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## **Australia's 2008–09 Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishing Season**

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## Executive summary

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The 2010 Fishing Season Report summarises catches and fishing activities in the Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) Fishery up to and including the 2008–09 quota year (Dec–Nov) and some preliminary results for the 2009–11 season. It also provides a summary of the history of the Australian SBT Fishery and fishing by Japan in the Australian Fishing Zone under bilateral access agreements.

A total of 30 commercial fishing vessels landed SBT in Australian waters in 2008–09 for a total catch of 5242 t. A total of 95.7% of the catch was taken by purse seine with the remainder taken by longline. Seven purse seiners fished off South Australia for the farm operations during the 2008–09 quota year, but live bait, pontoon-towing and feeding vessels were also involved. Purse seine fishing commenced in early December 2008 and finished in early April 2009.

The 2008–09 quota year catch was 5242 t from a quota of 5265 t. Length frequency data from the purse seine fishery from 2005–06 to 2006–07 indicated a shift to smaller fish, but this trend has showed signs of reversal since 2007–08, possibly due to the targeting of larger fish.

In the first year of the 2009–11 fishing season, in the farm sector, observers monitored 9.0% of purse seine sets where fish were retained and 13.5% of the estimated SBT catch. In 2009, observers also monitored 17.2% of longline hook effort in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF) during the months and in the areas of the SBT migration through that fishery. Observers were present on three purse seine trips in the ETBF; 104 (5 t) SBT were observed caught on the second of these trips and one SBT was caught whilst searching on the third trip. Observers monitored 8.5% of longline hook effort in the entire Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery, where three vessels operated in the fishery during this period.

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## Introduction

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This report summarises catches and fishing activities in the 2008–09 quota year<sup>1</sup> of the Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna (*Thunnus maccoyii*; SBT) Fishery. It also provides preliminary data on the first year of the 2009–11 fishing season for the surface fishery and a summary of the history of the Australian SBT Fishery. Caton et al. (1995) provide a more detailed historical description of the fishery.

## History

Troll catches of SBT were reported as early as the 1920s off the east coast of Australia, but significant commercial fishing for SBT commenced in the early 1950s with the establishment of a pole-and-live-bait fishery off New South Wales (NSW), South Australia (SA) and, later (1970), Western Australia (WA). Purse seine gear overtook pole as the main method and catches peaked at 21 500 t in 1982. The bulk of this early Australian catch of SBT was canned. Following quota reductions in 1983–84, the WA pole fishery for very small juveniles closed down and the south-eastern fishery began to target larger juveniles to supply the Japanese sashimi market. Surface catches were further reduced between 1989 and 1995 when about half of the Australian total allowable catch (TAC) was taken by Australia–Japan joint venture longliners in the Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ). The joint venture ceased in late 1995. From 1992 to 1998, domestic longliners operating off Tasmania (TAS) and NSW also took around 5–10% of the total Australian catch.

In 1990–91, about 20 t of SBT were transferred to fattening cages in Port Lincoln, SA, to enhance their value. Utilisation of the Australian SBT TAC in ‘farming’ operations increased from 3% of the TAC in 1991–92 to 98% in 1999–2000 and it has remained at similar high levels since.

Following declaration of the AFZ in 1979, Japanese longliners fished under a range of bilateral conditions, real-time monitoring program and joint-venture arrangements until 1997 when Japanese longliners were excluded from all AFZ fishing operations following failure to reach agreement on a global TAC within the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT). Caton and Ward (1996) provided copies of annual subsidiary agreements for the operations of bilateral-licensed longliners in the AFZ from 1979–80 to 1994–95.

## Recent seasons

The Australian domestic SBT catches for the 2008 and 2009 calendar years were 5033 t and 5108 t, respectively. The 2007–08 and 2008–09 quota year catches were 5234 t and 5242 t, respectively (Table 1). See Appendix 1 for quota year dates and Appendix 2 for duration of the farm sector fishing seasons.

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<sup>1</sup> Various time periods, such as ‘calendar years’, ‘fishing seasons’ and ‘quota years’, can be used when describing Australia’s SBT Fishery. Unless otherwise indicated, we have used quota years in this report, but note that fishing seasons of the various fishery components often span quota years. The start and end dates of Australian quota years have varied and are presented in Appendix 1.

**Table 1. Australian Catch by Gear and State for Quota Years 1988–89 to 2007–08**

Quota Year	Western Australia			South Australia			New South Wales			Tasmania			Large Longliners			Australia Total			RTMP	All Gears		
	Albany Pole	Esperance Pole	Long- line	Total	Pole & Purse Seine	Farm Cages	Long- line	Total	Pole & Purse Seine	Long- line	Total	Troll	Long- line	Total	Aust. Charter	Joint- venture	Total	Domestic Surface			Domestic Long- line	Total Long- line
1988–89	204	221	0	425	4872	0	0	4872	0	1	1	2	0	2	0	684	684	5299	1	685	0	5984
1989–90	133	97	0	230	4199	0	0	4199	0	6	6	14	0	14	0	400	400	4443	6	406	0	4849
1990–91	175	45	0	220	2588	0	0	2588	0	15	15	57	0	57	255	881	1136	2865	15	1151	300 <sup>a</sup>	4316
1991–92	17	0	0	17	1629	138	14	1781	34	90	124	36	20	56	59	2057	2116	1854	124	2240	800	4894
1992–93	0	0	0	0	716	722	68	1506	16	238	254	23	44	67	0	2735	2735	1477	350	3085	650	5212
1993–94	0	0	0	0	621	1294	55	1970	0	286	286	7	105	112	0	2299	2299	1922	446	2745	270	4937
1994–95	0	0	0	0	908	1954	2	2864	0	157	157	4	109	113	0	1295	1295	2866	268	1563	650	5080
1995–96	0	0	0	0	1447	3362	0	4809	28	89	117	0	262	262	0	0	0	4837	351	351	0	5188
1996–97	0	0	0	0	2000	2498	0	4497	7	229	236	2	242	244	0	0	0	4507	472	472	0	4978
1997–98	0	0	0 <sup>b</sup>	0	916	3488	0 <sup>b</sup>	4403	0 <sup>c</sup>	475	475	0 <sup>d</sup>	219	219	0	0	0	4433	664	664	0	5097
1998–99	0	0	0 <sup>b</sup>	0	28	4991	0 <sup>b</sup>	5018	0 <sup>c</sup>	97	97	0 <sup>d</sup>	116	116	0	0	0	5016	216	216	0	5232
1999–00	0	0	0 <sup>b</sup>	0	0	5130	13	5143	0	114	114	0	0 <sup>d</sup>	0	0	0	0	5130	127	127	0	5257
2000–01	0	0	0 <sup>b</sup>	0	0	5162	6	5168	0	32	32	0	0 <sup>d</sup>	0	0	0	0	5162	38	38	0	5247
2001–02	0	0	7	7	0	5234	0	5234	0	22 <sup>e</sup>	22 <sup>e</sup>	0	0 <sup>d</sup>	0	0	0	0	5234	29	29	0	5262
2002–03	0	0	0 <sup>f</sup>	0	0	5375	0	5375	0	17	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	5375	17	17	0	5391
2003–04	0	0	0 <sup>f</sup>	0	0 <sup>h</sup>	4874	0 <sup>g</sup>	4874	0	226 <sup>e</sup>	226 <sup>e</sup>	0	20	0	0	0	0	4874	247	247	0	5120
2004–05	0	0	0	0	0	5214	0	5214	0	35	35	0	0	0	0	0	0	5214	35	35	0	5248
2005–06	0	0	0	0	0	5302	0	5302	0	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	5302	6	6	0	5308
2006–07	0	0	0	0	0	5230	0	5230	0	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	5230	4	4	0	5234
2007–08	0	0	0	0	0	5211	0	5211	0	23	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	5211	23	23	0	5234
2008–09	0	0	0	0	0	5015	0	5015	0	227 <sup>i</sup>	227 <sup>i</sup>	0	0	0	0	0	0	5015	227	227	0	5242

See footnotes on following page.

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<sup>a</sup>Note that a further 700 t of Australian quota was 'frozen' (not allocated) in 1990–91.

<sup>b</sup>1997-98 and 1998-99 WA and SA non-farm catches are included in SA pole and purse seine catch, and in 1999–00 and 2000–01 WA longline catch is included in SA longline due to confidentiality guidelines.

<sup>c</sup>1997-98 to 1998-99 NSW pole and purse seine catches are included in NSW longline catch due to confidentiality guidelines.

<sup>d</sup>1997-98 and 1998-99 TAS troll catches are included in TAS longline, and in 1999–00, 2000-01 and 2001-02 TAS longline catch is included in NSW longline due to confidentiality guidelines.

<sup>e</sup>2001-02 and 2003-04 NSW longline catch also includes QLD longline catch due to confidentiality guidelines.

<sup>f</sup>2002-03 and 2003-04 WA longline catch is included in NSW longline due to confidentiality guidelines.

<sup>g</sup>2003-04 SA longline catch is included in NSW longline due to confidentiality guidelines.

<sup>h</sup>2003-04 additional SA purse seine catch that did not go into farm cages is included in SA farm cages catch due to confidentiality guidelines.

