

Driftnet fishing

Other ways of fishing

The EU ban on driftnets has resulted in a fishing revival and points to the way forward for European fisheries

In 1998, the European Union banned tuna driftnets in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. While those using this type of equipment were hit hard, including the driftnetters from the island of Ile d'Yeu in Brittany, France, it opened the way for other types of fishing operations for long-finned tuna stocks, notably in the Bay of Biscay.

As a result, today there are around 200 boats, half of them under 10 years old, fishing for long-fin tuna with lines. This seasonal fishing activity is carried out from the end of May until the end of October. The boats follow the long-fin tuna migrations: in the Azores at the beginning of the season, then up towards Ireland in September-October.

Landings also follow an east-west pattern: starting in the Galician port of La Coruña, where, like the swallows, the long-finned tuna returns in spring. The landings then move to Gijón, Santander and Bermeo, eventually ending in the Basque Country as the autumn leaves fall.

Long-finned tuna is fished with troll lines and hauled on board using hydraulic reels. Each boat has four or five fishermen, mostly young, three of whom watch over the mechanical hauling of the lines, each fisherman being responsible for a number of lines. As soon as they see a tuna hooked, it is immediately hauled aboard, gutted and chilled.

This troll line fishery is not new, being based on an ancestral artisanal fishery. In the past, it was manual, with each tuna hauled on board by hand. Today, the mechanization of the line hauling means that the work is less physically demanding, and this has attracted people into the profession.

Boats like these, 18-26 m long, catch, in a good season, approximately 700 kg of long-fin tuna each day. While these quantities may appear small, the tuna caught by line is top quality, in contrast to the net- and trawl-caught tuna, which are often damaged.

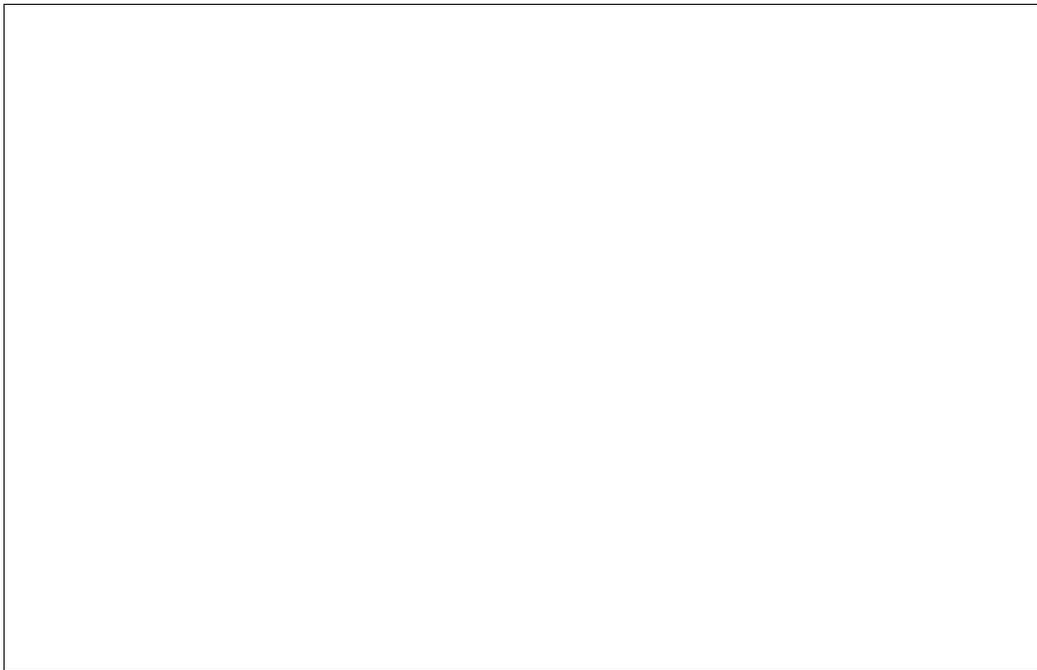
Line fishing of long-fin tuna provides well for both the crew and the boat. What is more, the boats are not great fuel guzzlers: pulling along a small number of lines out behind does not require too much precious energy. In today's world, this counts high.

In winter, when long-fin tuna swim under distant skies, these boats use *bolinche* (purse-seine) for anchovies or sardines. Some others have, for several years now, used a system of automated lines for mackerel, the results of which look very promising.

In the last couple of years, three or four boats from the island of Ile d'Yeu have started to fish long-fin tuna with troll lines. During the summer of 2005, Irish and French scientists did some fishing trials with gear similar to the ones used by fishermen from the coast of North Spain, with very positive results.

The development of a fleet using selective methods such as these is possible, if the pelagic trawlers stop their destructive fishing, which tends to flood the canning market with mediocre-quality long-fin tuna.

Fisheries like this—relatively low on intensity and fuel consumption, and based on traditional techniques that have been improved upon yet retain their selective features, all of which enables top-quality products to be



obtained—must surely point the way
forward for European fisheries. ¶

This article is based on an interview with Robert Alvarez, retired small-scale fisherman from Saint Jean de Luz, and member of Itsas Geroa (The Future of the Sea). The interview was done by Béatrice Gorez (cffa.cape@tiscali.be) of the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements