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## **Southern Bluefin Tuna: Life on the Line**

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In submitting this report, the researcher has agreed to FRDC publishing this material in its edited form.

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# Acknowledgments

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- Mr David Ellis - Tuna Australia
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# Introduction

As part of a broader, multifaceted strategy to educate both recreational fishers and the general public about southern bluefin tuna (SBT), a fifty minute documentary, titled *Life on the Line*, led by well-known and influential recreational fishing identity Al McGlashan was produced.

The documentary tells the story of how the stock was heavily fished throughout its range until the mid-1980s when it became apparent that the stock was at such a low level that global management and conservation was required to ensure its future. It highlights the significant management measures that were implemented by Australia, Japan and New Zealand that formed the basis of the current Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT).

Along the way the documentary explores how the stock is used both commercially and recreationally. Starting with a brief history of the farming sector located off Port Lincoln, South Australia and then exploring current operations that support a significant industry. Al then ventures to the waters off southern New South Wales during the winter months to follow skipper Shane Ralph on the vessel Jordan Kate as he targets SBT using longline methods.

Recreational fishers share their experiences of a fishery that was almost non-existent in the early 2000s to one that is available to more and more fishers every year, and rapidly becoming the mainstay of many southern ports. The recreational message highlights how rec fishers can best look after their catch both for the table and when practicing catch and release. The science behind catch and release is further explored by investigating the FRDC funded work undertaken by Dr Sean Tracey into post release survivability of SBT. A conservation message based on the Tuna Champions theme underpins the overall message of responsibility and stewardship of the resource.

The story then follows the significant investment in science that has underpinned the ongoing recovery of the species, especially the ground-breaking close kin techniques pioneered by CSIRO and supported by Fisheries Research and Development Corporation. It also investigates the impact of the CCSBT management procedure, the first harvest strategy of its kind in any tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (RFMO), on the status of the stock and its role into the future.

Amidst the optimism, the message is tempered with the reality of the situation. The species is currently listed under domestic environmental law as conservation dependent and commercial fishing is reliant on the species being managed under a formal recovery plan. Commentary from the conservation sector reinforces the need for a continued strong conservation message and strict science based management, to ensure that all fishers and consumers can continue to sustainably harvest and use the resource into the future. The documentary also provides an opportunity to recognise previous government research and management that has led to the recovery of the species and the consequential benefits to recreational fishers as a result.

## Objectives

The aim of the documentary was to:

- educate and inform recreational fishers and the general public about the current status of the SBT stock, its history and how it can be used sustainably into the future;
- to demonstrate practices and techniques consistent with the Tuna Champions program that can be used by the recreational fishing sector to support the continued recovery of SBT;
- to be an introduction to other extension and education elements regarding SBT that will follow in related projects.

- To distribute and promote the documentary across key media channels including mainstream TV, social media (Facebook, YouTube etc), print and radio.

## Method

A steering group Chaired by FRDC was convened to develop the storyline and provide technical advice on direction. The group consisted of representatives of the Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation (ARRF), McGlashan Media, Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC), Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES), Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) and representatives from the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

Three main themes were canvassed throughout the documentary:

1. Stock management - the story behind the decline, how it was arrested, the role of science and future outlook
2. Sustainable use of the resource - both recreational and commercial fishers, and seafood retailers, restaurateurs and consumers
3. Education - international best practice for catch and release recreational fishing as well as educating the consumer on the current status of the stock to allow them to make an informed decision when choosing what tuna species to buy.

