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Increased travelling as fact-finding for the pursuit of funding

At the conclusion of the Expert Committee meeting in Tahiti, Richard Shomura invited me to a Baitfish Workshop he was convening in Honolulu in the next month or so. While I was keen to accept this invitation, I suggested to Richard that it would be more appropriate if he invited Barney Smith or Tony Lewis, as they had done the bulk of the baitfish work in Papua New Guinea. Richard made it clear that he wanted me to attend primarily as a member of the Expert Committee on Tropical Skipjack and not as a baitfish expert. He wanted me to promote the newly proposed skipjack tagging programme. He also hoped that after the workshop, I would accompany him to the Lake Arrowhead Tuna Conference in California, again to help promote the tagging and survey project. He hoped that I would then go on with him to La Jolla, where his bosses were housed in the same building as the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. He thought it would be good for us to have a chat with them about South Pacific skipjack fisheries and the prospects for a major research initiative. Just to make sure I had no excuses, he stated that he would meet all of my expenses.

I presented papers at both the Baitfish Workshop and the Tuna Conference, and Barney and Tony each submitted a paper to the workshop.

The Baitfish Workshop in Honolulu was well attended, informative and extremely enjoyable. I found it particularly gratifying to learn that our baitfish work in Papua New Guinea was well ahead of most others in the

broader Pacific region. While most night-time baitfishers were aware of the considerable influence of the phase of the moon on bait catches, we were the first to quantify that impact (Kearney 1977a). The meeting left me in no doubt that the baitfish component of the broader programme I was proposing was both necessary and adequate.

The Lake Arrowhead conference was a pivotal one for me for a variety of reasons. Right from the moment we landed at the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), my understanding of the United States began to accelerate. On looking beyond the stairway down from the plane, behind Paul Strushaker, a scientist in Richard Shomura's lab, I was amazed by the density of the smog that greeted us: visibility was a lot less than 100 yards at about 2 pm. As his feet touched the tarmac, Paul immediately fell to his knees with his arms raised, exclaiming loudly, 'God bless America'. He was clearly not impressed with the air quality that greeted him on his arrival home. The drive up the mountains to Lake Arrowhead, at the back of Los Angeles, exposed the thickness of the green-brown smog, and what a contrast was created when we burst through it going up the mountain to see blue sky again. Air quality in Los Angeles has, of course, improved greatly since the 1970s.

On arrival at the main Conference Centre, it did not take me long to find Bill Bayliff. Everybody seemed to know him. At the first opportunity, I introduced myself. We had a lot to talk about, and we quickly agreed to do so, perhaps beginning over dinner that night. Then Bill just casually informed me how much Dr Joseph was looking forward to meeting me. I thought it was a bit early for Christmas celebrations, but maybe not.

My presentation was scheduled early in the program for the next day and just before a coffee break. There were lots of questions (usually a good sign). The fishermen wanted more information about the tuna and baitfish catch rates from the commercial fleets, whereas the scientists wanted to know more about the almost 600 tag recoveries we had documented. One guy, who stood up each time he asked a question, and he did that a lot, wanted more information about everything.

As the session concluded, Bill approached me to thank me for the talk. I immediately asked him, 'Who is the little guy asking all the questions?' 'That's Jim Joseph', he replied. Not my most auspicious start to a quest to

meet somebody I thought was really important for me to impress. As fate would have it, I was to have lunch with Jim and Bill that first day, so no harm had been done.

The conference was a wonderful introduction, for someone like me, to the world of tuna fishing, research and management, at least from the American perspective. I got to meet many key people, including a surprising number of tuna fishermen, and lots of representatives of the big canning companies, such as Starkist, Ralston Purina and Bumble Bee.

My friendship with Jim Joseph was strengthening quickly, and when at lunch on that first day he invited me to visit him in his office on Monday and to accompany him and his wife Pat to a celebration of the launch of a new tuna boat the following evening, my trip to San Diego was already a success, and I hadn't got there yet.

At the conference, I also had great enjoyment talking to tuna fishermen, including Tony Nizitich and Manuel Cintas. Manuel was the skipper of the *Apollo*, a new boat and the first in the US fleet with the capacity for 2,000 tons of tuna. I received another Christmas present when Manuel offered to give me a lift to San Diego after the conference.

On the drive down from the mountains a day or two later, I was to be given my first lessons on the value of using fish aggregating devices in tuna purse seining. One story in particular I will never forget.

The *Apollo* was about a thousand miles out from San Diego, and the fishing was unusually poor when Manuel spotted a piece of thick white polystyrene rope, only about two yards long but four inches thick, floating high on the water. It was almost certainly a piece of mooring rope for a very large ship. Manuel said that he knew the potential value of floating objects for attracting tuna, but this one was so small that he wouldn't usually even look at it. But these were tough times, and the fishing had been extremely slow.

When he gently steamed up to the piece of rope, his echosounders immediately became rather excited. There was no doubt that a very large school of tuna was underneath it. He set his net on it and retrieved more than 300 tons of large yellowfin tuna. The rope came up with the net. He had a quick look at it and was about to throw it in the garbage bin, but as it was dark by the time they had loaded their catch, he thought why not just put the piece of rope back in the water and drift here overnight, as you never know what the morrow may bring! One school of 300 tons of tuna

had gathered around it; why not another one? He attached a small upright red flag to the piece of rope to make it easier to find when it was in the ocean. Then he put it back over the side.

It took some time to find the rope the next morning, but when they did, it had another school of tuna under it. They fished the same piece of rope for the next four days for a total haul of 1,000 tons of yellowfin.

San Diego did not disappoint. At the site of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, I got to meet and chat with the senior staff of both the IATTC, including Cliff Petersen, the deputy director, Pat Tomlinson and Witek Klawe, and the National Marine Fisheries Service, including Bill Fox and Brian Rothschild, with whom I had a brief discussion that included Richard Shomura, about the Expert Committee on Tropical Skipjack. This was followed by several lengthier discussions with Jim Joseph and Bill Bayliff. I raised with them my thoughts on the much broader scale skipjack tagging project that had now been endorsed by the Expert Committee. They were immediately interested to the point that I thought, excited.

The cocktail party on the new tuna boat was another fascinating event. I got to meet more fishermen and celebrities in the tuna industry, including Augie Fellando, who, as the CEO of the American Tuna Boat Owners Association, I was to have a lot to do with over the next 10 years. I continued to hound Jim Joseph a little, to the extent that I felt I should apologise to him and his wife Pat (with whom my wife Hope and our whole family were soon to begin a lifelong and very close friendship) for taking up too much of his time. Pat immediately replied, 'As far as I am concerned, it would be great if you spoke to him all night. You are friendly to him. The fishermen just want to harass him, or even abuse him, for closing the tuna fishery at what they think is the wrong time'. Jim, as the director of the IATTC, was responsible for setting the dates of the opening and closing of the tuna fishery in the commission's area. I know of very few, if any, fisheries management decisions that pleased all the fishermen. (I have written a paper on the subject, entitled 'Resource Assessment: The Joy of Always Being Wrong' [Kearney 1991a].)

Before the evening was out, Jim invited me to come back to the wharves the next day with him so I could watch a tuna boat being built and to go over a few of the boats to help me get a better understanding of how they operated. Of course, I agreed.

The next morning turned out to be more of an introduction to the American work ethic than a fishing lesson. Shortly after Jim and I began walking around the dock, a bell rang, and all the workers on the various boats came walking briskly towards the coffee bars, of which there were several. Not much is unusual about that. Ten to 15 minutes later, the bell rang again. To my amazement, all the men walked very briskly, quite a few even jogged, back to their workstations. If you ran back to work on Australia's wharves, numerous union officials would let their displeasure be known.

