation at 2 sec sampling frequency.

Mechanical characteristics:

Size: **120 mm x 25 mm**.

Weight: **75g** out of water.

Each sensor is enclosed in stainless steel casing for shock protection during manoeuvres.

Data are easily collected electromagnetically from the sensor by means of a data pencil and then downloaded to a computer using the WinMemo programme. The extracted files provide a view of the data recorded during the time the sensor was activated.

In total, 11 data pencils were used (one per vessel).

Figures 2a and **2b** give different views of the depth gauges and protective casing used, showing the knocks received when casting and hauling during the set.

2.5 Sensor installation and data collection

The first stage of the project consisted of installing autonomous loggers (sensors, NKE SP2T300), already used by the IEO in observer campaigns and whose results were considered accurate for gathering the necessary information about temperature and depth. Each vessel was equipped with 2 sensors—of which one was a replacement—with their corresponding steel casing and data pencils.

It was decided that each vessel would install one of the sensors in the net, in the central section of the leadline, which is the part that reaches the maximum depth. Start-up was arranged for early morning, before the first set of the day, and shutdown for the end of the working day. The data were then downloaded to a computer and saved in a duly numbered file.

For this experiment, the sensors were programmed so that the loggers recorded each minute, thereby providing constant information about depth and temperature throughout the entire fishing operation. **Figure 3** shows an example of the log corresponding to one set, with depth and temperature records.

2.6 Catch data

For each set, in addition to temperature and depth data, catch data was also recorded per weight category and per species. These data were based on the skipper's estimations, which mean that there could be a bias in the specific composition of juvenile catches, as occurs in logbooks.

Each vessel was provided with a form on which the following data was to be noted down for each set:

- Date (D M Y)
- Location (latitude and longitude in degrees and minutes)
- Set number: Numbering will begin at one and will be correlative with the total duration of the project, for each boat.
- Free school, FAD and Seamount: It will mark the appropriate box
- Current: Data will be taken about the surface current, current direction and strength in knots.

The catches in each set will be noted according to species in the boxes corresponding to yellowfin, skipjack, bigeye and others (in tons) and the average weight of the specimens (in kilograms).

2.7 Information transfer

At the end of every trip, each vessel was required to transfer the data from the sensor, in addition to the information collected in the forms.

2.8 Data processing

Each vessel sent the data in different formats (dates, currents, weight, etc.), which were then merged into a single format to facilitate subsequent analysis. Weight categories were the same commonly used by this fleet

Catch data were analyzed depending on the depth of the set. It is evident that, irrespective of the maximum depth of the net, the catch adjudicated to each set corresponds to that made between the depth and the surface.

2.8.1 Correction of the specific composition

Catch data are based on estimations by the skipper, as are the fishing logs. In 1984, the ICCAT Working Group on Juvenile Tropical Tuna (ANON, 1984) established that there was a bias in the logbooks. As a result, from 1980 onwards, a method to correct the specific composition of the catches was used. This method was reviewed in 1991, after the results of a project financed by the EU and undertaken by the IEO and the IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, France) (Pallarés y Petit, 1998). For this reason, catch data provided by vessels were corrected through sampling on land by sampling teams set up in the main landing ports. This analysis led to a reduction in sample size from 1648 sets with estimations of catch by the skipper to 400 sets with the corrected specific composition.

3. Results

3.1 Depth of net closure

The results obtained were based on the data from 1648 sets of which 471 (29%) were made in the Atlantic, 603 (37%) in the Indian and 574 (35%) in the Pacific Oceans. As for the fishing mode, 380 sets (23%) were made over free schools, 1223 (74%) with FADs and 45 (3%) over seamounts. Net depth length varied between 220 m and 309 m (**Table 2**).

The maximum depth reached by the gear in each set throughout the experiment was registered for each vessel (or net). The maximum depth reached in a set was 226 m and the depths for all the sets varied between 65 m and 226 m. **Figure 4** shows the depths reached in each set for each net.

The depth reached by the net and the percentage it represents vis-à-vis net depth was calculated for each set. The mean percentage of net closure according to net depth was 56.73% and the values ranged from 20% to 83%.

