

Dec. 2024

Happy  
Holidays!  
From the

# WFOA

## Membership Newsletter

Est. 1967

### Message From the Executive Director

I don't remember ever locking the door on the boat. Over 30 years of coming in and out of ports up and down the coast, the door was always open. I'm sure we threw a padlock on when we left her shutdown and tied up, but I don't remember it. I remember the top half of an open Dutch door. I remember smiling faces filling that wooden door frame. Friendly fishermen stopping by to say "hi," share the latest dope, or grab a tool to use "just for a sec".

This holiday season I've been thinking a lot about that open door. Since coming aboard at the WFOA, I've been told time and again that the organization has been fighting for decades to keep the fishery open. Open to opportunities that are free from oppressive constraints, open to young fishermen just getting

started, open to head out wherever the ocean calls you.

Yet as 2024 comes to an end, I find myself in a lot of conversations about how this has to close because of that. Why we have to stop doing what we've done for the sake of what's next. What qualifies, who doesn't make the cut and how some realities require making difficult distinctions. How we have to close the door on someone outside for the sake of those huddled up inside.

I get it. I do. But personally, this Christmas I'm keeping my door open. I'm opening up my heart to the awesome of the advent season. I'm saving an open seat at the table and I'm opening up a cold one with whoever drops by. Might even get to open a few presents.

It's my hope that as you reflect on the year that was and think about the year to come, you find a piece of peace. That you remember some smiling faces, share some laughs and stay open to the possibilities of 2025. Happy New Year and cheers to next year being the best year.

God bless,



### WFOA Members Among Appointees to PFMC Advisory Bodies

-WFOA Staff

During the November Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC) meeting held in Costa Mesa, CA, the council appointed a new group of representatives to serve on their advisory subpanels. The process included several hours of closed session deliberation to examine the qualifications and applications of each candidate. Candidates represented various sectors of the fishing industry, specific geographical regions, the scientific community, and the public-at-large.

Ultimately, three members of the WFOA were selected to serve on the Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS). Long time WFOA member Gary Burke was appointed to the Commercial Gillnet Fisheries position. The Executive Director of the WFOA, Clayton Wraith was appointed to the Commercial Troll Fisheries position. WFOA member Erik Johnson was appointed to the Commercial Fisheries North of Point Conception position. The

candidates selected will serve for a term starting January 1, 2025 and running through December 31, 2027.

During the confirmation process, Councilwoman Christa Svensson articulated that the final decision on the composition of the HMSAS was intended to provide council representation for both major albacore associations, the WFOA and AAFA. She also emphasized that the HMSAS selections provided a HMS voice to the three coastal states: California, Oregon and Washington. She pointed out that AAFA consultant Mike Conroy was being appointed as the Commercial Purse Seine Fisheries position and would maintain a strong voice for AAFA in the HMSAS while also providing insight to the California delegation. Clayton Wraith would meet with the Oregon delegation as well as represent the membership of the WFOA. And newly appointed Erik

Johnson would be a crucial conduit between the HMSAS and the Washington delegation. The position was previously held by retired WFOA member Doug Fricke.

The advisory body positions confirmed during the November meeting also included roles on the Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS), the Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel (EAS), the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP), the Salmon Advisory Subpanel (SAS), the Scientific and Statistical Committee, and the Habitat Committee.

Due to some confusion about the application process the council decided that they will re-advertise for an important role on the HMSAS Advisory Subpanel. The Commercial Fisheries South of Point Conception position remains open and fishermen interested in having a voice in the council process are encouraged to apply.





## NOAA Releases Seafood Strategy that Aligns with Several WFOA Goals

-WFOA Staff

In early October, NOAA Fisheries released its National Seafood Strategy Implementation Plan, which aims to sustain and grow the U.S. seafood industry over the next five years. The plan focuses on several key priorities for the WFOA, including maintaining wild-capture fisheries like albacore tuna, fighting illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and expanding market opportunities for American fishermen.