As we inspected several tuna boats, the level of staff commitment to the industry impressed me greatly. While on one of these boats, Jim introduced me to Gordon Broadhead, who was working for Ralston Purina at that time but had previously been the senior scientist at the IATTC. He was, in fact, so senior that many people associated with the commission thought that he would succeed Dr Jack Kask as director of the IATTC – a responsibility that was given to Jim Joseph. I was immediately impressed with Gordon and was very pleased when he accepted Jim's invitation to join us for coffee.

As we were chatting, the subject of the broad-scale tagging project came up. Both Jim and Gordon thought this was very likely to be something the IATTC might be able to help with. Should it get going, it would certainly be something they would be greatly interested in. After all, the area of responsibility of the IATTC was in the same ocean, and at least some skipjack could be expected to mix between the east and west Pacific. While the structure of skipjack stocks was the subject of considerable debate, there was certainly no demarcation line that was a permanent barrier to movement. The subject inevitably shifted to how much I thought the project would cost and how I was proposing to have it funded.

I advised that I had only a very preliminary estimate of cost and that much would depend on where and how a suitable vessel would come from. Under cross-examination, I suggested maybe $600,000 a year for three years to do the tagging and then about half this amount per year for another two years to complete the analyses. Gordon made some wise observations that led him to several conclusions: he thought the project was a laudable idea, but he thought my estimate of cost was seriously low. But even $600,000 a year for multiple years was a huge amount of money to raise for a fisheries research project, particularly on a fishery that was still very much in its infancy. He stressed that to raise that amount of money, I would need to have considerably more than just a good idea. I would have to be able to convince donors that there really was something in it for them. I would have

to explain why they could not afford not to be in it. Over the next two years, I was to be given similar advice from several relevant sources, most notably the Rockefeller Foundation (see Chapter 5). Gordon wished me well, but really did not think I had much chance of raising the necessary money.

After Gordon left, Jim asked me if he could come visit our operation in Port Moresby and discuss our future cooperation further. I could see him quickly becoming my mentor and had difficulty restraining my enthusiasm for his visit.

Jim did not procrastinate. Within a month, we were sitting in my office at Kanudi discussing how we could best make such a big research program eventuate. Neither of us had serious doubts that having the project based largely on tagging was the right way to go. Yes, there were undeniably considerable risks, but we thought they were not sufficiently problematic to make us change direction. We could not see a viable alternative. We also had little doubt that 100,000 tagged fish should be enough to enable resource assessment within acceptable confidence intervals. We agreed that tagging this quantity over three years was technically achievable. Jim agreed with me that tagging the 100,000 fish over three years was much better than having the same number tagged in a shorter period. I felt that three years would be enough to enable at least first impressions of the variability in abundance over time.

Jim could not really help allay my concerns that problems with getting bait in the eastern part of the central Pacific may make it difficult to have tags sufficiently uniformly distributed across our total study area. He knew that I had more experience than he did with tropical baitfish species. And he was impressed with the baitfish survey and assessment program we had developed in Papua New Guinea. Of particular relevance to this specific problem was the improved baitfish handling processes we had developed primarily for the smaller and more delicate tropical baitfish species. These new techniques had greatly increased the amount of bait we could carry in a bait tank and the longevity of most species once carefully loaded, observing the specific protocols we had developed. Of particular value was our procedure for splitting the bait-fishing process into three stages: 1. With the assistance of bright underwater lights, trapping the bait in a 'bouke-ami' net at night; 2. Holding it uncrowded and undisturbed in the net for the rest of the night; and 3. Crowding and then loading it into the bait tanks after daybreak.

There was good reason for confidence that, provided the vessel we used was in sound working condition, and the crew were up to commercial pole and line fishing standards, we could overcome most technical problems that might arise. What we were planning was, after all, a research project, and we were well aware of the priority that must be given to baitfish supply. I was also anticipating that there would be some areas where there simply would not be enough skipjack to make tagging rewarding. Dealing with unequal sample sizes was an anticipated part of the process of analysis. We may have to revisit some areas several times.