Figure 5 shows the percentages of net closure for each set, according to the depth of purse line closure and the size of the falling net.

3.2 Speed of the falling net

The speed of the falling gear was established per set for each vessel. The falling speeds generally varied between 0.1 and 0.2 m/sec, with higher and lower values found in some vessels. These values reflect the speed reached by the net from start of set to maximum depth.

3.3 Catch composition per species and depth

Two analyses of the data from catch and depth of net closure were made for each set. In the first analyses, catch data were provided by the skipper of the vessel (estimations of catch per species) and in the second, catch data were corrected against those from the multi-species sampling taken on landing. It is important to note that the number of sets with sampling is considerably lower than the total number of sets made throughout the experiment. For this reason we extended the analysis to two cases: no specific correction (more coverage) and specific correction (fewer sets)

3.3.1 Bathymetric distribution of the catches (specific composition without correction)

Table 3 shows the catches in weight and percentage per species and fishing mode, as well as set distribution (in number and percentage) per ocean and fishing mode. In total, data were obtained from 1648 sets that provided a catch of 61 933 tons. In the case of the Atlantic, 471 sets were made, resulting in 11 471 tons; 603 sets with 16996 t in the Indian Ocean and 574 sets and 33 466 t in the case of the Pacific.

Most sets (74.2%) were made over FADs. Despite being the most practised (53.5%) in the Atlantic Ocean, this fishing mode is proportionally lower compared with the other oceans (77.4%, Indian Ocean, and 87.8%, Pacific Ocean).

Figure 6 gives the catches of all 3 species according to the depth of purse line closure in each set for all 3 oceans. There appears to be no differential bathymetric distribution between the 3 species. The sets with the highest catch, essentially of skipjack, were found at around 150 metres. Bigeye was found at all depth levels.

3.3.2 Bathymetric distribution of the catches (specific composition with correction)

Table 4 shows the catches, with corrected specific composition, in weight and percentage per species and fishing mode, as well as the distribution of sampled sets (in number and percentage) per ocean and fishing mode. In total, data were obtained from 400 sets that provided a catch of 17 230 tons. In the Atlantic, 196 sets were used, resulting in 6870 tons of catch, while for the Indian were 168 sets with 7 899 t and for the Pacific were 36 sets with 2 461 t.

It is important to highlight the significant proportion of bigeye observed in catches associated with FADs in the Pacific Ocean (35.3%), in comparison with the Atlantic and Indian Oceans where much lower percentages were obtained (15% and 12.5%, respectively).

The analysis of the corrected and uncorrected specific compositions pinpoints that skipjack was the dominant species in all catches with FADs in all 3 oceans.

Figure 7 gives the corrected catches according to the depth of purse line closure in each set for all 3 oceans but with no stratification of the 3 species according to depth. In the Atlantic Ocean, bigeye catches were made in sets between 60 m and 200 m, while the sets with greater catches, only of skipjack and yellowfin, were made at depths ranging from 150 m to 200 m.

4. Discussion

Several purse-seine nets whose net depth and length varied from 220 to 239 metres were used throughout the experiment. As a result, the depth of purse line closure was different in each set, according to environmental conditions (currents), the characteristics of the manoeuvre (vessel speed and duration of hauling in of the purse line) and size of the gear. No set exceeded 226 metres depth. In this experiment, the mean percentage of net depth was 56.73%, with a variation range of between 20% and 83% of the total depth, which confirmed results obtained in previous works (Santana et al., 2002; Delgado de Molina et al., 2004).

The purpose of the study was to check the assumption that the greater the depth of net, the higher the catch of juvenile bigeye. In all likelihood, this assumption emerges from several studies on the fishing depth of tropical species caught with a long-line, in which many authors claim that there is a clear stratification of species, the bigeye being found at greater depths than the skipjack and yellowfin (Mohri et al., 2006; Eslava and Gaertner, 1990; Hanamoto, 1987; Schaefer and Fuller (2006) and Eslava et al., (2003)). In our experiment, however, no differential bathymetric distribution was observed between the 3 species in any of the 3 oceans. This may explain why most bigeye catches are made over floating objects and, unlike in long-line fishing, are essentially composed of skipjack and juvenile bigeye and yellowfin. This may indicate that stratification occurs according to size and that juvenile specimens occupy a level of surface depth irrespective of species.