<sup>i</sup>2008-09 SA pole-and-line catch, NSW purse seine catch and TAS longline catch included in NSW longline catch due to confidentiality guidelines.

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## Catch and effort

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In the 2008–09 quota year, 95.7% of the Australian catch of SBT was taken by purse seine off SA for the farm operations. The remainder was taken by longline off NSW and TAS, purse seine off NSW and pole-and-line off SA. Australian catch by gear and state for the quota years 1988–89 to 2008–09 is shown in Table 1. Catch by fishing season with number of vessels and vessel search hours is in Appendix 3. The Australian catch of SBT for the calendar years 2008 and 2009 is mapped in Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively.

## Nominal CPUE

Nominal catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) indices for the Australian surface or longline fisheries are not viewed as indicative of stock status. The farm operations use purse seines to catch SBT, with assistance from former pole-and-line vessels as bait vessels and spotter planes. This makes the development of a reasonable measure of nominal fishing effort difficult and complicates the interpretation of catch rates.

Australian longliners generally target more than one species in the fishing season and the targeted effort (number of hooks targeting SBT) is not distinguishable from logbooks. For information, nominal SBT CPUE for all Australian longline effort is provided at Appendix 4.

No SBT have been landed by troll vessels since 1998–99.

## Size composition

In the SA surface fishery there has been reduced competition for SBT among fishers following the introduction of individual transferable quotas (ITQs). Since the late 1980s, the fishery has targeted small (<80 cm) SBT, which were previously taken in bulk for canning (Caton et al. 1995). This resulted in an increase in the average length of SBT landed for fresh-chilled export. As the farm component of the fishery increased in the 1990s, the average length of SBT landed in SA decreased from a peak of 103.2 cm in 1995 to a low of 90.7 cm in 2006 (Table 2). This is primarily due to selective targeting of schools to catch the best sized fish for farming. The average length of SBT landed in SA has since increased and was 97.3 cm in 2009.

Length frequency data from the purse seine fishery for the 2004–05 and 2005–06 fishing seasons showed a marked shift to smaller fish, with the average length reducing slightly from 91.0 cm in 2004–05 to 90.7 cm in the 2005–06 fishing season (Figure 3). This trend reversed in 2006–07 and 2007–08, with the average length in the purse seine fishery increasing to 94.0 cm and 93.9 cm, respectively. Observer reports for 2008–09 indicated a number of shots were aborted owing to the small size of fish, and it appears purse seiners are now targeting schools of larger fish possibly because of the higher prices obtained at harvest (Appendices 5 and 6).

The size trends in the TAS fishery reflect the change in orientation of the fishery from trolling to longlining operations since 1993. In the later years, the fishery was dominated by longlining operations that tended to target larger fish.

Since the late 1980s, the average length of SBT landed in NSW has varied considerably because of the varying contribution of longline and sporadic surface catches to the overall catch levels. However, longline-caught SBT off NSW have, in general, been considerably larger than SBT previously taken in this fishery (Figure 4).

The percentage representation by length in the winter catches of Japanese longliners off eastern TAS from 1988 to 1997 showed substantial changes (Figure 5). Initially, there were two groups representing a group of pre-adults (<130 cm) and older adult SBT (>150 cm). A progressive increase in the representation of younger ages was evident until 1992, and there was also a steady

increase in the average length of the SBT comprising the larger mode. The “trough” between the modes was consistent with intensive removals of small SBT in the early 1980s by Australia’s surface fishery. The increasing representation of small SBT in the eastern TAS longline fishery after 1988 was consistent with the escapement of smaller SBT as a result of the 1988 and 1989 quota reductions in Australia’s surface fishery. The reversal of this trend from 1993 was apparent by the reduced presence of SBT <105 cm in 1994, then of SBT <120 cm in 1995, and SBT <135 cm in 1996. This needs careful attention because one explanation could be reduced overall abundance of three-year-old SBT in 1994, three- and four-year-old SBT in 1995 and three-, four- and five-year-old SBT in 1996. The reduced representation of those sizes was also noted in the reduced abundance of small SBT (<100 cm) in the TAS troll fishery in 1994 and 1995, and the failure of the troll fishery (which depended upon small SBT) in 1996 and 1997.

In 1997, the troll fishery results were poor and the observer data from Japanese longliners for the TAS winter season showed a scarcity of SBT less than 105 cm. However, the 1997 data showed an increased representation of 105 cm SBT compared with 1996. In the absence of Japanese and joint-venture longline operations in the AFZ since 1998, no subsequent comparison is possible.

While the successive reduction in small SBT did not persist in 1997, the previous decreases may signal several weak year classes in the early 1990s. The changed representation of 105 cm SBT in 1997 does not appear to have been associated with any change in fishing or reporting practices.

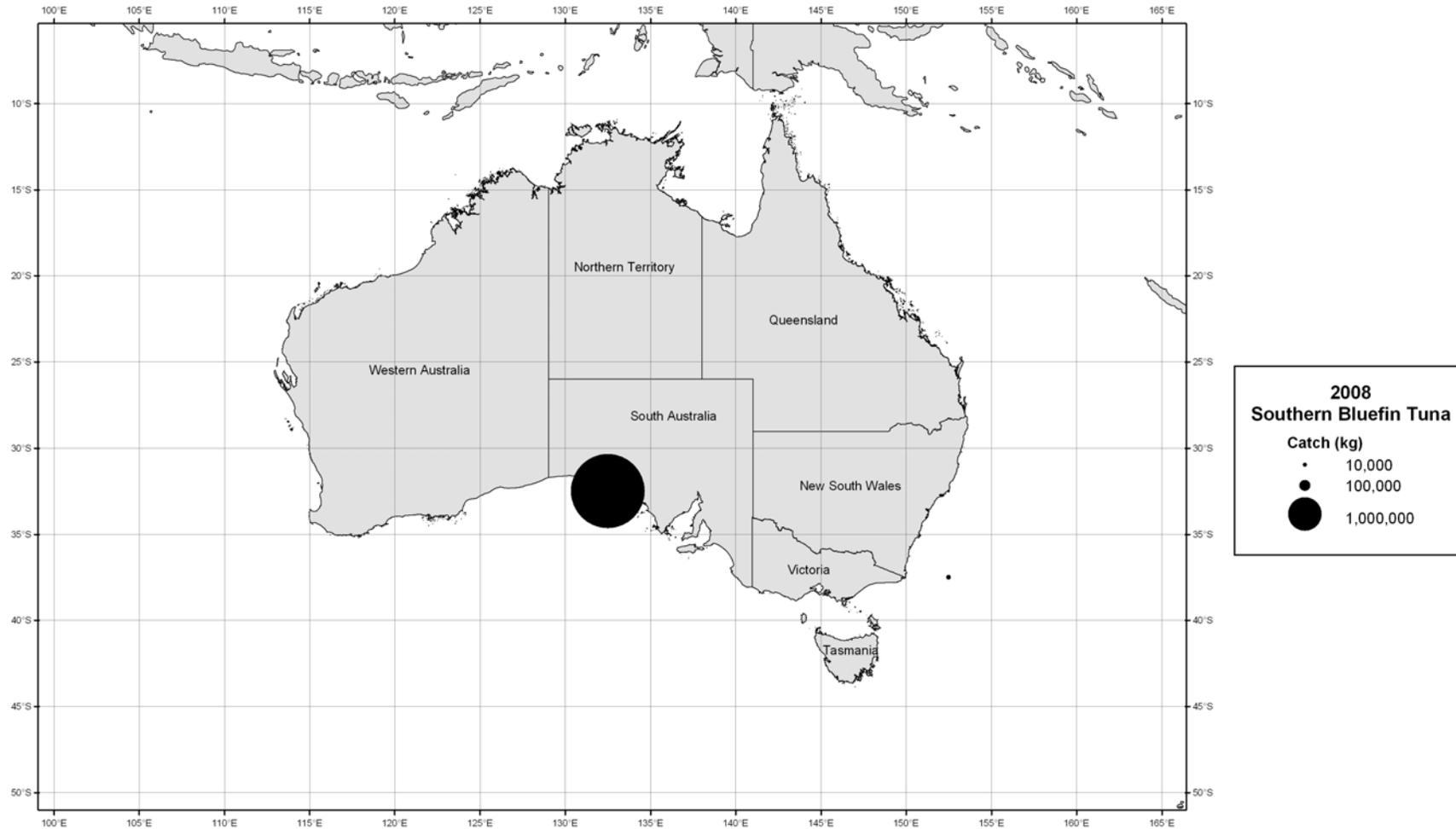
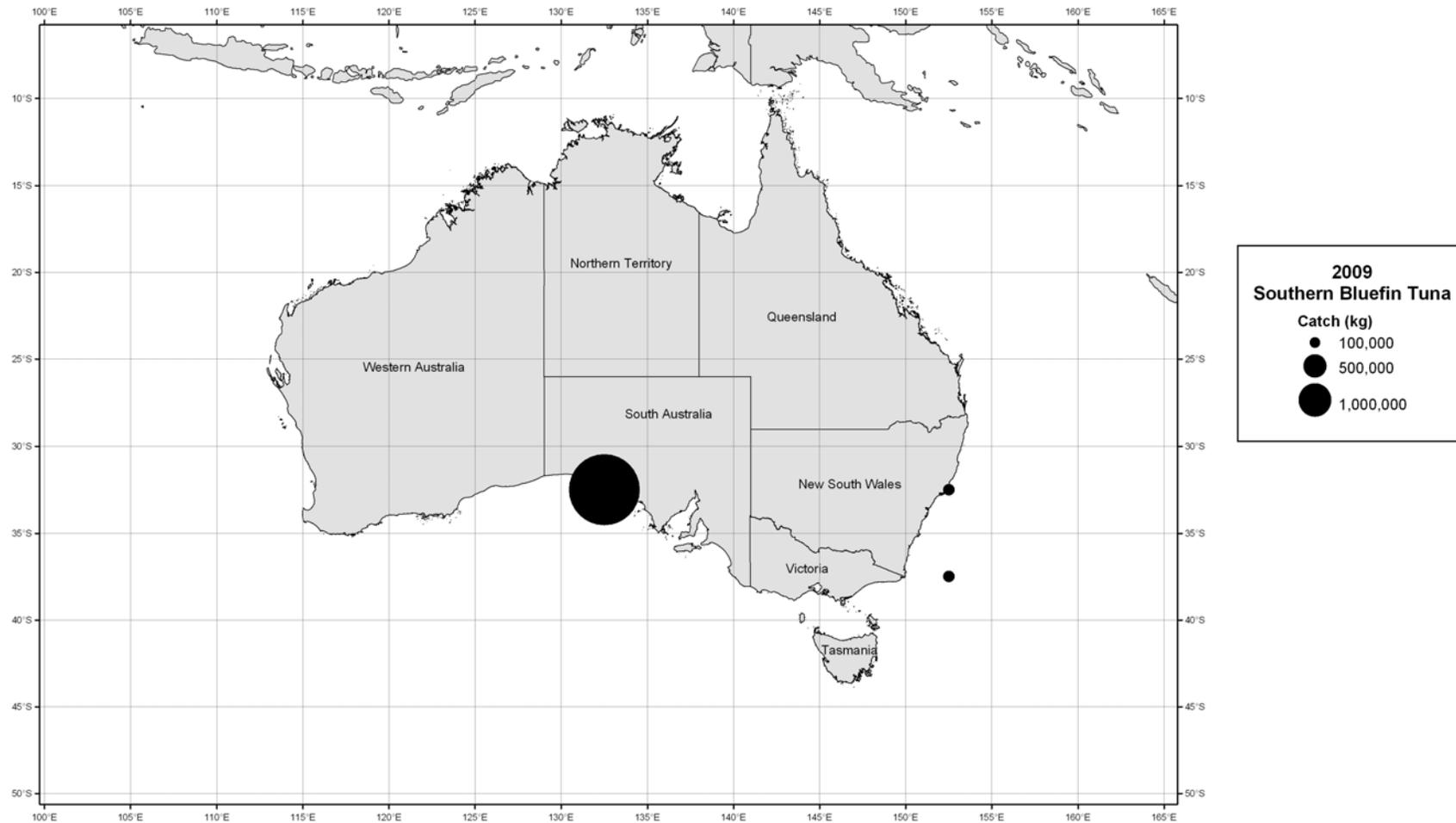