I never did know for sure what was the cause of the coincidence, but while Jim was in Port Moresby, so also was Dr Akira Suda. Suda-San was at that time the director of the Far Seas Fisheries Research Laboratory in Shimizu, Japan. I had meetings with him in Shimizu a year or two earlier. He had come on a fact-finding mission, having heard of our success in researching the Papua New Guinea tuna fishery. I suspect that Jim may have orchestrated the 'coincidence' of them both being in Port Moresby at the same time. The three of us, plus Tony Lewis, spent considerable time talking generally about Papua New Guinea's tuna resources. Dr Suda had the opportunity to talk to Barney Smith one-on-one on board the *Tagula*, which was working out of Rabaul under Barney's direction for the week Dr Suda was in Papua New Guinea. He had actually managed to catch a few skipjack and see them tagged while he was on the boat.

Suda was particularly keen to talk to me about the imminent international discussions on the Law of the Sea and what might happen in the South Pacific – a subject of great interest to the Japanese. Dr Suda had not been able to find anybody other than myself who appeared to have a great interest in what changes the Law of the Sea might bring to tuna management in the South Pacific. I had started work on exactly this topic and, in the next two years, would publish several papers on it, so I was very keen to exchange opinions with such a senior member of the Japanese fisheries hierarchy. Dr Suda felt that my involvement with the issues around the Law of the Sea and what Pacific Island nations wished to achieve from it would have a big impact on Japan's attitude to funding the Skipjack Programme.

Having such distinguished visitors gave my wife, Hope, and I the opportunity for a rather special seafood dinner, to which the minister for Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries, Bruce Jephcott, with whom I had a firm friendship, also accepted our invitation. Port Moresby was a great place for fresh seafood at the time, and the meal included very large mud crabs, lobsters, several

species of prawns from the Gulf of Papua and a very large long-tail tuna I had caught in Port Moresby Harbour four or five days earlier; the tuna was presented at the dinner as sashimi.

The evening was great fun. I particularly remember the merriment that was created when, at the start of the smorgasbord, Tony unceremoniously plonked one of the biggest mud crab claws I have ever seen on the minister's plate. The claw was so big that the minister almost lost control of his plate. I also well remember Suda-san's amazed look as he studied the very large plate with more than two kilos of tuna sashimi on it. He looked a little puzzled as he came up to me and said, 'Kearney-san, that is a very big plate of sashimi'. I took him over to the fridge and showed him where there were at least 5 kilos more (Port Moresby was famous for very big *Thunnus tonggol*, and this one had been over 40 pounds at the time of capture). Suda's puzzled look was replaced with a beaming smile: 'This could not happen in Japan: to be invited to a dinner party where there is more tuna sashimi than you could possibly eat'. He then went silent for a while, apparently deep in thought. Then he stated, 'I appreciate the trouble you and your wife have gone to, to make sure that we have a variety of seafood, but would you be upset if I ate only tuna?' What an easy guest to please!

Before Jim left Port Moresby, we discussed the wisdom of getting the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) involved in engendering support for the Skipjack Programme. Jim knew FAO well, and he thought that John Gulland would be the right person to approach if we thought FAO should be involved in some way. We agreed that I would talk to Dick Baird and Richard Shomura about it and get back to him.

The concept of the Skipjack Programme continued to gain momentum as 1974 rolled on. The old-fashioned spelling of the word 'programme', Dick Baird informed me, was at the insistence of the SPC. While it rather annoyed many, particularly the Americans, I learnt to live and work with it.

The SPC's Seventh Technical Meeting on Fisheries, which I attended, was held in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, in July. I gave a short talk on how I felt the Skipjack Programme, if implemented, would help with gaining regional consensus on how to address the new Law of the Sea, which was on the horizon. The meeting endorsed the proposal of the Expert Committee as a 'project of the highest priority and urgency'; an endorsement that was subsequently seconded by the Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council Sixteenth

Session, meeting jointly with the Indian Ocean Fishery Commission in Jakarta, Indonesia, in November. By invitation, I attended both meetings to promote the programme.