The observations of numerous authors (Ariz et al., 1993; Fonteneau 1993; Pallarés et al., 1995) and those noted down in our fishing logs since the introduction of artificial floating objects have been confirmed: catches of bigeye in free-swimming schools are low, and juveniles fundamentally make up the catches over artificial floating objects.

Several authors point out differences in the behaviour of different tropical tuna species depending on whether they are associated with floating objects or free schools (Holland et al., 1990; Schaefer and Fuller, 2006). Bigeye not associated with floating objects are therefore found during the day at depths of more than 190 metres; however, bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack associated with floating objects are found at lower depths (Holland et al., 1990; Dagorn et al., 2006). In this study, catches of all three species took place at depths of 50 to 200 metres in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and at 50 to 226 metres in the Atlantic Ocean.

5. Conclusions

- The depth length of the gear varied between 220 m and 309 m, while depth closure ranged from 65 m to 226 m.
- The mean percentage of depth closure, according to net size, was 56.73% (ranging from 20% to 83%).
- The speed of the falling net generally varied between 0.1 and 0.2 m/sec.
- Skipjack was the dominant species in all 3 oceans in the FADs mode. In the Pacific, yields were obtained between 50 m and 200 m and in the Indian and Atlantic, between 50 m and 250 m.
- No differential bathymetric distribution was observed between the 3 species in any of the oceans.
- It would be advisable to extend the study to include additional analyses, for example, by detailed analysis of the catches obtained in the more shallow interval (for example, depth up to 120 m) and/or by stratifying the catches according to time of catch.

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Table 1. Main characteristics of the vessels participating in the project.

	Vessels Name	Date of entry into service	Total Length (m)	Power (HP)	Capacity (m ³)
Pacific Ocean	ALBACORA UNO	01/01/1996	105	6004	2650
	ALBATÚN TRES	30/09/2004	115	6696	3095
	AURORA B	19/05/1998	84.1	4080	2060
	ROSITA C	30/10/2000	84.1	4076	2060
Indian Ocean	ALBACÁN	04/09/1991	85.85	4023	1900
	ALBACORA CUATRO	16/02/1974	83.45	4000	1850
	ALBATÚN DOS	30/04/2004	116	7795	3250
Atlantic Ocean	ALBACORA QUINCE	04/05/1983	85.85	4580	1850
	ALMADRABA DOS	26/11/1979	66	4800	1350
	ALMADRABA UNO	13/03/1977	52.25	3000	925
	KURTZIO	19/02/1976	56.1	2200	750
	MAR DE SERGIO	26/06/1984	84.2	5704	1850
	MATXIKORTA	19/01/1976	56.1	2200	850

Table 2. Fishing gear characteristics of each vessel.

Headline (m)	Leadline (m)	Depth (m)
1450	1700	220
1720	2000	220
1600	1800	230
1590	1900	240
1387	1650	245
1300	1600	255
1600	1800	260
1750	1900	270
1598	-	280
1600	-	280
1671	-	285
1699	1971	289
1799	-	309

Table 3. Weight (top) (uncorrected specific composition) and percentages (down) of each species per fishing mode and Sets (number (top) and percentage (down)) per ocean and fishing mode catch.

	PACIFIC OCEAN				INDIAN OCEAN				ATLANTIC OCEAN				3 OCEANS			
	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL
YFT (t)	173	5481	0	5654	1918	3078	1119	6115	4481	1400	0	5881	6572	9959	1119	17650
SKJ (t)	1642	20686	0	22328	157	9133	497	9787	297	4645	0	4942	2096	34464	497	37057
BET (t)	15	5469	0	5484	213	729	152	1094	105	543	0	648	333	6741	152	7226
TOTAL tons	1830	31636	0	33466	2288	12940	1768	16996	4883	6588	0	11471	9001	51164	1768	61933
TOTAL sets	70	504	0	574	91	467	45	603	219	252	0	471	380	1223	45	1648