Figure 1. Australian SBT catch in the 2008 calendar year

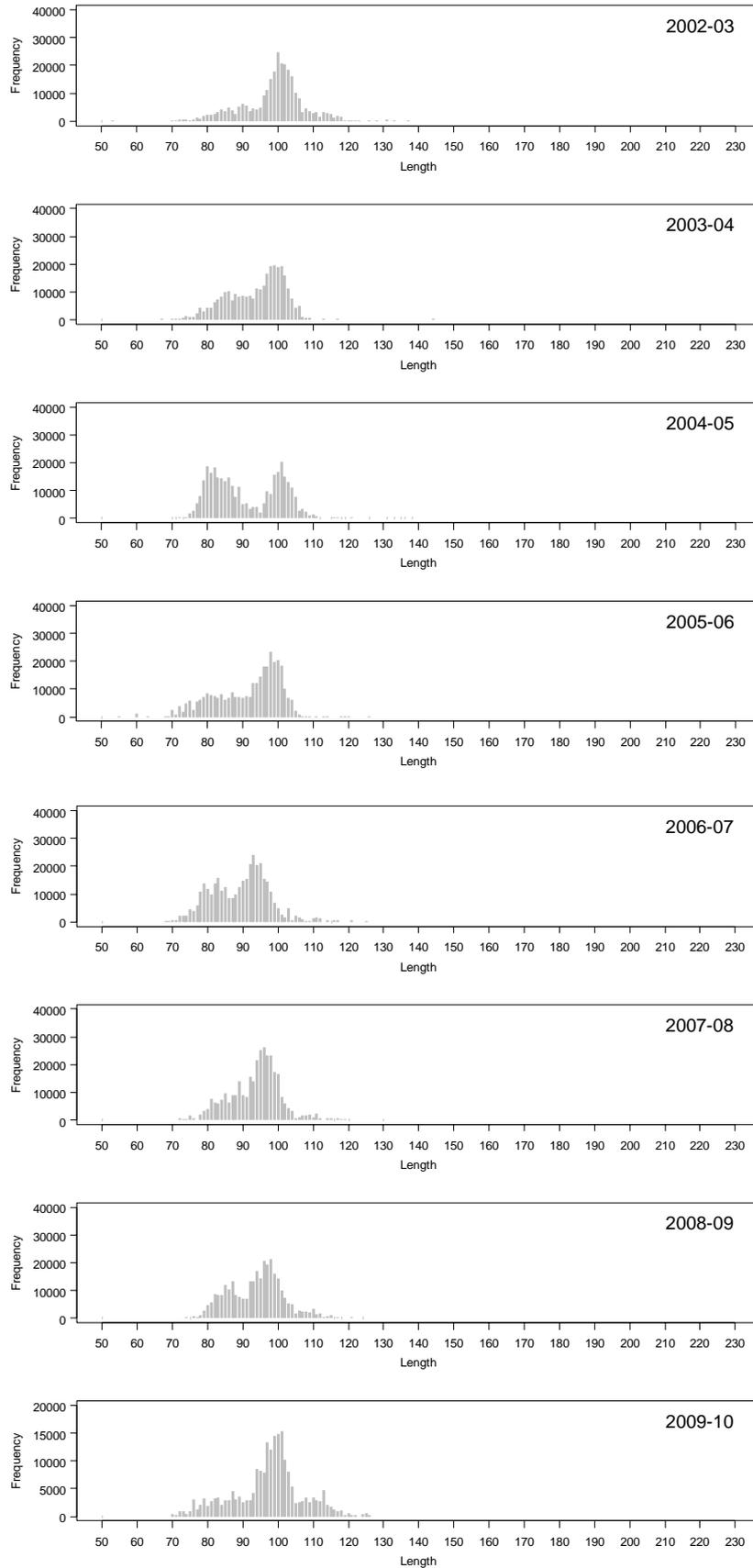


**Figure 2.** Australian SBT catch in the 2009 calendar year

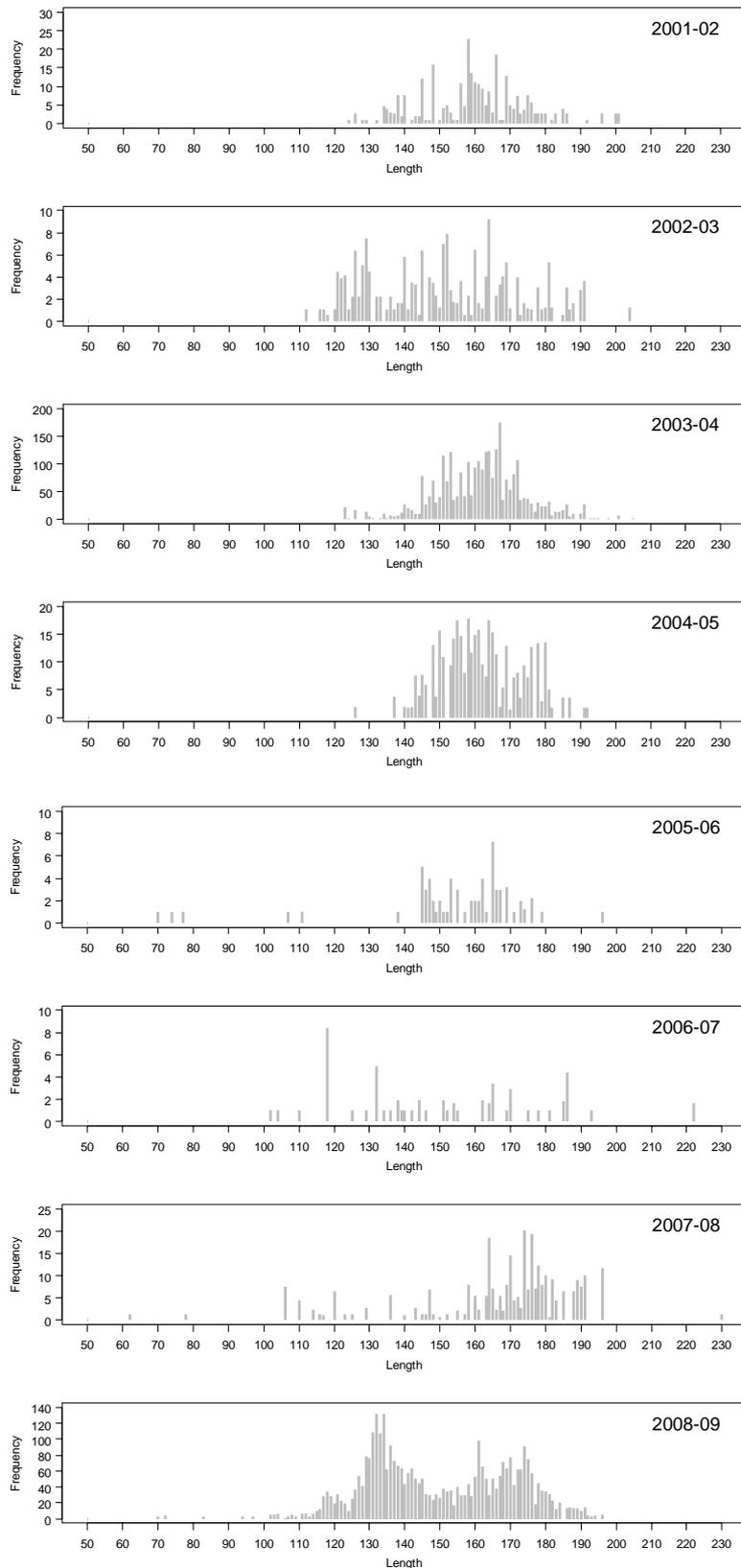
**Table 2.** Average fork length (cm) of SBT landed in each Australian state, 1989 to 2008  
(source: tow cage size monitoring database)

