Atlantic Tropical tuna Tagging Programme
ICCAT/AOTTP NEWSLETTER

A quarterly newsletter published by the ICCAT Secretariat

No. 2

Overview: The AOTTP Programme (http://www.iccat.int/AOTTP/en/) is collecting tag-recapture data from Atlantic Ocean tropical tuna fisheries to improve their management. AOTTP will tag 120,000 fish using conventional and electronic tags. The tag-recapture data are being used to improve the estimation of biological parameters needed for doing population size assessments.

Tagging at sea: AOTTP is now tagging tuna actively around Madeira and Braziland, since we last reported a further 10,000 fish have been tagged and released taking the total to nearly 60,000 almost half way to the target. Additionally nearly 9000 fish have been double-tagged which allows 'tag-shedding' rates to be estimated: an important statistic needed for accurate population studies from tag-recapture data.
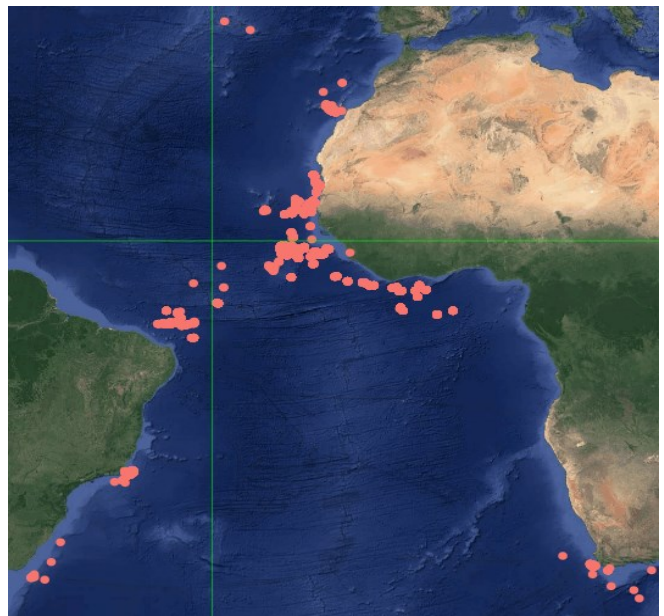
Map showing locations of yellowfin tuna tagged and released by AOTTP between June 2016 and Sept 2017

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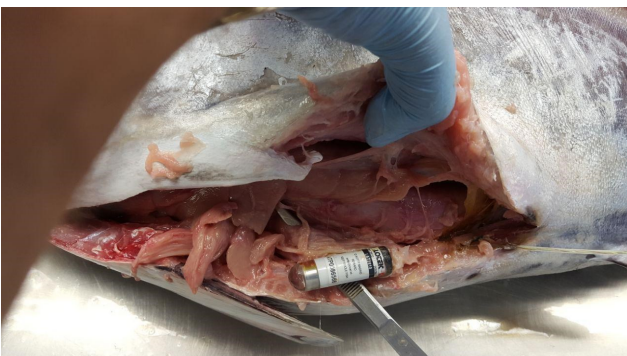
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Crew of the Ponta Calhau pole and line fishing off the Savage Islands (Madeira).

Tag recovery: Since June 3,000 additional tags have been recovered, and rewards distributed, taking the current total to nearly 11,000. Tags are now also being found by the AOTTP team in Brazil and we have evidence that tropical tuna are migrating right across the Atlantic, in an east to west direction.

AOTTP is also surgically implanting tiny electronic data-loggers in tuna. These tags are relatively expensive but, if found and returned to ICCAT, provide detailed information on migration behaviour and habitat preferences. One was recently recovered in West Africa after nearly 3 months inside the body cavity of a yellowfin tuna .

AOTTP tagging team—northern Brazil
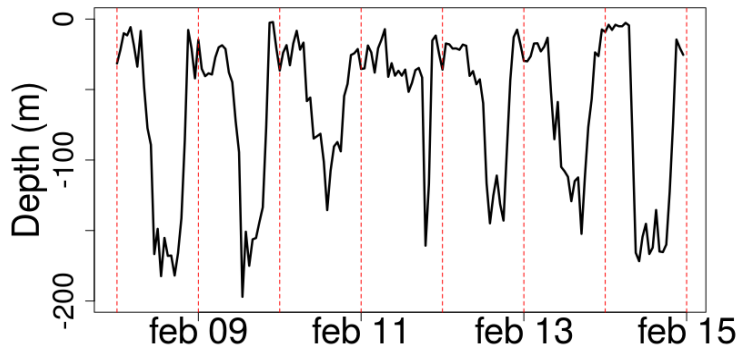
A week of daily diving behaviour by a yellowfin tuna determined from an internal data-logger tag.