	PACIFIC OCEAN				INDIAN OCEAN				ATLANTIC OCEAN				3 OCEANS		
	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount
% YFT	9.5	17.3	0.0	16.9	83.8	23.8	63.3	36.0	91.8	21.3	0.0	51.3	73.0	19.5	63.3
%SKJ	89.7	65.4	0.0	66.7	6.9	70.6	28.1	57.6	6.1	70.5	0.0	43.1	23.3	67.4	28.1
%BET	0.8	17.3	0.0	16.4	9.3	5.6	8.6	6.4	2.2	8.2	0.0	5.6	3.7	13.2	8.6
% Catch by Type	5.5	94.5	0.0	100	13.5	78.1	10.4	100	42.8	57.4	0.0	100	14.5	82.6	2.9
% TOTAL sets	12.2	87.8	0.0	100	15.1	77.4	7.5	100	46.5	53.5	0.0	100	23.1	74.2	2.7

Table 4. Weight (top) (corrected specific composition) and percentages (down) of each species per fishing mode and Sets (number (top) and percentage (down)) per ocean and fishing mode catch.

	PACIFIC OCEAN				INDIAN OCEAN				ATLANTIC OCEAN				3 OCEANS			
	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL
YFT (t)	0	194	0	194	584	1606	219	2409	1277	1727	0	3004	1861	3526	219	5606
SKJ (t)	0	1398	0	1398	41	4174	325	4541	46	2939	0	2985	87	8511	325	8924
BET (t)	0	869	0	869	37	829	82	949	60	822	0	882	97	2521	82	2701
TOTAL tons	0	1461	0	1461	663	6610	626	7899	1382	5488	0	6870	2045	14559	626	17230
TOTAL sets	0	36	0	36	11	146	11	168	32	164	0	196	43	346	11	400

	PACIFIC OCEAN				INDIAN OCEAN				ATLANTIC OCEAN				3 OCEANS		
	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount	TOTAL	Free School	FAD's	Sea Mount
% YFT	0.0	7.9	0.0	7.9	88.1	24.3	35.0	30.5	92.4	31.5	0.0	43.7	91.0	24.2	35
%SKJ	0.0	56.8	0.0	56.8	6.3	63.2	51.9	57.5	3.3	53.6	0.0	43.4	4.3	58.5	51.9
%BET	0.0	35.3	0.0	35.3	5.6	12.5	13.1	12.0	4.4	15.0	0.0	12.8	4.8	17.3	13.1
% Catch by Type	0.0	100	0.0	100	8	84	8	100	20	80	0.0	100	11.9	84.5	3.6
% TOTAL sets	0.0	100	0.0	100	6.5	86.9	6.5	100	16.3	83.7	0.0	100	10.8	86.5	2.8