Calendar Year	Western Australia <sup>a</sup>	South Australia <sup>a</sup>	Tasmania	NSW	Joint- venture
1989	65.4	88.8	–	–	–
1990	65.6	89.3	96.0	112.8	–
1991	67.2	95.5	94.9	154.8	114.5
1992	66.1	97.0	93.4	109.2	108.0
1993	65.2	101.1	99.7	117.8	116.5
1994	–	97.4	125.5	121.3	124.8
1995	–	103.2	127.9	125.0	125.0
1996	–	102.7	132.7	139.7	–
1997	–	97.7	133.2	134.6	–
1998	–	94.9	134.5	136.1	–
1999	–	97.6	134.2	138.5	–
2000	–	97.0	–	154.3	–
2001	154.3	98.1	–	149.7	–
2002	–	98.4	–	159.9	–
2003	–	98.7	–	154.1	–
2004	–	93.6	–	161.9	–
2005	–	91.0	–	161.7	–
2006	–	90.7	–	154.1	–
2007	–	94.0	–	150.5	–
2008	–	93.9	–	166.7	–
2009	–	97.3	159.9	149.6	–

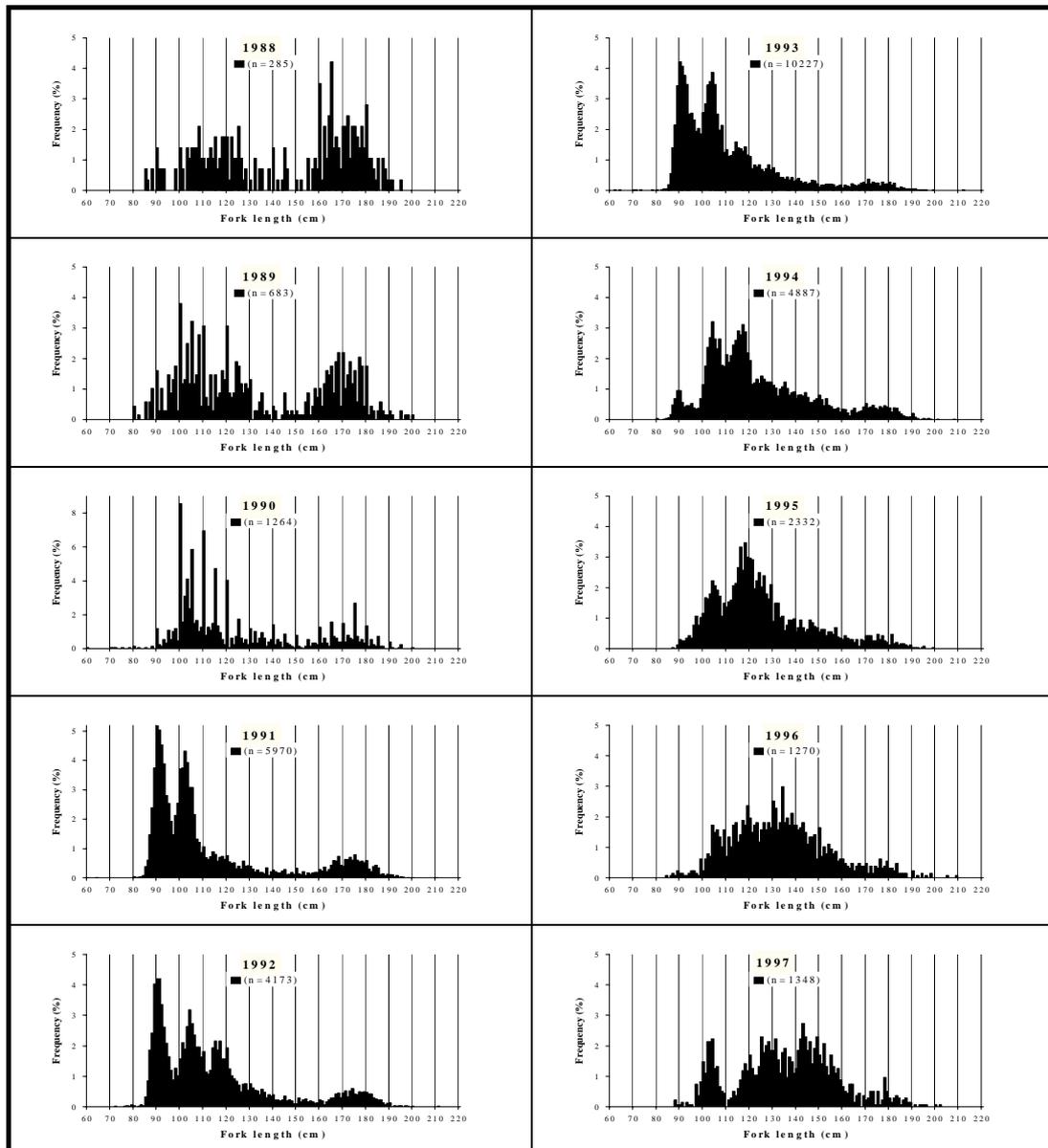
<sup>a</sup>Lengths are reported by calendar year, except for Western Australia and South Australia, which are by financial year (e.g. 1998 represents the financial year 1998–99) to cover the summer season



**Figure 3.** Length frequency of SBT purse seine catch in Australian waters raised to total catch, 2002–03 to the first year of the 2009–11 fishing seasons (source: tow cage size monitoring database)



**Figure 4.** Length frequency histograms for retained SBT longline catch in Australian waters raised to total catch, 2001–02 to 2008–09 quota years (source: AFMA observer data and processor monitoring data)



**Figure 5.** Length frequency of SBT measured by Australian observers on Japanese longliners fishing in the Tasmania region, 1988 to 1997. The data include small SBT tagged and released by observers.

## Fleet size and distribution

In the 2008–09 quota year, a total of 30 commercial fishing vessels landed SBT in Australian waters.

### South Australia (SA)

The one- to five-year-old SBT, which school from late spring to autumn in surface waters of the eastern Great Australian Bight, SA, were fished by seven purse seiners during the 2008–09 quota year, but various live bait, pontoon-towing and feeding vessels were also involved. Fishing commenced in early December 2008 and finished in early April 2009 for the season.

One pole-and-line vessel caught SBT off SA during the 2008–09 quota year.

## Western Australia (WA)

There were no SBT caught off WA in the 2008–09 quota year.

## New South Wales (NSW)

During the 2008–09 quota year, 20 domestic longliners reported landing SBT from the area of the fishery for older juveniles and adults in deeper waters off NSW.

One purse seine vessel caught SBT off NSW during the 2008–09 quota year.

## Tasmania (TAS)

One longline vessel caught SBT off TAS in the 2008–09 quota year.

## Queensland (QLD)

There were no SBT caught off QLD in the 2008–09 quota year.

## Other relevant information

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### Recreational catch

Recreational fishing for SBT in the 2008 and 2009 calendar years was concentrated in continental shelf waters off south-east TAS, SA, and western Victoria (VIC). Angling for SBT has been popular among gamefishing club members for many years in TAS and SA waters, but there has been increased activity among the general recreational fishing sector in the last five years, particularly in western VIC waters near Portland and Port Fairy (Rowse et al. 2008).

Overall, the data available on recreational catch of SBT are very limited. Previous estimates of total annual recreational catches ranged between 3 t and 85 t from 1994 to 2002 (Table 3). These data are indicative estimates only and are based on a range of different data sources. There are no estimates of total Australian recreational SBT catch available for 2003 to 2009.

