

PNG TUNA TAGGING PROJECT (PNGTP-2)

CRUISE REPORT No. 3

Bismarck Sea, north of Manus Island, Solomon Sea and east of Bougainville

29th February - 19th March 2012

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes activities of the third and final cruise of the second annual charter of the Papua New Guinea Tagging Project (PNGTP) during a nineteen day period in March 2012. After leaving Madang, the vessel fished in the central Bismarck Sea, then to the northern EEZ, north of Manus, before fishing east to Kavieng for the full moon break. The cruise continued to the south of New Britain via Cape Lambert before fishing across the Solomon Sea, clearing out of PNG in Buka and fishing back to Noro base.

Scientific personnel involved in the cruise are listed below in Table 1.

Table 1. SPC and NFA personnel onboard during Cruise 2

Name	Title	Affiliation	
Thomas Usu	Cruise leader	NFA	29/2 – 9/3/2012
Antony Lewis	Cruise leader	SPC contractor	9/3 – 19/3/2012
Bruno Leroy	Cruise leader	SPC	29/2-19/3/2012
Benthly Sabub	Tagging Technician	NFA	29/2 – 17/3/2012
Chris Molai	Trainee	NFA	29/2 – 17/3/2012

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF SEARCHING and FISHING ACTIVITY

Following departure from Madang with good bait, the cruise began with excellent fishing on a seamount north of Whirlwind Reef, then again near Shelburne Reef. With good bait from Seeadler Harbour, good fishing was then found north of Manus on the TAO Equator buoy before travelling to Kavieng for the full moon break. Good catches were made on the Dyaul ridge before transferring to the south coast of New Britain, via St Georges Channel. Schools were found close inshore off Lindenhaven and fished for several days, before crossing the Solomon Sea to Buka for outwards clearance. The final day's fishing on the 5S TAO buoy yielded excellent fishing to end the cruise on a high note. The shortened charter concluded in Noro early morning on the 19th March.

The track of the cruise in the PNG EEZ, based on school, 0600, 1800 and 2400 hrs positions, is found below as **Figure 1** and a summary of general movements and tag releases follows as **Table 2**.

A compilation of the daily log extracts, detailing daily activities, is provided as **Appendix 2**.

Figure 1: Cruise track during PNGTP-2 Cruise 3

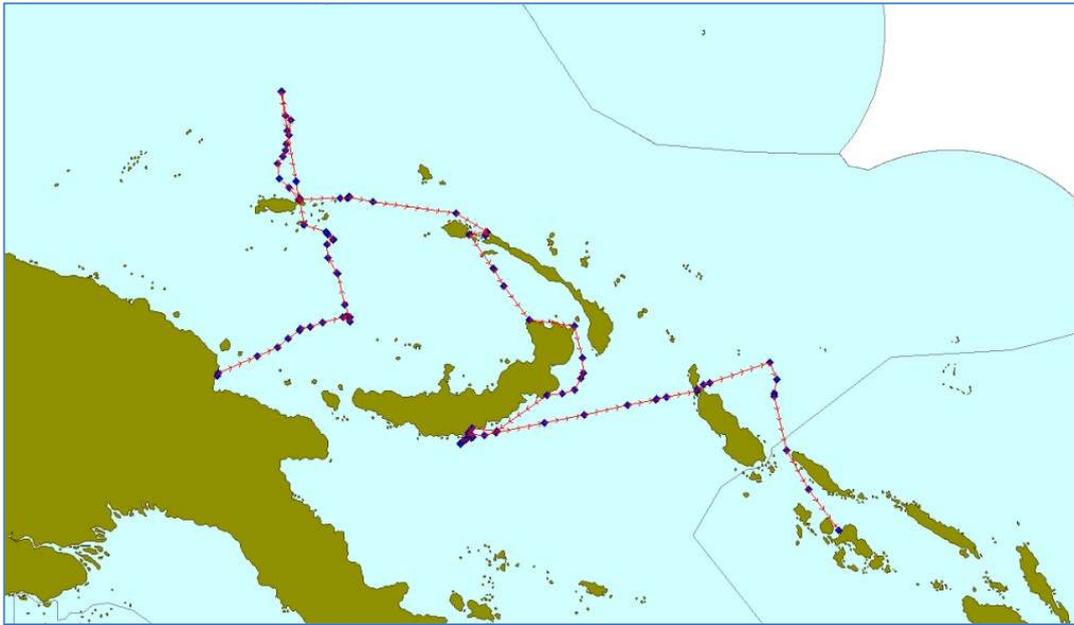


Table 2 Summary of PNGTP- 2 Cruise 3 activity, with the number of conventional and archival tag releases per day

Date	Activity	Conventional releases			Archival releases			Total releases
		SJ	YF	BE	SJ	YF	BE	
Feb 29 th	In port Madang, bait Rasch passage							
Mar 1 st	Fishing central Bismarck	178	75					253
Mar 2 nd	Fishing Thomas seamount, bait Sherburne	3227	189	30				3446
Mar 3 rd	Fishing central Bismarck, bait St Andrews	638	38					676
Mar 4 th	Steam to Manus (no bait), bait Seeadler							0
Mar 5 th	Fishing north Manus	768	43	63				874
Mar 6 th	Fishing TAO 00/147E, bait Seeadler	311	28	366			8	713
Mar 7 th	Fishing towards Kavieng	105	213					318
Mar 8 th	In port Kavieng (full moon)							0
Mar 9 th	In port Kavieng (full moon)							0
Mar 10 th	In port, clear, baiting Nusandaula							0
Mar 11 th	Fishing Dyaul seamount, baiting C. Lambert	2227	701					2928
Mar 12 th	Fishing St Georges Channel, then south	60						60
Mar 13 th	Fishing s coast NB, baiting Lindenhaven	53	20					73
Mar 14 th	Fishing s coast NB, baiting Lindenhaven	1362	465	1				1828
Mar 15 th	Fishing towards Buka, steaming overnight	370	672	1				1043
Mar 16 th	Fishing west of Buka, baiting, Taiof Is	131	21	2				154
Mar 17 th	In port Buka, clearance outwards; fishing east							0
Mar 18 th	Fishing TAO 5S, steam towards Noro	2267	293	337				2897
Mar 19 th	Noro base, decommissioning							
	CRUISE 3 TOTAL	11697	2758	800			8	15263