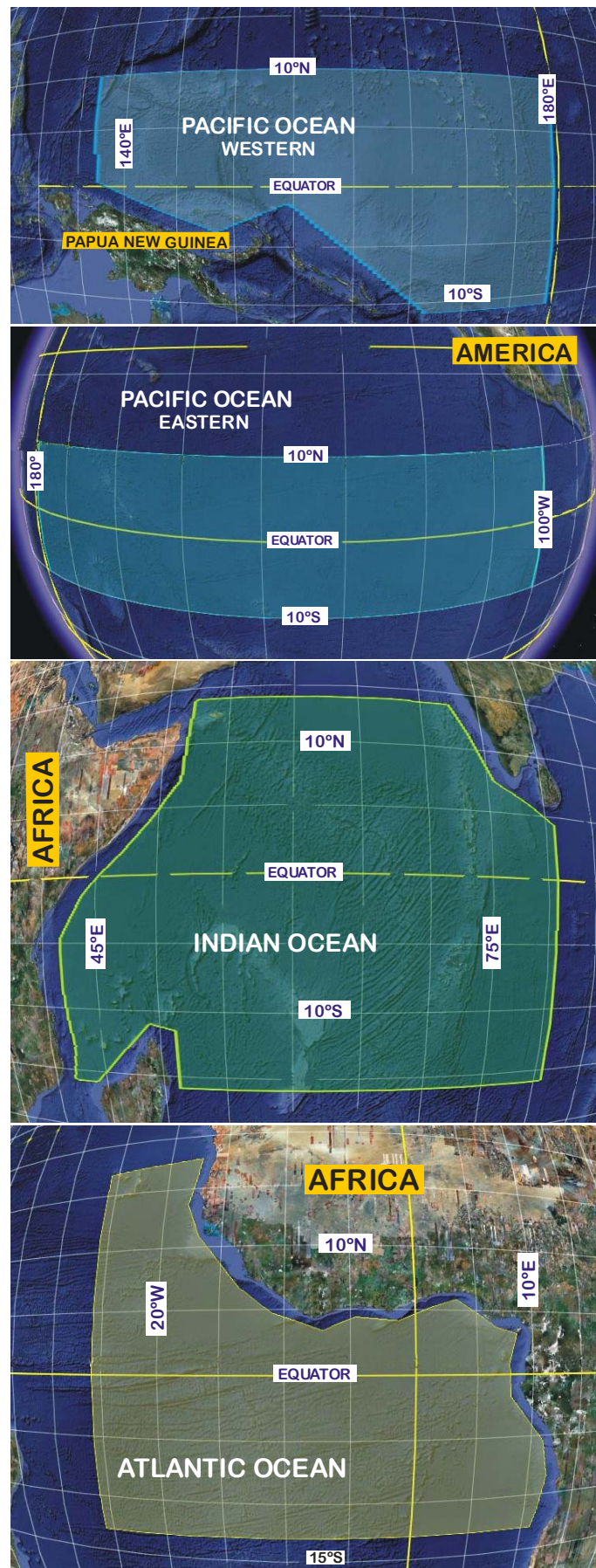


Figure 1. The four working areas.



Figure 2a. Different views of one sensor.



Figure 2b. Protective casing of a sensor (damage during a set).

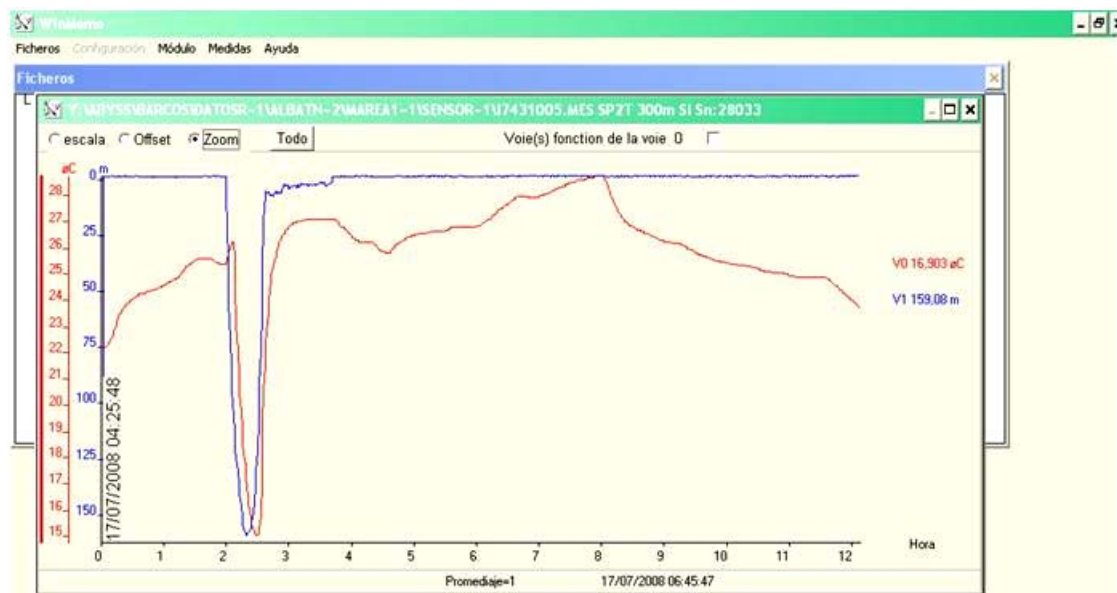


Figure 3. Sensor log of a set (blue indicates the depth (in meters) and red that of temperatures (in °C)).