**Table 3.** Indicative estimates of recreational catch (t) by Australian recreational fishers, 1994 to 2002

Calendar year	Recreational Catch (t)
1994	16
1995	insufficient data
1996	insufficient data
1997	insufficient data
1998	38
1999	3
2000	10
2001	60
2002	85

For the 2008 recreational SBT season (January-July), there are catch estimates available for TAS and SA only. The TAS estimate was obtained from on-site surveys and charter logbooks (Forbes et al. 2009) and the SA catch estimate from a statewide telephone-diary survey and charter fishery logbooks (Jones 2009, PIRSA unpublished data). The estimates are summarised in Table 4. There were no surveys of recreational SBT fishing undertaken in 2009.

**Table 4.** Estimated recreational catch of SBT in South Australian and Tasmanian waters for the 2008 season

State	Estimated number of SBT retained	Estimated weight of SBT retained (tonnes)	Period of data collection
South Australia <sup>2</sup>	1597	29.1	November 2007 to October 2008
Tasmania	480	14.0	January to June 2008

Sources: SA – Primary Industries and Resources SA unpublished data. TAS – Forbes et al (2009).

The number of SBT tag releases by Australian recreational fishers is provided in Table 5. These data do not include recreational tag releases using CCSBT tags. There has been a significant increase in tag and release activity for SBT since 2005, particularly in TAS and SA.

**Table 5.** Tag releases of SBT by Australian recreational fishers, 1990 to 2009

Year	Percentage of total releases					No. of Releases
	TAS	NSW	SA	VIC	WA	
1990	7.1	0.0	14.3	57.1	21.4	14
1991	5.8	44.7	23.2	25.6	0.7	293
1992	5.6	18.5	48.1	24.1	3.7	54
1993	3.5	6.9	87.9	0.0	1.7	231
1994	0.0	14.3	76.2	0.0	9.5	63
1995	0.0	25.0	25.0	0.0	50.0	12
1996	0.0	25.8	74.2	0.0	0.0	159
1997	0.0	3.7	87.0	0.0	9.3	54
1998	4.8	0.8	52.5	40.6	1.3	377
1999	0.0	0.0	70.9	29.1	0.0	117
2000	0.0	0.4	99.1	0.4	0.0	224
2001	38.8	1.9	23.8	30.6	5.0	160
2002	39.4	2.6	25.9	25.4	6.7	193
2003	14.3	0.0	71.4	0.0	14.3	21
2004	31.8	0.0	45.5	0.0	22.7	22
2005	0.0	2.1	93.7	0.0	4.2	96
2006	7.2	0.2	84.7	0	7.9	584
2007	29.3	0.1	66.2	1.3	3.1	1303
2008	1.0	0	96.6	0.5	1.9	1006
2009	9.0	3.3	83.9	1.7	2.2	2044

Source: Game Fish Tagging Program, Industry and Investment NSW

## Discards in the commercial fishery

During the first year of the 2009–11 fishing season, no discarding of SBT was observed or reported in logbooks collected in the purse seine fishery in the Great Australian Bight. However, one observed set was aborted because of too many fish, and the fish were released alive.

In 2004, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) observers monitored longline operations in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF) during the months and areas in which SBT were most likely to be taken incidentally (i.e. south of 30°S from May to September). Observer data showed that 61% of longline caught SBT were discarded during the observed operations. In contrast, the level of SBT discards recorded in logbooks from other vessels fishing during the same period south of 30°S was only 10%. In response to this new information, AFMA implemented tighter access controls, as well as increased observer coverage for the 2005–06,

<sup>2</sup> Estimates of SBT retained by South Australian fishers were obtained by a general population survey and due to the low incidence of SBT fishing amongst the population, the 95% confidence limits for these estimates are broad eg. the estimated number of SBT retained by South Australian residents (including catch from charter trips) was 1212 (+/- 845). Note that the estimate in Table 4 for South Australia includes catch from interstate clients in the charter boat fishery.

2006–07, 2007–08 and 2008–09 quota years in areas and at times where there is a high risk of SBT being caught (Appendix 5).

In 2009, in the ETBF, south of 30°S and during the months of May to September, 16 observers monitored 180 000 hooks of a total of 1 048 000, representing 17.2% observer coverage of longline effort during the SBT migration. For the fishery as a whole, 6.4% of hooks were observed in 2009. The total catch number of SBT caught while observers were on board was 1558 of which 817 were retained, 741 were discarded (737 of which were released alive) and none were tagged. Individual retained SBT ranged from 70–196 cm in length. The size distribution of the discarded ETBF longline catch of SBT from 2002 to 2006 is shown in Figure 1 of Appendix 7. ETBF logbooks for 2009 showed 192.0 t (3482 fish) of SBT were retained in the ETBF and 1741 (33.3%) were discarded. Note that Catch Disposal Records for 2009 reported 3537 SBT retained and landed in the ETBF; misidentification of SBT in logbooks possibly accounts for this discrepancy.

Observers were present on three purse seine trips in the ETBF. Fishing operations were observed on only one of these trips, where two shots were attempted. The first shot was aborted due to gear problems and approximately 20 t of SBT escaped. Gear problems were also encountered in the second shot and approximately 400 kg of fish escaped, however 104 (5 t) SBT were observed retained from this second shot. One SBT was observed caught on a strike line whilst searching during the third trip.

During 2009, observers monitored 8.5% of longline hook effort in the Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery (WTBF). Three vessels participated in this fishery in 2009, and no SBT were observed caught in 2009.

## Fish release trials

In response to the operational characteristics of the SBT fishery, AFMA and the fishing industry agreed to undertake a three-year trial, commencing in 2007, to investigate a mechanism to allow a single release of live fish to avoid exceeding Australia's national allocation of SBT. The trial was supported by amendments to the Southern Bluefin Tuna Management Plan and by implementation standards agreed to by industry. The first release of the trial was conducted on 6 April 2008. Approximately 2000 SBT (approximately 39 t) were released at 35°14.5' S 135°36.5' E. To select the release site, an aerial survey of three preferred release locations was conducted on 4 April 2008. These sites were selected because they are known as locations where wild SBT can be found. The final release site was selected because it had a strong presence of wild SBT indicating that the area was suitable habitat for SBT.

The second release took place on 17 March 2010 at 35°12.384S 135°45.424E. The 2010 release lasted approximately 3 hours 20 minutes during which time divers estimated that 500 fish had been released. The release was observed by AFMA Compliance officer and the Protec Marine representative. All fish were released alive and vigorous with no mortalities observed during the release. Each release complied with a standard set of procedures and was considered a success.

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## Appendix 1. SBT fishing season dates 1988–89 to 2009–11

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Quota Year	Start Date	End Date
1988–89	1 Oct 1988	30 Sep 1989
1989–90	1 Oct 1989	30 Sep 1990
1990–91	1 Oct 1990	30 Sep 1991
1991–92	1 Oct 1991	31 Oct 1992
1992–93	1 Nov 1992	31 Oct 1993
1993–94	1 Nov 1993	31 Oct 1994
1994–95	1 Nov 1994	15 Dec 1995
1995–96	16 Dec 1995	15 Dec 1996
1996–97	16 Dec 1996	30 Nov 1997
1997–98	1 Dec 1997	30 Nov 1998
1998–99	1 Dec 1998	30 Nov 1999
1999–00	1 Dec 1999	30 Nov 2000
2000–01	1 Dec 2000	30 Nov 2001
2001–02	1 Dec 2001	30 Nov 2002
2002–03	1 Dec 2002	30 Nov 2003
2003–04	1 Dec 2003	30 Nov 2004
2004–05	1 Dec 2004	30 Nov 2005
2005–06	1 Dec 2005	30 Nov 2006
2006–07	1 Dec 2006	30 Nov 2007
2007–08	1 Dec 2007	30 Nov 2008
2008–09	1 Dec 2008	30 Nov 2009
2009–11	1 Dec 2009	30 Nov 2011

## Appendix 2. Purse seine fishing season duration

Quota Year	First Day of Season	Last Day of Season	1st Day	50%	75%	90%	Last Day	Duration
1993-94	1 Nov 93	31 Oct 94	49	113	127	138	175	127
1994-95	1 Nov 94	15 Dec 95	36	106	133	160	410 <sup>a</sup>	375 <sup>a</sup>
1995-96	16 Dec 95	15 Dec 96	1	67	87	131	365	365
1996-97	16 Dec 96	30 Nov 97	2	66	85	95	141	140
1997-98	1 Dec 97	30 Nov 98	19	67	84	98	364	346
1998-99	1 Dec 98	30 Nov 99	10	52	73	78	113	104
1999-00	1 Dec 99	30 Nov 00	4	56	65	79	118	115
2000-01	1 Dec 00	30 Nov 01	4	60	80	88	97	94
2001-02	1 Dec 01	30 Nov 02	9	61	75	80	121	113
2002-03	1 Dec 02	30 Nov 03	11	60	82	97	116	106
2003-04	1 Dec 03	30 Nov 04	9	66	87	102	115	107
2004-05	1 Dec 04	30 Nov 05	5	61	83	98	119	115
2005-06	1 Dec 05	30 Nov 06	18	70	92	99	358	341
2006-07	1 Dec 06	30 Nov 07	1	74	93	104	125	125
2007-08	1 Dec 07	30 Nov 08	10	58	91	94	99	90
2008-09	1 Dec 08	30 Nov 09	3	76	103	113	130	128
2009-11; Yr 1	1 Dec 09	30 Nov 10	3	52	69	78	84	82

'1<sup>st</sup> Day' = Day of First Capture, '50%', etc denote the day of the season on which that percentage of the catch had been taken, 'Last Day' = the Day of Last Capture. Note that the 2009-11, Year 1 figures provided are preliminary as the year does not finish until November 2010.