In addition to the host the following people were interviewed for the piece:

- Dr Sean Tracey, IMAS
- Dr Campbell Davies and Dr Richard Hillary – CSIRO
- Mr Brett Cleary - ARFF
- Mr Glenn Sant - TRAFFIC
- Mr Brian Jeffriess AM, Executive Officer, Australian Southern Bluefin Industry Association (ASTBIA)
- Mr Rick Kolega – Owner SEKOL Pty Ltd
- Mr Tony Santic – Owner Tony's Tuna
- The Nichols family – Personalised Sea Charters
- Professor Glenn Hurry, former AFMA CEO and former Chair, Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation

## Results, Discussion, Conclusion

The project, shot in a number of locations across Australia, concluded in November 2019 with a premiere showing of the fifty minute documentary, *Life on the Line*, at the IMAX Melbourne Museum. The proceedings were launched by Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries, Senator Jonathan Duniam and the night hosted by Brownlow Medallist and Tuna Champion Ambassador, Patrick Dangerfield. The event, attended by over four hundred people, was extremely well received and broadly publicised in the mainstream media.

Following the premier the documentary was aired on Channel 9, Saturday 14 November, at 3.30PM and was also made available on 9Now until 10 December 2019. A permanent link will be available on YouTube from 26 December 2019.

## Implications

The aim of the documentary and social media campaign was to begin to educate and inform recreational fishers and the general public about the current status of the SBT stock, its history, and how it can be used sustainably into the future. The documentary dovetails nicely into the ongoing Tuna Champions Project that further builds on the sustainable use message.

## Tuna Champions project

Community engagement is at the heart of the national Tuna Champions project, which encourages recreational fishers to use the best fishing and handling practices for the iconic Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) and to become stewards of the SBT fishery.

Funded by the Australian Government through the Fisheries Research Development Corporation (FRDC), the project is an initiative of the Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation (ARFF) in collaboration with the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) at the University of Tasmania.

It is the largest single-species education-communication program funded by the FRDC, with an investment from the Federal Government of over \$600,000. The program has been developed by Dr Sean Tracey and his Tuna Champions team at IMAS at the University of Tasmania. The IMAS team will continue to grow the engagement and education program until the project concludes in November 2020, when it will be transitioned to ARFF for ongoing management.

The focus of the program is to understand the perspective of the recreational fisher and ensure they have the best information, based on the research, to fish responsibly and to respect the animal – whether it is to catch a fish for the table, or to enjoy the experience with friends and release the fish in a way that gives it the best chance of surviving.

## Recommendations

The *Life on the Line* project has been and will continue to be used as a resource for ARFF and others to inform stakeholders about the SBT resource and how it can be used sustainably into the future. Most recently the documentary was shown at the 2019 National Recreational Fishing Conference as a precursor to a dedicated Tuna Champions presentation. Further screenings and presentations are planned for a variety of audiences and locations.

## Extension and Adoption

Al McGlashan is a prominent, respected and influential recreational fishing identity and an audience of both occasional recreational anglers and avid game fishers alike. His weekly column in the mainstream, metropolitan publication the Daily Telegraph (news.com.au) is widely read and attracts attention across a range of demographics. Between online and print, his weekly article has had a readership of more than 1.1 million people.

In addition to traditional media, Al also has an extensive social media following with a following of more than 130 000 on Facebook, a following of more than 35 000 on Instagram, more than 10 million total views to-date on YouTube. Furthermore, it is likely that other respected third parties and/or highly followed recreational fishing media pages like recreational fishing associations, Al's sponsors (eg Club Marine, Mercury Marine, Shimano), and bait and tackle shops will also share content about the management of SBT, thus improving the awareness about the science-based management of SBT and Commonwealth fisheries more broadly.

## Project materials developed

Along with the fifty minute documentary *Life on the Line* a series of six short three minute videos with the following titles were produced:

1. Southern Bluefin Tuna Facts
2. Southern Bluefin Tuna History

3. Southern Bluefin Tuna Ranching
4. CSIRO's Contribution to SBT
5. Longlining Facts
6. Satellite Tagging Southern Bluefin Tuna

A YouTube link to these short videos will be made available in early 2020.

## Appendices

### **Appendix 1: Staff**

The following staff have been directly involved in the project:

- Mr Al McGlashan
- Mr Richard White-Smith
- Ms Kerrie Bennetts
- Mr Brett Cleary
- Dr Sean Tracey
- Ms Stephanie Cannon
- Ms Yvonne Zunic
- Mr Matt Daniel