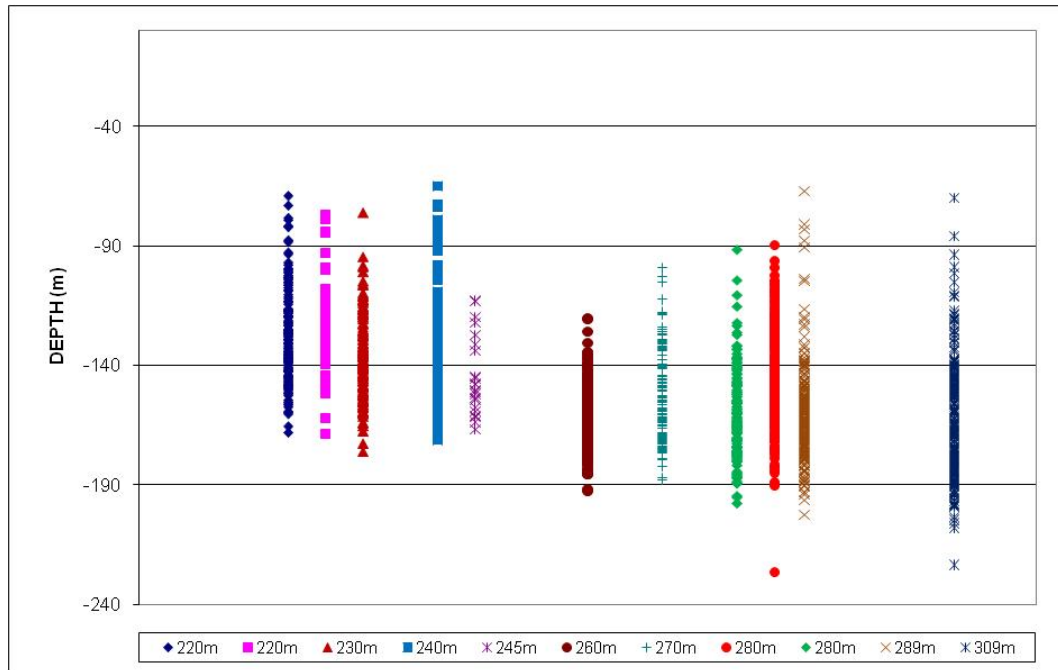


Figure 4. Depth reached by each net in each set. The axis of abscissas shows the depth meters.

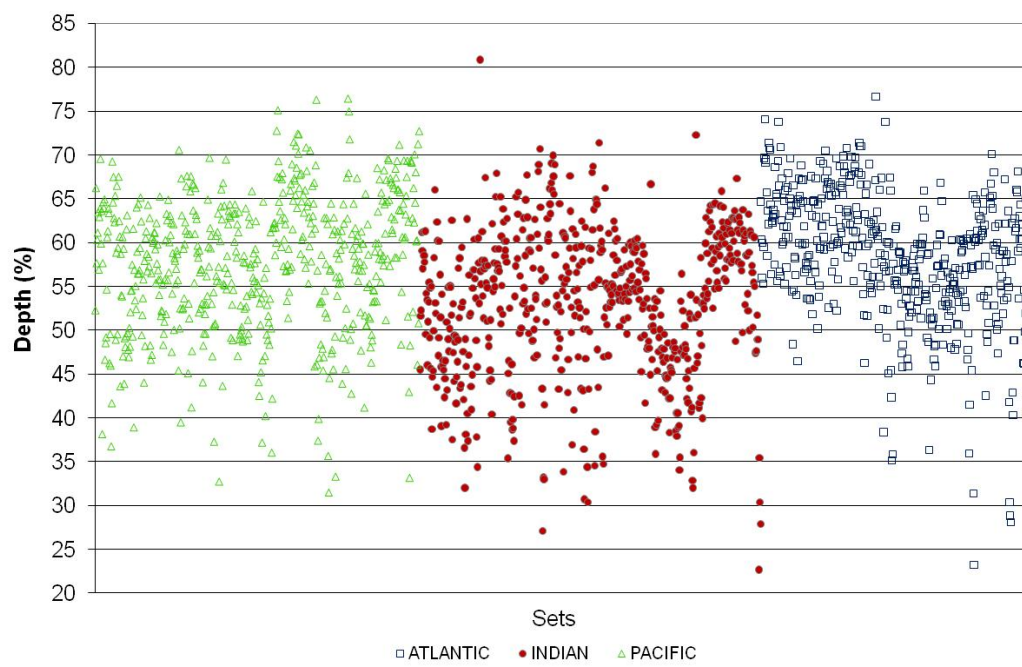


Figure 5. Percentage of the depth of the net in each set. The colours show the sets made in each ocean.