One of NOAA's key priorities is the sustainable management of highly migratory species (HMS). The plan highlights the need for sustainable harvesting while addressing the impact of changing climate on fish migration and ocean conditions. These goals align with the WFOA's focus on science-driven management that supports both sustainability and the economic health of the albacore fleet. However, a WFOA board member raised concerns about the plan's focus on "equitable ocean access." The member noted, "When the government starts deciding who can use the ocean, fishermen usually lose out. The WFOA must

## WFOA Working to Exempt US Troll Vessels from South Pacific Harvest Control Rules

-WFOA Staff

The WFOA is advocating for the West Coast albacore troll fleet to be exempt from new South Pacific harvest control rules (HCRs). The Permanent Advisory Committee (PAC) made recommendations to the U.S. Section to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) in November for the purpose of developing U.S. policies, positions, and negotiating strategies with respect to U.S. participation in the WCPFC. As a member of the PAC, the WFOA Executive Director took part in the delegations discussions and pointed out that, "our vessels have a minimal impact on the South Pacific Albacore stock. They shouldn't be restricted by a harvest control rule primarily focused on long lining."

In its final recommendations, the PAC reasoned that since the U.S.

South Pacific albacore troll fleet "caught an average of less than 350 metric tons of albacore during 2015-2017, it should be exempt from further catch reductions under harvest scenarios to reach the Target Reference Point (TRP) and under an allocation scheme for South Pacific albacore." Recognizing that American vessels participating in the South Pacific fishery could increase, the PAC recommended an option for future management. In its recommendations the PAC explained, "if the troll catches exceed 5% of total catch of South Pacific albacore, this could trigger troll fisheries being subject to further reductions." The WFOA Director felt the potential trigger was fair and explained, "we're not asking for a free pass, just fair recognition that our fleet, in its current makeup, is clearly not causing the South Pacific Albacore population decline."

continue fighting for our access to fishing grounds."

Another major part of the NOAA strategy is combating IUU fishing. The plan calls for stronger enforcement through programs like the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP) and international collaborations. These efforts aim to protect U.S. fishermen from unfair competition and ensure the integrity of sustainably caught American seafood. The WFOA has consistently called for stronger action against IUU fishing, a key concern for its members.

The plan also emphasizes the need to improve seafood marketing. WFOA staff are working on applying for Saltonstall-Kennedy grants to promote albacore marketing both in the U.S. and abroad. Trade advocacy and export certifications will help open up global markets, and the WFOA will continue to partner with the Seafood Inspection

Program (SIP) to ensure access to European markets. NOAA's marketing efforts align with the WFOA's goal of raising consumer awareness about the quality and sustainability of wild-caught albacore. Extra funding could help promote individual member labels, strengthen domestic markets, and create more international opportunities.

Supporting fleet renewal and getting the next generation of albacore fishermen involved is another key part of NOAA's plan. Workforce development and upgrading infrastructure are also priorities. Initiatives like the Young Fisherman's Development Program and funding for port and vessel upgrades aim to address labor shortages and outdated infrastructure, ensuring the U.S. fleet remains competitive. These funds could help lower entry costs for new fishermen and help older members sell their vessels as they approach retirement.



## Member Highlight: Charting His Own Course

-WFOA Staff

**Name:** Alan Alward

**District:** Morro Bay, CA

Alan Alward grew up a sailor in Palos Verdes, California. When he left home in his 20's, he decided to pursue fishing by taking a commercial fishing class at the Southern California Regional Occupational Training Center in San Pedro. Run by an old purse seiner Captain, the class taught Alan what to expect out of the career, the people skills he'd need, and how to go about getting a job. He landed his first gig on an old 68 ft Albacore boat, the Deep 6, which was one of several vessels hired to conduct offshore surveys at the time. After that successful season, he wouldn't fish for Albacore again until 2003.