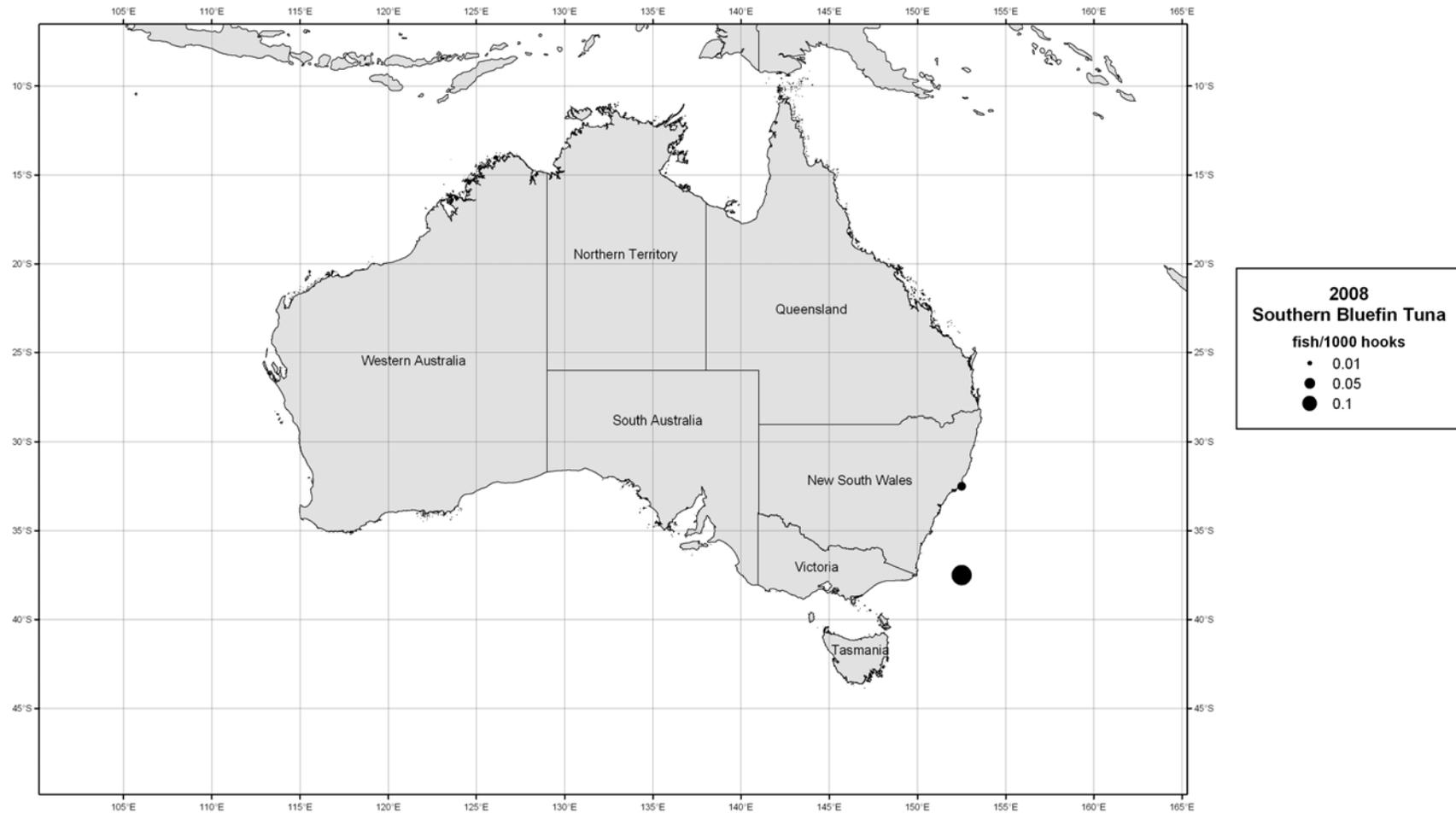
<sup>a</sup>Figures greater than 365 days because the season dates changed and extended this season for longer than one year.

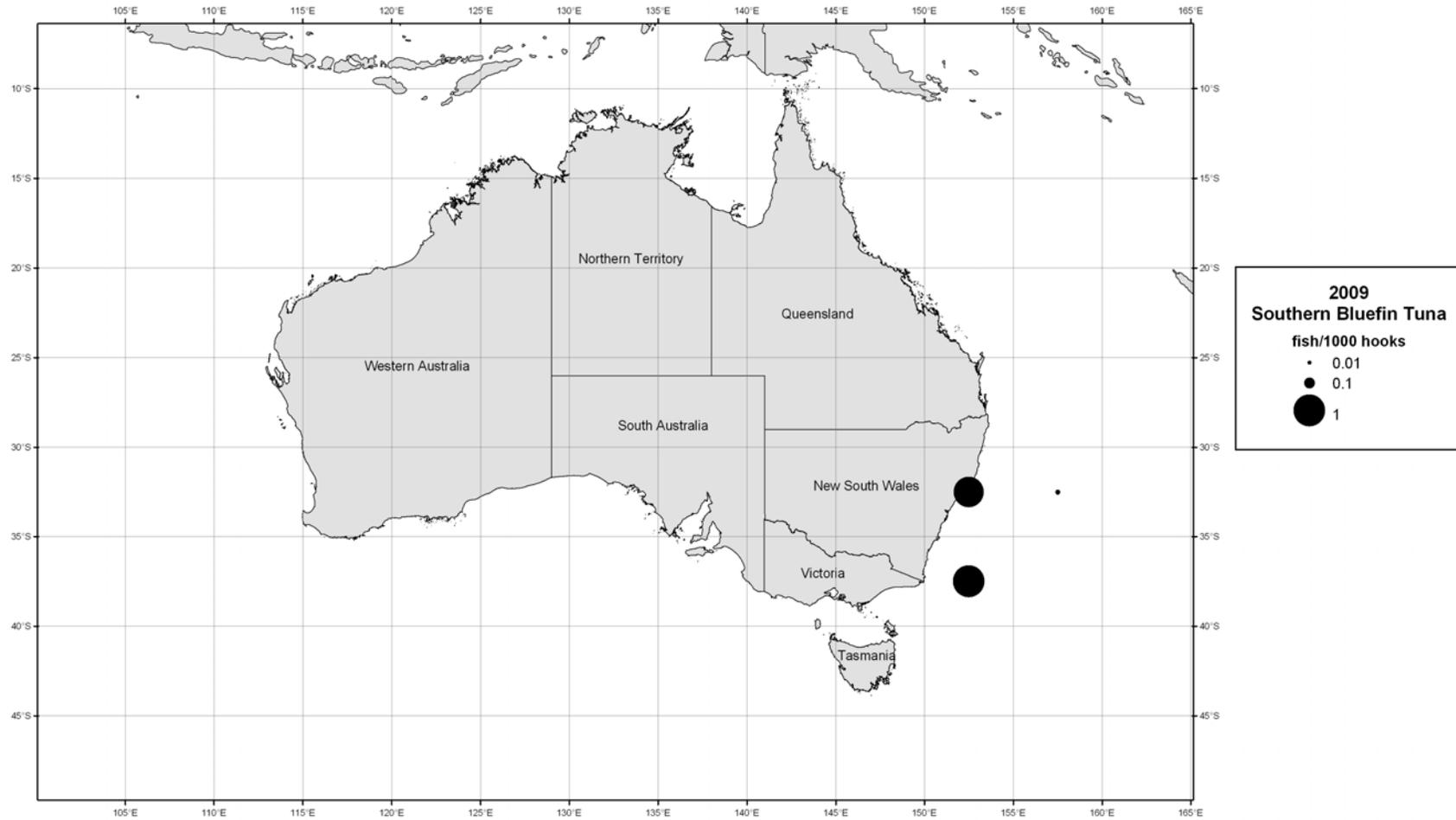
### Appendix 3. Australian surface catch for farm operations, 1994–95 to 2008–09

Season	Estimated catch (t)	Actual catch (t)	Catcher vessels	Vessel search hours	Sets	No. 1° squares fished
1994–95	2179	2009	5	526	104	5
1995–96	2859	3442	6	631	89	11
1996–97	3134	2505	7	769	118	13
1997–98	3916	3629	7	671	143	8
1998–99	4418	4991	7	972	129	3
1999–00	4746	5131	8	764	107	5
2000–01	5100	5162	8	799	129	2
2001–02	5400	5234	7	1309	159	3
2002–03	5188	5375	7	1276	150	5
2003–04	5299	4874	6	1202	160	4
2004–05	5225	5215	8	1168	139	4
2005–06	5463	5302	7	1304	156	6
2006–07	5091	5230	6	1459	160	8
2007–08	4530	5211	7	1217	134	2
2008–09	4348	5015	7	1156	139	7
2009–11, Yr 1	3323	3998	6	417	78	3

Note that the 2009–11, Year 1 figures provide are preliminary as the year does not finish until end November 2010.