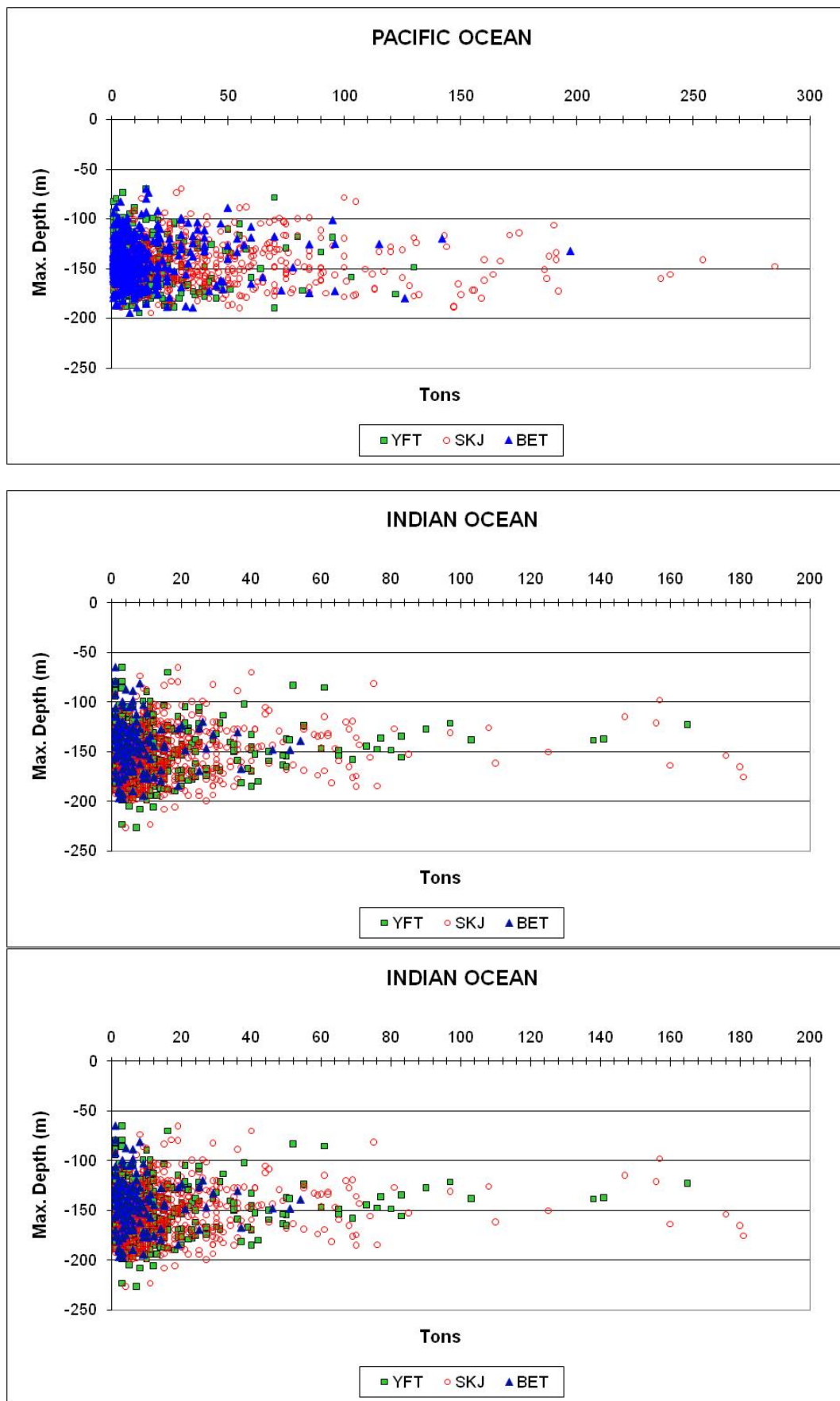


Figure 6. Catches (no specific correction) per species according to depth of purse line closure in each set for all 3 oceans.

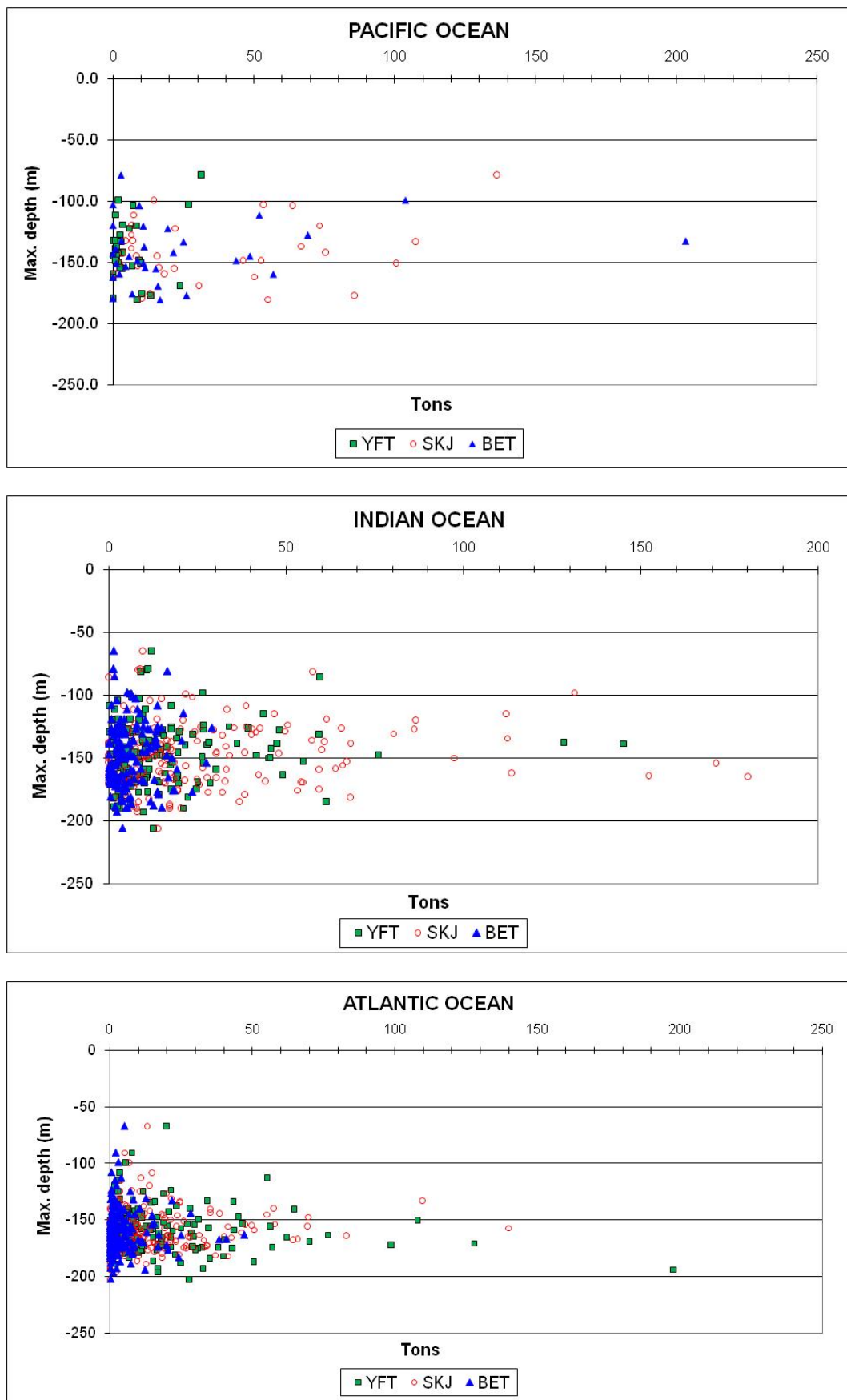


Figure 7. Catches (with specific correction) per species according to depth of purse line closure in each set for all 3 oceans.