AOTTP internal electronic tag recently returned after 3 months at sea.

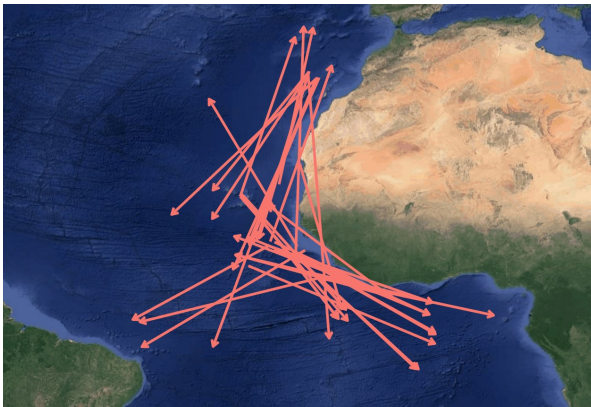
AOTTP awareness-raising in Brazil.

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AOTTP bigeye tuna migrations > 1,000 nautical miles.

Scientific data: The date, locations and sizes of the released and recovered fish provide important scientific information. The time during which a tagged fish is free in the sea before being recaptured is an important statistic. Clearly AOTTP wants to limit the number of short-term recaptures to a minimum. Maximum times at liberty for bigeye, skipjack, and yellowfin so far recorded are, 413, 404, and 426 days respectively. Any change in the body length observed also provides information on growth rates.
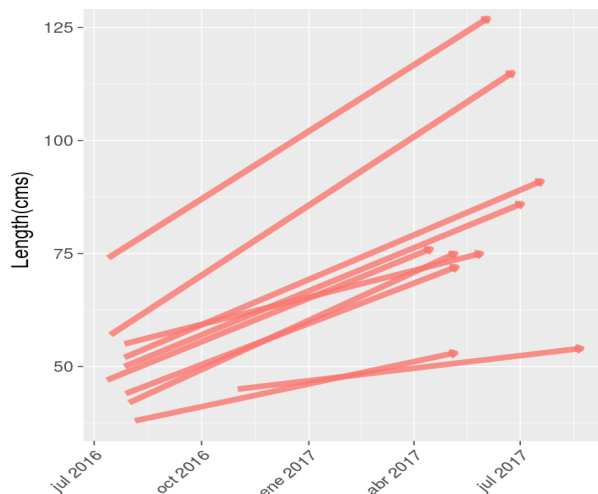
Change in length (growth) between release and recapture of 10 tagged yellowfin tuna at liberty for more than 9 months.

Other activities

- AOTTP will hold four capacity building workshops at the end of this year and beginning of next. The first will be in Madrid and the following two in Abidjan. Subjects to be covered will include estimating tuna growth, mortality and movement from tag-recapture data.

- AOTTP presented at four ICCAT SCRS meetings this year.

- AOTTP presented at a lunchtime conference in Brussels in June, http://ec.europa.eu/europaid/news-and-events/atlantic-ocean-tropical-tuna-tagging-programme-aottp.en

- AOTTP 2nd Interim Report prepared and submitted to the EU in June. Accepted in August.

- Jesus Garcia started in Madrid in August as AOTTP Database/Website Specialist.

- Tagging at sea ongoing off Brazil, Madeira, USA, and Uruguay. An opportunity to tag in the Guyana Basin is being explored.

- Tag-seeding work being expanded in West Africa and planned for Brazil.

- The creation of the ICCAT-AOTTP pan-Atlantic Otolith Reference Set (will improve the ageing of tropical tuna which is very important in population assessment) will start in November.

- AOTTP tags recovered in Thailand (transhipment).

- Six working documents on AOTTP activities presented to the SCRS Tropical Tuna Species Group Meeting.

- AOTTP Steering Group meeting held in September 2017.

- Calls for Tender for Phase 2 Tagging NW Atlantic launched.

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