## Appendix 4. Nominal CPUE for all Australian longliners, 2008 and 2009 calendar years





## Appendix 5. Summary of observed catch and effort by year and sector

Country	Year	Sector	Observers Deployed	Sea Days	Sets/Tows Observed	Observed Vessels	Observed Effort (% units)	Observed Catch (% units)	Total Cost
Australia	2002–03	Purse Seine <sup>a</sup>	N/A	47	24		11% (sets)	11% (est. total weight)	60,000 (A\$)
Australia	2002–03	Towing <sup>a</sup>	N/A	19	1		2.6% (tows)		(included above)
Australia	2002	East Coast Longline	17	323	198		14.4% (hooks)	35.5% (no. retained catch)	NA
Australia	2002	West Coast Longline	N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A (hooks)	N/A (no. retained catch)	NA
Australia	2003–04	Purse Seine <sup>a</sup>	2	27	21		13% (sets)	12.8% (est. total weight)	60,000 (A\$)
Australia	2003–04	Towing <sup>a</sup>	2	30	2		5.6% (tows)		(included above)
Australia	2003	East Coast Longline	10	242	168		14.9% (hooks)	55.2% (no. retained catch)	303,000 (60,000 A\$ SBT component)
Australia	2003	West Coast Longline	4	72	54		2.0% (hooks)	4.5% (no. retained catch)	42,247 (A\$)
Australia	2004–05	Purse Seine <sup>a</sup>	2	36	15		11.2% (sets)	8.5% (est. total weight)	60,000 (A\$)
Australia	2004–05	Towing <sup>a</sup>	2	24	2		5.7% (tows)		(included above)
Australia	2004	East Coast Longline	11		68		11.7% (hooks)	5.4% (no. retained catch)	966,000 (150,000 A\$ SBT component)
Australia	2004	West Coast Longline			59		3.9% (hooks)	0% (no. retained catch)	57,384 (A\$)
Australia	2005–06	Purse Seine <sup>a</sup>	2	47	14		9.2% (sets)	10.1% (est. total weight)	78,000 (A\$)
Australia	2005	East Coast Longline	14		128		37.5% (hooks)	62.8% (no. retained catch)	723,289 (160,000 A\$ SBT component)
Australia	2005	West Coast Longline			47		9.1% (hooks)	(no observed catch)	0

Country	Year	Sector	Observers Deployed	Sea Days	Sets/Tows Observed	Observed Vessels	Observed Effort (% , units)	Observed Catch (% , units)	Total Cost
Australia	2006–07	Purse Seine <sup>a</sup>	2	50	9		5.6% (sets)	12.1% (est. total weight)	
Australia	2006–07	Towing <sup>a</sup>	2	41	2		6.5% (tows)		
Australia	2006	East Coast Longline	20		138		22.1% (hooks)	88.9% (no. retained catch)	
Australia	2006	West Coast Longline	1		8		17.4% (hooks)	(no observed catch)	
Australia	2007–08	Purse Seine <sup>a</sup>	2	19	16		11.8% (sets)	5.6% (est. total weight)	68,000 (A\$)
Australia	2007–08	Towing <sup>a</sup>	2	38	2		6.0% (tows)		(included above)
Australia	2007	East Coast Longline	17		156		30.2% (hooks – SBT Area)	23.2% (no. retained catch)	180,000 (A\$)
Australia	2007	West Coast Longline			10		1.9% (hooks)	No SBT caught	15,589 (A\$)
Australia	2008–09	Purse Seine	2	27	11 (fish retained) 8 (aborted)	3	7.9% (sets, fish retained)	15.3% (est. total weight)	77,215 (A\$)
Australia	2008–09	Towing	1	15	1	1	3.2% (tows)		(included above)
Australia	2008	East Coast Longline	31		676		47.9% (hooks – SBT Area)	34% (no. retained catch)	694,500 (A\$ – 08/09 fin year)
Australia	2008	West Coast Longline	3		25		16.7% (sets)	No SBT caught	16,800 (A\$ – 08/09 fin year)
Australia	2009–11, Yr 1	Purse Seine	1	3	7 (fish retained) 1 (aborted)	2	9.0% (sets, fish retained)	13.5% (est. total weight)	95,392 (A\$)
Australia	2009–11, Yr 1	Towing	1	27	1	1	4.2% (tows)		(included above)
Australia	2009	East Coast Longline	20		400		17.2% (hooks – SBT Area)	23% (no. retained catch)	332,562 (A\$ – 09/10 fin year)
Australia	2009	West Coast Longline	2		31		8.2% (sets)	No SBT caught	21,019 (A\$ – 09/10 fin year)

<sup>a</sup>Australian purse seine and towing observer statistics are for the SBT fishing year December–November

## Appendix 6. Number of biological samples taken in observer programs (year and sector)

Country	Year	Sector	Otoliths	Sex	Tags	Stomach contents	Length measurement
Australia	2002	Longline	0	124	165	0	300
Australia	2003	Longline	0	51	229	1	388
Australia	2004	Longline	5	62	0	5	187
Australia	2004–05	Purse seine	2	2	0	0	3
Australia	2005	Longline	63	189	19	12	264
Australia	2005–06	Purse seine	46	46	0	0	23
Australia	2006	Longline	0	4	1	0	32
Australia	2006–07	Purse seine	9	17	0	16	19
Australia	2007	Longline	9	41	0	0	42
Australia	2007–08	Purse seine	4	4	0	0	4
Australia	2008	Longline	0	84	0	1	99
Australia	2008–09	Purse seine	14	14	0	0	14
Australia	2009	Longline	0	746	0	0	810
Australia	2009–11, Yr 1	Purse seine	3	3	0	0	3

## Appendix 7. An overview of the Australian southern bluefin tuna observer program

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### Observer sources and training

The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) has recruited and trained observers since its establishment in 1992. Approximately 20 observers are currently employed in the AFMA observer program. They are sourced from universities and the maritime industries from around Australia and require the ability to live and work at sea, have demonstrated experience in collecting biological data at sea, and have experience in fisheries research methodologies and collection of associated scientific data. Observers also hold marine radio operators certificate of proficiency (or similar qualifications and/or experience), a sea safety certificate and medical certificate, and have completed an AFMA observer training course.

In 2009, in addition to the independent AFMA observers, an international observer from South Africa (Capricorn Fisheries Monitoring) was deployed for one trip. This was the same international observer that was used in 2008.

### Summary

#### Purse seine fishery—Great Australian Bight 2009–11

The purse seine observer program for the first year of the 2009–11 Australian SBT fishing season monitored fishing and tow operations in 33°17'–34°17'S and 131°47'–132°55'E in January, February and March 2010. One Australian observer monitored seven purse seine sets where fish were retained and one set that was aborted because of too many fish, and the fish were released alive. This represents 9.0% of the total sets in which fish were taken in the first year of the 2009–11 fishing season. From these observations an estimated 450 t of SBT were caught during observed sets, representing 13.5% of the estimated tonnage caught for the first year of the 2009–11 season. The observer recorded a total of 16 mortalities during purse seine operations.

The observer also monitored one tow operation and recorded 18 SBT mortalities during that towing operation.

#### Purse seine fishery—Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF)

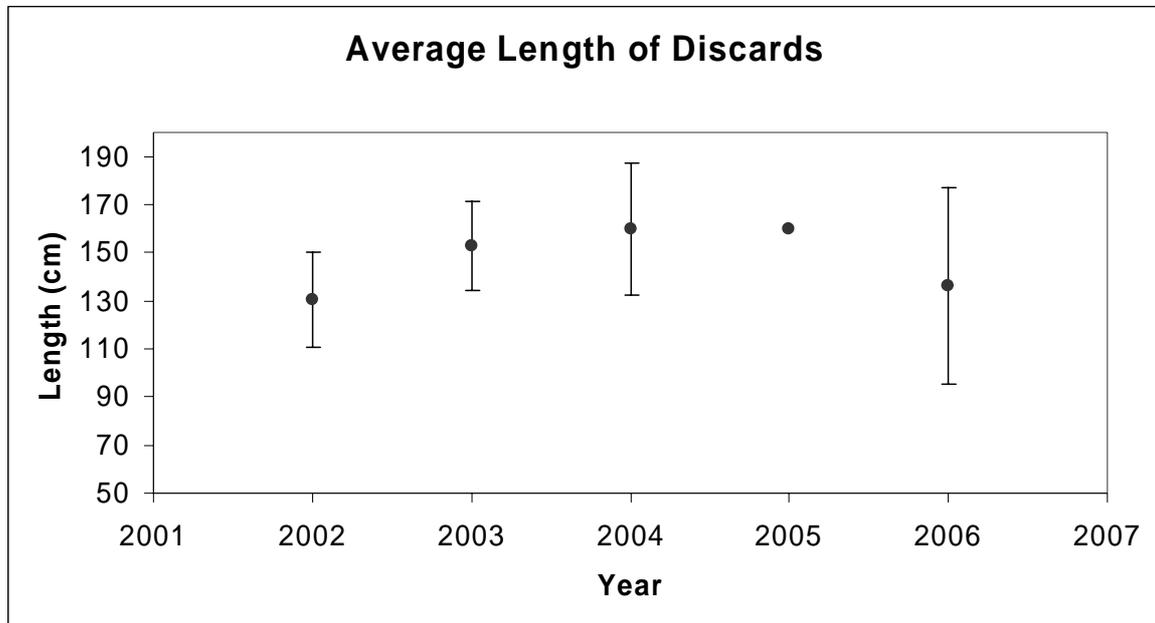
Observers were present on three purse seine trips in the ETBF. Fishing operations were observed on only the second of these trips, where two shots were attempted. The first shot was aborted due to gear problems and approximately 20 t of SBT escaped. Gear problems were also encountered in the second shot and approximately 400 kg of fish escaped, however 104 (5 t) SBT were observed retained from this second shot. One SBT was observed caught on a strike line whilst searching during the third trip.

