

**Stehr Group**

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23rd Sept., 1988

The Senior Executive Officer,  
Rural Research Secretariat,  
Department of Primary Industries and Energy,  
G.P.O. Box 858,  
CANBERRA, A.C.T. 2601

RE: FIRTA PROJECT 86/11

By the end of December 1986 our Company had spent close to \$100,000 on this particular project. We are still under a moral obligation to sell part of our tuna catch in South Australia to the Japanese people who assisted us in this project in order that we can possibly get them to come pack and help us find Bluefin Tuna further to see in the more traditional Japanese Tuna areas of our Australian coasts. Your department has all the expenses for the "Angelica-S" for this amount together with our report for the first run. Due to the large financial loss incurred at this time, it was not possible for us to send the "Angelica-S" back to Tasmania the following year which was indicated in our letter to you this January 1987. We in turn shifted our emphasis to the "Leonard Star" which fished in Tasmanian waters from December to June 1987.

On seventeen separate occasions we set longliner and droplines with a small number of hooks in test fishing activities from Storm Bay to Schouten Island in 40-50 fathom of water without any success. On a number of occasions we tried to "chum" up tuna which we thought to be Bluefin from echosoundings as we always had substantial amounts of Mackerel for bait on board; this was also unsuccessful. From January to April we also had two men running troll lines and other than skipjack on six occasions, no tuna was caught.

In late April we organized our plane (Cessna 172) with our spotter Mr. Ted O’Connell (ex CSIRO who has had extensive experience in spotting Bluefin Tuna) to try to find concentrated areas of tuna but without any luck. Ted found scattered feeding patches of 4-5kg skipjack from just North of Schouter Island to Eagle Hawk Neck. We then brought Jakes Wichman down to Tasmania for further evaluation for a fortnight. Collectively it was decided to stop concentrating on tuna as we felt it was not the right time. On one occasion we were informed by members of the Fishing Industry in Tasmania that Japanese longliners were working due East of Hobart about 40 miles out, but on checking this report we found it to be negative.

Shortly after in early June I left for Japan to try to organise a longline joint venture with the Fukuichi Company of Shimizu, Japan. This Company has been fishing off Tasmania and other Australian coasts for the past 25 years and known to us by our assisting them with bait requirements. Being a very conservative Company they have not as yet come up with any concrete proposals.

1988 Season

We purchased a 48ft longline vessel “Question” which is especially fitted out for longlining and to supply the fresh Tuna market in Japan.

From 16 January-14 February “Question” worked off the north east coast of Tasmania between St. Helens and Flinders Island and shot roughly 6000 hooks in that time. Water temperature was not taken but it is believed that temperatures were about 20°C from information from other vessels. “Question” is a highly successful Tuna longline vessel working on the East Coast Longline Fishery before coming to South Australia. Test fishing was negative and we believe temperatures had a lot to do with our failure of catching any Bluefin.

“Leonard Star” started fishing in late December with small amounts of longline gear, troll lines and other gear needed for our tuna operation was stored on the “Leonard Star” and in our Tasmanian factory. In January and February this year we found the water currents close to the Tasmanian Coast too hot for Tuna. Our spotter Ted O’Connell concentrated on finding Bluefin within suitable water currents as it appeared to us to be the most suitable and cheapest way to go as we were and are seriously handicapped by financial constraints.

We flew our plane:

|                        |            |
|------------------------|------------|
| 23 <sup>rd</sup> March | 3.5 hours  |
| 24 <sup>th</sup> March | 6.0 hours  |
| 25 <sup>th</sup> March | 4.0 hours  |
| 26 <sup>th</sup> March | 2.0 hours  |
| 28 <sup>th</sup> March | 2.5 hours  |
| 29 <sup>th</sup> March | 1.5 hours  |
| 30 <sup>th</sup> March | 1.5 hours  |
| 31 <sup>st</sup> March | 1.0 hour   |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> April | 1.20 hours |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> April | 1.5 hours  |
| 14 <sup>th</sup> April | 2.5 hours  |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> April | 1.35 hours |
| 18 <sup>th</sup> April | 2.0 hours  |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> April | 6.10 hours |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> April | 2.5 hours  |
| 22 <sup>nd</sup> April | 1.0 hour   |
| 24 <sup>th</sup> April | 2.0 hours  |
| 25 <sup>th</sup> April | 2.0 hours  |
| 27 <sup>th</sup> April | 5.0 hours  |

In the general survey areas the water temperatures were 20.2°C-21°C and off Schouten Island 22°C.