Discussions with Dick Baird and Richard Shomura confirmed that getting FAO involved may help with fundraising, once that begun in earnest. I so advised Jim Joseph, who immediately confirmed that he would call John Gulland. I felt it would be much better if Jim rang Gulland, as I had met him only once when I attended a population dynamics course he ran in Cronulla a year or so earlier. In any case, Jim carried much more seniority than I. Jim rang me back a day or so later to tell me that Gulland was enthusiastic about getting involved. FAO had not had much success at all with fisheries projects in the Pacific, so why not get on board with the biggest one they had ever heard of? What Jim arranged was that I would give Gulland a week or so to get endorsement from Fred Popper, who was the director of FAO's Fisheries Division, and then give Gulland a call to discuss the possibilities.

Calling Gulland in Rome, Italy, turned out to be not a simple task. Jim had given me the number to ring, but in 1974 in Papua New Guinea, international phone calls were not simply a matter of dialling and speaking. I checked the time in Rome, and at about 10 am, their time, rang our international switch and booked a call. 'Please wait', said the local operator, who did not sound at all confident about the task I was giving him. So I waited … and waited … and waited … I finally hung up about an hour and a half later. I tried the next night for the same result, except as I was about to hang up, my wife, Hope, said, 'Give me the phone'. She wanted to be helpful, but I could not help but feel that she was a little annoyed I had given in so meekly the night before. I gladly gave her the phone. She hung on for ages. Eventually, an operator came on the line to see what was going on. As nothing was happening, Hope gave him a polite serve and kept waiting. I was about to go to bed when, in a very secretarial voice, she said loudly (to alert me to her success), 'Good morning, Dr Gulland. You have a call from Papua New Guinea. Could you please hold for a moment while I get Dr Kearney for you?'

The discussion with Gulland was much more productive than I dared hope. He led with a statement of how keen FAO was to be involved, confirming FAO's lack of success with fisheries projects in the Pacific. He then offered me a month-long consultancy, to come to Rome and work with him and Sidney Holt to refine the project proposal and investigate ways of getting it

supported. There was not a lot more for me to say than a rather enthusiastic 'yes'. He would send me the plane ticket. He suggested a date in November, and I would only need to contact him if I could not make that date. If I did make it, all I needed to do was tell him which flight, and I would be met at the airport.

To go from living in Port Moresby, or even Sydney, to living in Rome in 1974 was clearly going to result in some form of culture shock, but I wasn't quite ready for how much. One of FAO's very senior scientists, Jean-Paul Troadec, met me at the airport. As we drove into Rome, I was most impressed with the many beautiful older buildings. I commented to Jean-Paul about one. His response, that this one was only about 700 years old, said it all: no existing building in Australia is much more than 250 years old.

The consultancy resulted in the production of a revised proposal for the Skipjack Programme that contained considerably more detail on what activities would be undertaken and what analyses would be done. It even included a draft schedule by country or territory for the first year of tagging and baitfish research. Of significance to later obtaining financial support from the UK (discussed in Chapter 7) was the acknowledgement of the possible difficulty of getting sufficient bait in the eastern extremes of the SPC area. This concern was countered by the acknowledgement that skipjack were known to be seasonally abundant in this area.

This version of the proposal was published as a document for the joint meeting of the Indo-Pacific Fisheries Council and the Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission in Mombasa, Kenya, in July 1975 under my name as an FAO consultant (Kearney 1974). At the time, I thought FAO was keen to have me as one of its staff acknowledged as the author because of its history of difficulty in establishing successful projects in the Pacific. Immediately after funding for the programme was confirmed, I became aware of the full extent of FAO's interest (see Chapter 11).