A move to Morro Bay, CA introduced him to a community of abalone and sea urchin divers where he got a job as a deckhand. But when the skipper he was working for decided to get out of the dive business, Alan found himself in the unexpected position of being the

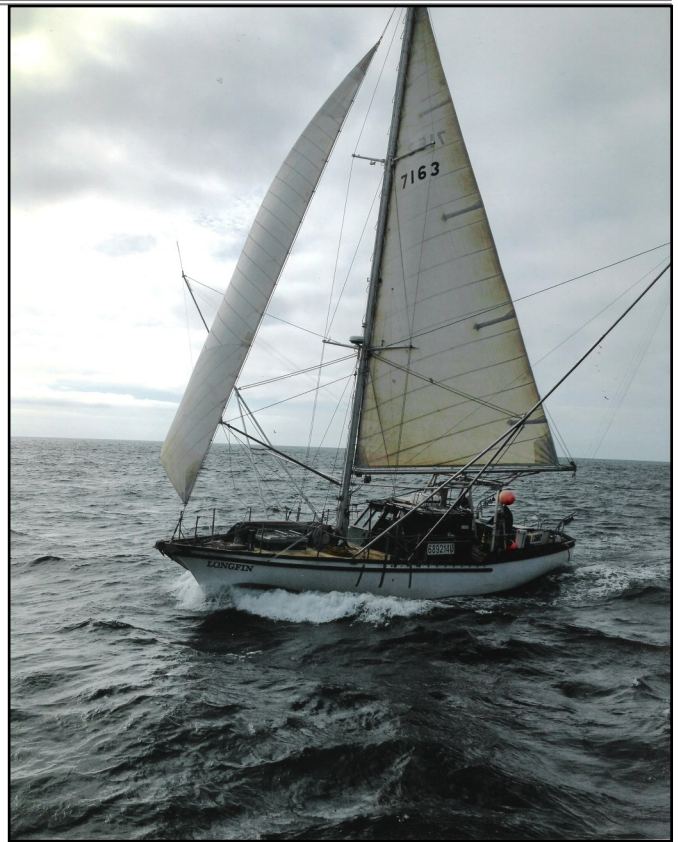


- Alan Alward

diver and the skipper. He proceeded to be a full-time diver for roughly 25 years. When he started to feel that it was time to retire from diving he began looking for an Albacore boat to take advantage of the open access fishery. "The dive permit I had for years, that wasn't transferable. So, I just did whatever was available, and that was albacore."

However, as a self-proclaimed "oddball", Alan wanted to fish his way – on a sailboat. As is often the case, the path to his fishing sailboat was not straightforward. His first boat was a relatively turnkey vessel, but it taught him some harsh lessons. Too much ice, too much water, a hole, and a broken pump would lead to its loss. Not to be deterred, Alan found another fishing boat for sale that was actually a yacht design, a motor sailor. It was in rough shape and for the first five years it would have no sails, but eventually it would become the vessel that keeps Alan inspired. "It's kind of a dream. It's not really very practical, but it keeps me interested. At my age, if you're not interested, you're not going to keep doing it."

Alan may enjoy the friendly competition of fishing, but he wouldn't describe himself as hardcore by any means. He fishes alone with no crew, but among a group of other solo fishers. Safety is important and they all have a motto – Don't let a whitecap get between you and the beach. When it's time to head out though, he still looks



- F/V Longfin under sail

forward to the experience, "When I realize that I'm really getting ready to go, I get up and I'm just completely focused and eager to hit the road. It's a wonderful thing."

He knows, like we all do, that markets, regulations, and government influence remain big factors in the industry. Being part of an organization that's trying to help on those fronts is very important, and so is reaching out to one another. "I think a lot of fishermen are kind of balkanized. They kind of tend to their own circle, but I think if you reach out a little bit, you'll find everybody's pretty open. I don't meet people that aren't friendly, but you can think that way. You can carry that attitude around. What I've found is that's not really true. People are more helpful than we give them credit for."

