

# Albacore a prized catch



A summer tuna tagging project is expected to excite considerable interest from all fishers—especially those with a penchant for greenbacks as a reward.

Dubbed the 'chicken of the sea', albacore tuna are the subject of a new tag and release programme off New Zealand's rugged West Coast.

Researchers from the Secretariat of the Pacific Communities (SPC) oceanic fisheries program have spent three months tagging and releasing 3,000 juvenile albacore tuna, with the aim to collect better estimates of the albacore tuna fishery's exploitation rates, movement patterns, growth rates, and validate age estimates. Local fishing vessel, *Genesis*, was chartered for the programme.

Tuna were tagged with either a yellow or white spaghetti tag. The yellow tags are designed to track movement patterns, while fish tagged with a white tag were also injected with a chemical dye allowing scientist to later conduct age validation experiments.

The dye leaves a mark on the ear bones (otoliths) of the fish, and because the ear bones have growth rings similar to trees, the dye will allow scientists to better estimate their age.

Each returned tag could fetch fishers between US\$20 to US\$100 depending on the type of tag.

A key component to the success of this project will be to maximise tag return information and recovery of dye-injected fish.

"While not expecting tag returns beyond the short-term, because juvenile fish do not remain long in New Zealand waters, tagged fish may recruit to fisheries in New Zealand and elsewhere in the South Pacific over the next ten years," says MFish senior fisheries analyst, Graeme McGregor.

**All tagged tuna have a plastic dart inserted below their second dorsal fin. An identifying number is printed twice on each tag.**

If you find a tagged albacore please write down the following details:

- the tag number
- where, when, and how the albacore was caught
- the fork length (nose to middle of the tail) of the fish measured on a flat surface
- your name and address.

There are two kinds of tags you could find:

**YELLOW TAGS** have the words: SPC NOUMEA REWARD written on them. These tags should be given to your local MFish office along with the above information. A \$20 USD reward is given for each tag returned.

**WHITE TAGS** have the words: KEEP FISH FOR \$100 USD REWARD. These fish have also been injected with a special dye and are very valuable to scientists. These tags should be returned, along with the whole fish and written information, to your local MFish office. A \$100 USD reward is given for each tag along with the whole fish (chilled or frozen).

All tag returns also go in an end-of-season lottery for other prizes. Rewards will be paid by the SPC once the reward has been verified.

For further information on the tagging program please refer to SPC's website: [www.spc.int/tagging](http://www.spc.int/tagging)

For MFish office details please go to our website and look under 'contact us'.