#### Longline fishery

In 2009, in the ETBF, south of 30°S and during May to September (where SBT are usually caught), 16 observers monitored 180 000 hooks of a total of 1 048 000, representing 17.2% observer coverage of longline effort. For the fishery as a whole, 6.4% of hooks were observed in 2009. The total catch number of SBT caught while observers were on board was 1558 of which 817 were retained, 741 were discarded (737 of which were released alive) and none were tagged. Individual retained SBT ranged from 70–196 cm in length. Average length of observed discards for 2002 to 2006 are shown in Figure 1. ETBF logbooks for 2009 showed 192.0 t (3482 fish) of SBT were

retained in the ETBF and 1741 (33.3%) were discarded. Note that Catch Disposal Records for 2009 reported 3537 SBT retained and landed in the ETBF; misidentification of SBT in logbooks possibly accounts for this discrepancy.

In 2009, 8.5% of longline hook effort was observed in the Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery (WTBF). Three vessels participated in this fishery in 2009, and no SBT were observed caught.



**Figure 1.** Average length of observed discards by year for 2002 to 2006 in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (n = 30 for 2002, n = 13 for 2003, n = 28 for 2004, n = 1 for 2005 and n = 15 for 2006, total not recorded = 480)

## Scientific observer program design and coverage

The target coverage for the SBT purse seine fleet operating out of Port Lincoln is 10% of the total catch and effort for the fishery and 100% of all operations while an observer is on board. Most of the Australian SBT purse seine effort has historically taken place in an area between 33–35°S and 131–133°E.

The observers in the purse seine fishery in the first year of the 2009–11 fishing season spent 39 days at sea, and observed purse seiner activities for three days and tow activities for 27 days. The remainder of the days were spent in transit.

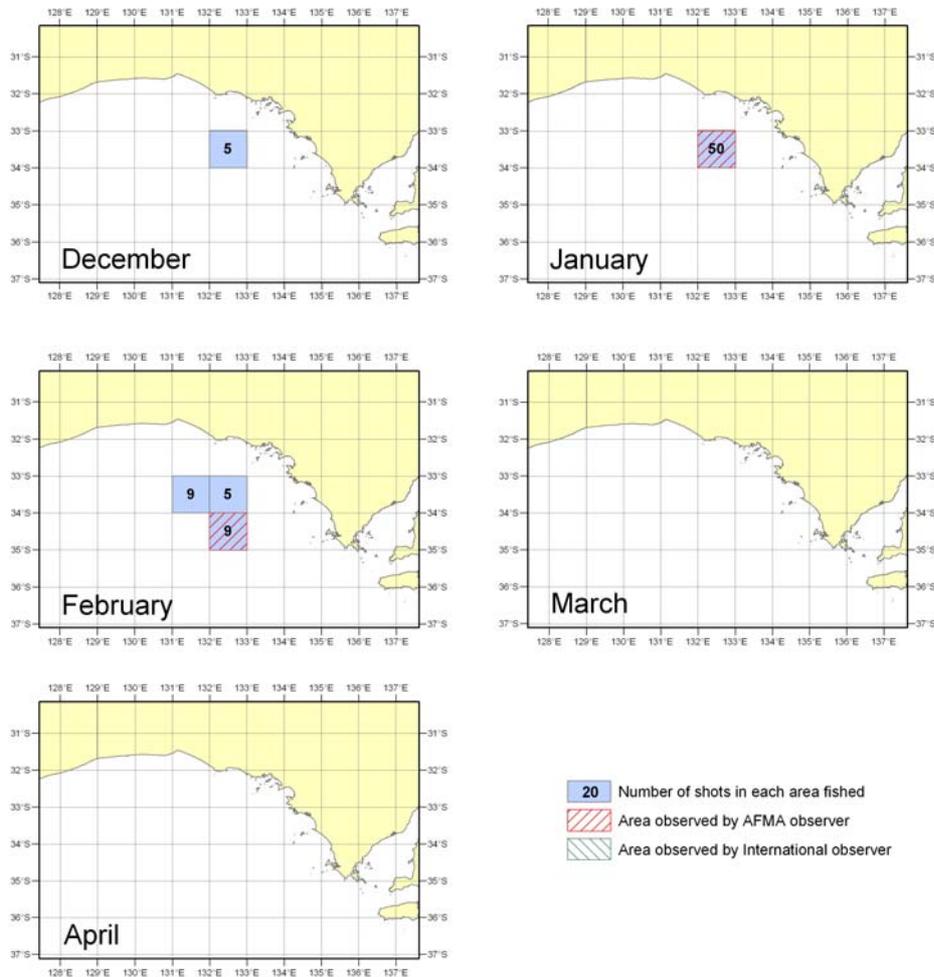
Typically, less than 7% of total effort in the purse seine sector of the Australian SBT Fishery occurs in December; hence, AFMA decided not to conduct observations in that month on the basis that such coverage is not cost-effective or representative of the period when most of the catch occurs.

## Observer data

### Effort data

In 2010, observers monitored seven purse seine sets where fish were retained, and one set that was aborted because of too many fish, and the fish were released alive. Fishing operations observed in the purse seine sector were based in the Great Australian Bight between 33°17'–34°17'S and 131°47'–132°55'E (see Figure 2). The observed sets where fish were retained represent 9.0% of all sets in the fishery where fish were retained for the first year of the 2009–11 fishing season.

Data were gathered on vessel characteristics, fishing gear and equipment. Comprehensive operational and environmental information were recorded for each set that occurred while the observer was on board. This included information on searching, chumming, setting and hauling activities. Information on chumming operations by the fishing vessel and associated chumming vessels was also recorded. In addition, observers recorded information on the movement of some spotter aircraft and their time in the area preceding sets.



**Figure 2.** The number of sets recorded in the SBT purse-seine fishery from December 2009 to April 2010. The hatching represents areas where observations took place.

One tow was observed and data collected on the number of SBT mortalities, the date they occurred and whether they were retained or discarded. Data were also collected on:

- Towing methods
- Average towing speed
- Cage number and diameter
- Maximum cage depth
- Average weight of SBT transferred
- Estimated number of SBT
- Methods of counting and verifying fish counts

## Catch data

Observers recorded catch composition and fate of target and bycatch species where possible during all observed sets. The time at start and end of observation, the observed catch in estimated number and estimated weight for SBT and all other species were recorded where possible.

Because fish are taken alive for farming purposes in the purse seine sector, it is not possible to obtain actual weight or length information at the time of catching the SBT. Consequently, both catch data and observed catch data are estimates only and these are reported below.

In total, an estimated 450 t of SBT were caught during observed sets. This observed catch accounted for 13.5% of the total estimated catch of 3323 t. The actual tonnage caught by purse-seine vessels in the first year of the 2009–11 fishing season was 3998 t.

Observers monitored and made records of bycatch species where possible during all sets. Bycatch data were collected from visual observation of the catch before transfer to tow cages and through observation of any species meshed during hauling of the purse seine net. In the first year of the 2009–11 fishing season, the observer reported no non-target catch.

## Length frequency data

It is not possible for onboard observers to obtain length measurements for the live SBT catch, but observers are required to take biological samples from all SBT mortalities. During purse seine operations, the observers recorded 16 SBT mortalities of which none were sampled because the fish were damaged. During towing operations, the observer recorded 18 SBT mortalities of which three were sampled (LCF of these fish were 121 to 144 cm).

## Biological data

There were no otoliths obtained from mortalities in the purse seine operations and three otoliths were obtained from mortalities during the tow operation. There is also an ongoing project to collect otoliths from farm mortalities.

Weight samples were obtained for seven of the 16 SBT mortalities observed during purse seine operations and for the three fish sampled during the tow operation. The average weight for the seven mortalities sampled by the observers during purse seine operations was 31 kg. The average weight for the three mortalities observed during towing operations was 42.2 kg.

## Tag return monitoring

There were no tagged SBT reported by the observers.

## Conclusions

Seven purse seine sets, representing 9.0% of the total sets in which fish were retained during the first year of the 2009–11 fishing season were observed. Observer coverage of longline effort in the ETBF, south of 30°S and during May to September (where SBT are usually caught), was 17.2% of hooks, while 8.5% of longline hook effort was observed in the WTBF. One purse seine set where fish were retained was observed in the ETBF.