## The Path to Implementing a Harvest Control Rule for North Pacific Albacore

-WFOA Staff

For fishermen, the implementation of a Harvest Control Rule (HCR) is a difficult discussion. The WFOA has consistently advocated for minimizing any restrictions on the US fleet. As we approach upcoming decisions on domestic effort controls, it is critical that the process remain transparent. The following is a brief summary of the recent history of relevant events provided to help members understand the context for current discussions.

### Early Management Measures

The establishment of a harvest control rule (HCR) for North Pacific albacore reflects years of collaborative effort between Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs), scientists, and key stakeholders, including the WFOA. In 2005, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) implemented fishing effort limits for North Pacific albacore in response to concerns over the health of the stocks. These

measures were intended to provide stability and limited global effort to 2005 levels. The measures lacked formalized harvest strategies or defined target reference points (TRPs). Recognizing the lack of clear guidance, the WFOA engaged with these fishery managers to ensure any future frameworks would account for the realities of the West Coast fleet.

### Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) and WFOA Advocacy

In 2015, the International Scientific Committee (ISC) launched the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process to assess potential harvest strategies against conservation and fishery objectives. The WFOA played an active role during this phase, ensuring that the priorities of West Coast albacore fishermen were heard. By 2017, key management objectives had been defined, including maintaining spawning stock biomass (SSB) above critical thresholds, minimizing abrupt management changes, and preserving equitable fishing opportunities.

When initial MSE results were presented in 2019, we worked directly with the RFMOs to address concerns over candidate strategies that could disproportionately impact the U.S. fleet. By advocating for the removal of overly restrictive proposals, the WFOA helped refine the objectives and focus on sustainable, practical measures.

### Finalizing the HCR

The MSE process culminated in 2021 with a set of simulations evaluating HCR performance under various conditions. We worked closely with managers to ensure that these strategies balanced sustainability with economic stability. Efforts included advocating for policies that maintained fleet access and limited undue burdens, such as overly conservative reference points that could restrict fishing opportunities.

The 2023 stock assessment confirmed the albacore stock's strong status, with SSB levels well above established thresholds. The WFOA emphasized these findings in discussions with managers to ensure that the proposed HCRs would support continued fleet prosperity and only be applied in the event of an significant decline in stock levels.

### Looking Ahead

In December 2023, current HCR was adopted and will be in place for the next ten years. The HCR requires each country to determine their own methodology for limiting effort if the HCR is triggered. The US delegation has taken the position that management through TAE is preferable to TAC for our fleet (see infographic for more details). Details regarding potential restrictions on TAE have yet to be determined. Discussions on these details are ongoing with NOAA holding a stakeholder webinar on Feb. 20th, 2025. We will continue to actively engage in this process and fight for the West Coast albacore fleet.

<b>TAC</b>	<b>VS</b>	<b>TAE</b>
<p>Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limits the amount of fish harvested (e.g., tonnage), directly controlling the total catch to ensure stock sustainability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Favored for highly targeted fisheries with precise stock assessments.</li> <li>Provides clear catch limits but may lead to race-to-fish scenarios without individual quotas.</li> </ul>		<p>Total Allowable Effort (TAE) limits the fishing effort (e.g., number of vessels, days at sea, or gear types), indirectly managing harvests by capping fishing capacity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preferred in data-limited fisheries where monitoring stock abundance is challenging.</li> <li>Offers flexibility but may result in uneven distribution of fishing opportunities.</li> </ul>





## NOAA to Host Informational Webinar on NPA Harvest Control Rule

-WFOA Staff

### Reminder



The National Marine Fisheries Service announced it will be hosting a U.S. stakeholder informational webinar to discuss a draft proposal that includes “options for translating fishing intensity into catch and/or effort limits.” This US proposal is being prepared for the 2025 Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) meeting on North Pacific Albacore.

According to NOAA announcement the meeting will also include, “discussion on exceptional circumstances as related to the North Pacific albacore Management Strategy Evaluation.” The WFOA has been involved with these discussions and negotiations for the duration of this process and has successfully been able to minimize the impact of these international regulations on the West Coast fleet. The virtual meeting will be held Thursday February 20th, from 1pm-4pm PST. Members are encouraged to attend and make their voices heard. Further information, including an agenda, will be distributed as soon as it is made available. No draft proposal has been provided at the time of this publication.

## US/Canadian Treaty Talks Continue With Some Shifts in Focus

-WFOA Staff

On Tuesday, December 3, delegations from the U.S. and Canada held an initial meeting to restart negotiations on a reciprocal fishing and port access treaty regime. This was the first official negotiation between the two countries since the 2024 “exchange of letters,” which created a status quo bridge agreement for the previous season.

The meeting began with a recap of prior negotiations and a reframing of contentious issues as manageable disagreements that could be resolved. Both delegations acknowledged the history of collaboration and the benefits both fleets have received from prior agreements. The U.S. delegation initiated the discussions, expressing support for a “status quo” agreement, while Canada articulated its goal of achieving a “fair and equitable” arrangement.

Each delegation leader emphasized the importance of timely progress, conveying a sense of urgency to their representatives. Both sides underscored the need to provide clarity to fishing vessels

well in advance of the upcoming season.

Discussions of the 2024 season were limited but significant. Both delegations highlighted the benefits of reciprocal access and agreed that continued collaboration was preferable to ending the treaty. Notably, each side acknowledged the absence of any incidents of aggression or negative interactions on the water.

In a notable shift, the Canadian delegation stated it would no longer seek to increase the number of Canadian vessels allowed to access the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). They recognized that increasing the cap above 45 vessels was a non-starter for U.S. fishermen. This shift was welcomed by the U.S. delegation, enabling a productive discussion on other topics, including:

- Legal mechanisms to monitor the total aggregate length of the Canadian fleet.
- Ensuring U.S. vessels fishing in

Canadian waters comply with log-book requirements.

- Exploring the possibility of an agreement extending beyond three years.

A new issue arose toward the conclusion of the meeting when the Canadian delegation proposed extending the dates for Canadian vessel access to U.S. waters. Canada suggested moving the cut-off date to October 8, citing recent fishing trends and the need to ensure fairness and equity. They argued that an extension would reduce congestion on Canadian fishing grounds later in the season, creating more space for U.S. vessels operating in Canadian waters. The U.S. delegation did not engage significantly on the proposal, instead focusing on recapping progress and finalizing the details of the next meeting.

Both delegations proposed in-person talks for early 2025, reiterating the importance of maintaining the pace of negotiations. Updates will be provided as additional details are made available.

## MSC Requires Certification Sharing Agreement

-WFOA Staff

The WFOA and AAFA are negotiating a draft agreement that will outline the criteria for who qualifies under the North and South Pacific Albacore Marine Stewardship Councils (MSC) certification. The latest version of the MSC certification criteria (referenced as FCPv2.3) applied during the most recent reassessment requires that all certified fisheries have an established “certificate sharing agreement.” The certificate sharing agreement is published on the MSC website and provides details on who can use the certificate and any other agreements or rules in place between the different client groups. These rules would apply to all pole or troll caught

albacore caught in the North and South Pacific and marketed as MSC certified over the next five years.

During the fall board meeting the WFOA directors expressed a desire to advocate that the certificate applies to as many vessels as possible, regardless of membership within an association and in accordance with long held principles of increasing opportunities for the fleet. However, this is not as simple as it may seem, as MSC requires that a list of qualified vessels be maintained by the certificate holders. This puts the onus on the associations to keep accurate records of vessel ownership, Coast

Guard requirements, active HMS permits, registry with appropriate RFMOs, etc. Without appropriate vetting and active monitoring of the qualified vessel list, the certification could be jeopardized.

The process requires significant investments of time and money for the associations. Market trends and interest from buyers has demonstrated the value of maintaining MSC status. The WFOA minimizes financial burden on members by shifting the expense of maintaining the certification to buyers interested in marketing MSC certified fish and applying for grant funding to subsidize costs.

## Albacore Fleet Completes 2024 Season With Mixed Results

-WFOA Staff

Available data for the 2024 West Coast albacore surface hook-and-line season shows a significant year-over-year increase in production from 2023. At the time of publication, reports available on the Pacific Fisheries Information Network (PacFIN) show over 4,453 metric tons (mt) of albacore delivered this season. The publicly available information provided by PacFIN includes delivery data from ports in Oregon, Washington, and California. These reports are often delayed, so the final numbers for the 2024 season could be substantially higher.

As it stands, the increase in production resulted in an estimated ex-vessel net revenue of over \$15.85 million so far this season. While these initial 2024 numbers indicate a positive upward trend, they remain below the industry’s historical averages. Examining the recent 10-year average shows that the fleet has been responsible for catching 8,794 mt annually, worth an average of \$36.5 million per year. For comparison, the 2023 season landings totaled 3,161 mt and produced \$9.3 million—the lowest

economic value since 1991. Following a disastrous season by adding over 1,500 mt of additional production is a positive indicator that the fishery can return to previous levels.

Another positive development during the 2024 season was the return of active bait fishing following several years of de minimis pole production. The opportunity to harvest using poles was a welcomed return to the rack. Several member vessels reported strong periods of pole fishing production. However, the window of opportunity was short and represented significantly less effort compared to jigging.

Overall vessel effort and participation numbers are not yet available. Reports from the fleet and buyers throughout the season suggested several vessels did not return to the tuna grounds in 2024. Of the vessels that did participate, many concentrated deliveries in a limited number of ports. Westport, WA and Newport, OR continued to offload the majority of albacore deliveries, followed by Astoria, OR and Coos Bay, OR.

The concentration of activity raises important questions about infrastructure and capacity. Throughout the season, WFOA received complaints regarding delayed turnarounds and limited slip availability. Additionally, concerns about the availability of offloading stations in Northern and Southern California were brought to WFOA’s attention at the end of the year.

Each season has a story, and members responded with mixed reactions to the 2024 season statistics. “We had some big days and were able to put a couple of trips together, but it wasn’t consistent. Felt like we were chasing ‘em all season. I would have thought the numbers would be higher,” expressed a long-time WFOA member fishing out of Coos Bay, OR. Similar sentiments were shared by a member fishing out of central California, who summed up his season by stating plainly, “Well, it was better than last year.” The majority of members who participated in the mid-season survey felt that weather and water conditions were good this year and they were optimistic about the future.

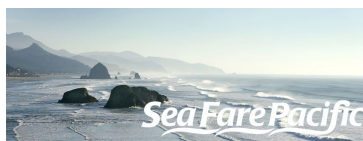
## Thank You to Our 2024 Supporting Members

Since 1967, the WFOA has been fighting for the future of the fleet. That commitment to the commercial fishing community would not be possible without the generous contributions of our Supporting Members.

Thank you for partnering with us!



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# In Memoriam

*In loving memory of those we lost this year.*

*Fair winds and following seas*

*Raymond Hicks - WA*

*John (Tom) Thomas Curry - OR*

*David "Dave" Christian - AK*

*Sandra Jean Traxinger - AK*

*Robby "Stretch" Sanchez - CA*

*John Pepple - OR*

*Matthew Paul - CA*

*Jon Gonzalez - OR*

*Riley Tavis Locker - WA*

*Donna Lee Pollock - WA*

*Jack Benton Cartwright - OR*

*Andy Babich - WA*

*Donald Lee Tripp - WA*

*Rhonda Lee Moe - CA*

*The crew of the F/V Wind Walker:*

*Travis Kapp*

*Michael Brown*

*Emilio Celaya-Talamantez*

*Jacob Hannah*

*Alex Ireland*

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