We concentrated close to shore from Eagle Hawk Neck to Schouten Island as we thought this was the best area to concentrate on. We also flew well offshore out to 50 miles looking for signs such as good water, Japanese longliners and concentrations of Bluefin. "Leonard Star" test fished this area extensively from Schouten Island to Storm Bay and worked troll lines continuously for indications of Bluefin.

The best concentration of Tuna we saw was Skipjack of approximately 50 tonne in one patch off Schouter Island. Through to the North we saw smaller patches of Skipjack up to about 20 tonnes at times but not in commercial quantities.

We felt that March and April would have been the best months to find any concentration of Bluefin in this area as the water was far too warm for Mackerel and thought it better to concentrate on Tuna, especially as we heard that in previous years some feeding Bluefin

was caught close to Eagle Hawk Neck with troll lines by amateur fishermen. On checking through the system we found there were no Bluefin but some large striped Tuna of 8 kgs and in one instance one Big Eye of 17 kgs.

It is possible to catch Bluefin close to Eagle Hawk Neck but as far as we can ascertain not in a commercial quantity and certainly not enough to send to the Japanese markets.

Nevertheless it was felt that the areas needed further investigation, up to 20 miles out, taking into consideration that Bluefin have been sighted over the years off the East Coast of Tasmania by vessels and planes similar to the east coast of N.S.W. We are of the opinion that since we have been closely involved in Mackerel and Tuna on the East Coast of Tasmania the conditions have not been completely normal as in previous years and therefore felt quite strongly that further work should and will be done by our Company. Over the 3 month period we flew our plane approximately 80 hours on Tuna spotting exclusively.

We found that Jack Mackerel was not as good as Red Bait for longline bait and this is also confirmed by Japanese longliners who prefer Red Bait of 100-150 grams. This is because the Red Bait is better in the hooks due to its firmer texture. The Japanese are very particular about the size of the bait and we believe that one of our failures was in using 250-300 gram fish which is too large.

We are at present trying to establish, with one of the Japanese Companies who are longline fishing south of Tasmania, a contact so that in the future we can establish a radio contact and exchange fishing information so we can fish the same areas. Earlier this year I spent 5 days in Tokyo and Shimizu concentrating on establishing this type of contact.

Since the beginning of the FIRTA GRANT we have established an export processing plant in Tasmania and purchased a Flake ice machine. Eventually when a longline fishery for fresh or frozen Tuna is established we will be able to take advantage of our premises and assist the industry with the right infrastructure and use it as a base.

Our belief is that there is a longline Tuna fishery off Tasmania from time to time and being close enough inshore for smaller vessels using longline and troll lines. The opinion of the Japanese, however, is that although we believe in this inshore fishery, they say that it is well offshore where water

currents, colour of the water and temperatures do not have such a large influence as inshore.

Water temperatures off the Tasmanian coast have definitely been higher over the past two years than ever before and this factor alone could be a major reason that Bluefin are non-existent inshore or at the most in exceptionally small quantities.

Our Company is absolutely committed to ongoing experimentation in an endeavor to establish a longline fishery in Tasmania even after the quite substantial amounts of money which have been lost through the "Angelica-S", "Leonard Star", the "Question" and the infrastructure required in regard to shore management, background information in Australia and Japan and spotting plane, which by the way we found extremely valuable although very expensive.

Our spotter, Ted O'Connell flew with the C.S.I.R.O. plane when tests were being carried out with the new SLAR System detecting fish, currents and different water temperatures and tidelines. Unfortunately it was not economically possible to take it offshore and find where the Japanese longliners were operating.

Australian Tuna Fisheries Pty Ltd. is far too committed financially in Tasmania to stop the surveys at this stage especially after we have gained valuable experience over the past two years and in this coming year we will be making an all out effort in trying to establish what we believe to be a valuable Longline Tuna Fishery in Tasmanian waters and offshore.

We trust this will have shown you our total commitment in the past as well as in the future, especially as there are moves afoot for us to look more into Longline Fishing Australia wide.

Should you need any further information please feel free to contact me and if necessary I would be prepared to personally come to Canberra.

Yours faithfully,

Hagen Stehr.