While at FAO, I also took the opportunity to have several discussions with Fred Popper, the director of the FAO Fisheries Division, on the broader issues of the Law of the Sea and South Pacific fisheries management. I told Fred of the paper I had begun writing on this topic. He suggested that we might write a joint paper on this topic at some time. Less than two years later, we did so. Before leaving Rome, I was offered another three- or four-month consultancy with FAO to undertake a review of Indian Ocean tuna fisheries. I did not have to decide immediately.

I returned to Port Moresby in late December 1974 and immediately pestered Dick Baird for an update on the funding for my possible position at the SPC. He told me that he was extremely confident he could get enough money from the SPC to allow me to work for six months on the fundraising for this project. It would suit him if I took the FAO job in the interim, as this would give him time to get a signed commitment for me to be paid. He clearly implied, without unequivocally stating it, that the money for my salary would be coming from the SPC.

It was some time, more than a year, and well after I began working at the SPC, before I established that it was not SPC money that funded my appointment. I now believe that Dick had not wanted me to know that the SPC Executive was not supportive of the programme. I think he needed the extra time to make sure they would provide some support, such as housing and medical insurance, that was standard with SPC employment. I believe he thought I might not take on the task if I knew the full extent of the lack of support from the executive staff of the SPC.

Paul Judd's excellent report, 'A Short History of the Skipjack Survey and Assessment Programme' (2016), provides a sound summary of this critical period in the commencement of the programme, beginning in the middle of 1974:

> The first recommendation of the SPC's Seventh Technical Meeting on Fisheries, held in Tonga in July 1974, had not only stated that: 'The meeting recommends that the Tagging Programme as outlined by the Expert Committee on Tropical Skipjack be accepted as a project of the highest priority and urgency', it went on to state that:
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> > The need for such a programme has been accepted, and the Meeting recommends that the South Pacific Commission make every possible effort to obtain funding for the programme from any possible sources. *It was appreciated that such funding should not interfere with the existing funding structure for South Pacific Commission projects* [emphasis added].

The last sentence was a directive from the SPC Executive. It clearly reflected considerable concern, particularly among the executive, that if SPC donor country funds were directed towards this project, the outcome would be a negative influence on the quantum of funds available for SPC core support.

I was to spend four months on the second FAO consultancy, culminating in the publication of a review of changes in the tuna fisheries of the Indian Ocean (Kearney 1975b). I then returned briefly to Port Moresby before accepting the challenge put to me by Dick Baird. I commenced work at the SPC in Noumea on September 13, 1975, believing that my salary was being paid by the SPC for at least the next six months.

As Paul Judd reports, in the interim, the Rockefeller Foundation had created the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management (ICLARM), but its operation was still very much in its infancy in mid-1975. The first meeting on the ICLARM Technical Advisory Committee occurred in Honolulu in February 1975, and just five days later, the ICLARM program coordinator (Steve Ritterbush) sent a memo to Dr Phil Helfrich, the director designate of ICLARM, concerning the 'Skipjack Resource Assessment Project':

> After working out the initial details with Dick Baird (DB) … this is where we stand at the moment. The Project Manager for this program will be hired directly through the SPC in a staff capacity. Dick will develop a job description for the position in line with SPC requirements (even though he already intends to hire Bob Kearney) and will also handle the transfer of grant funds on the SPC end … The SPC will provide office space, housing, support personnel, and medical services. *ICLARM funds will go for salary, additional expatriation allowance, and travel expenses* [emphasis added]. DB has assured me that no percentage of ICLARM funds will be deducted for administrative overhead.

The funds that were to be spent on the employment of the Skipjack Programme coordinator were ICLARM funds and not those of the parent Rockefeller Foundation. I was to ascertain in my meeting with the Rockefeller Foundation's Program Committee in November 1975 (see Chapter 5) that they were not aware that some of the funding they had provided to help create the Expert Committee on Tropical Skipjack had been used to pay my salary in the early stages of my pursuit of funding for the Skipjack Programme.

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