TAG RELEASES

Of the 19 days of the cruise, all or part of five days were spent in port, with several days steaming with no bait or poor bait. Generally very good weather was experienced with no days fishing lost due to bad weather.

A total of over 15,000 fish was tagged and released with conventional tags during the cruise, comprising 11,697 skipjack (77%), 2,758 yellowfin (17%) and 800 bigeye (6%). Additionally, 8 archival tags were deployed on bigeye during the cruise, making a total of **15,263 releases** for the cruise.

The average number of fish tagged per day's fishing was over 1000, with three separate day's fishing producing around 3,000 fish tagged.

Nearly half of the releases involved seamount fishing (46%), with anchored FADs (primarily weather buoys) and free schools each contributing over 20% of releases.

The majority of the releases (12,904 – 85%) were the larger P tags (generally fish > 38 cm), with relatively few of the 11cm Z tags deployed on this cruise (2,343 - 15%).

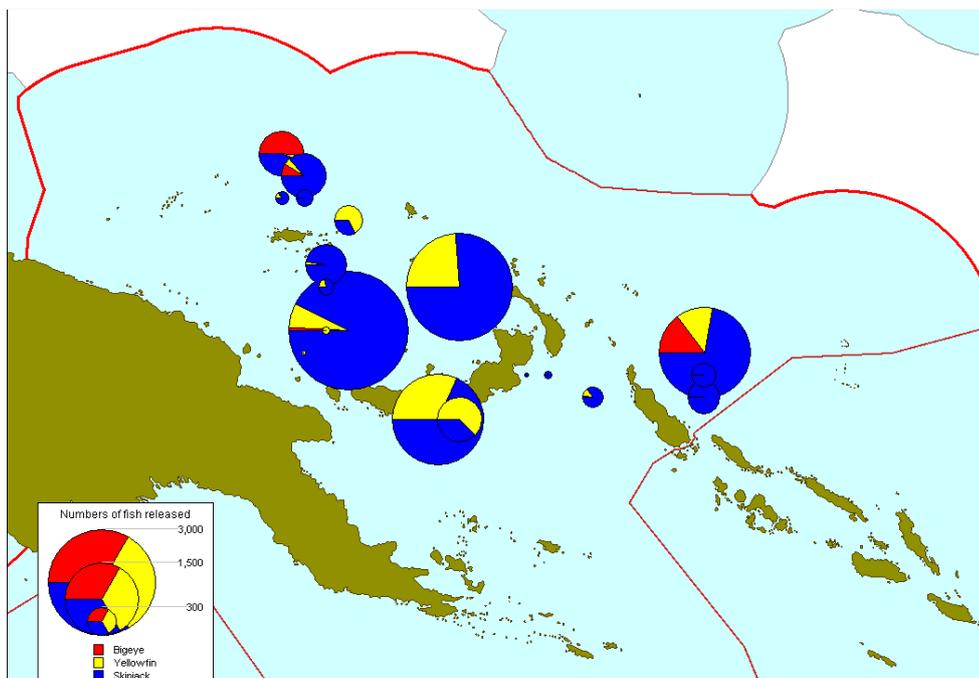
7,303 fish were tagged in the north-east Bismarck Sea in four days fishing, on two separate occasions, with 6270 skipjack (86%), 515 (13%) yellowfin and 30 bigeye.

1,898 fish were tagged in three days fishing north of Manus, with 1185 skipjack (62%), 284 yellowfin (15%) and an excellent 421 bigeye (22%).

3,063 fish were tagged in four days fishing in the Solomon Sea (63% skipjack, 37% yellowfin) and **2,897** fish on the final day's fishing east of Buka (78% skipjack, a high 12% bigeye and 10% yellowfin).

The figure below shows the distribution of tag releases by species during the cruise.

Figure 2 Distribution of tag releases by species during Cruise 3

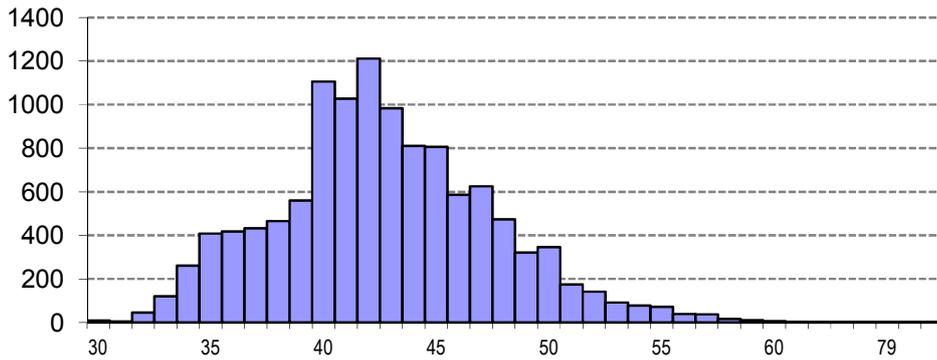


The Cruise 3 releases are summarized by school, location, school type day and area in **Appendix Table 1**.

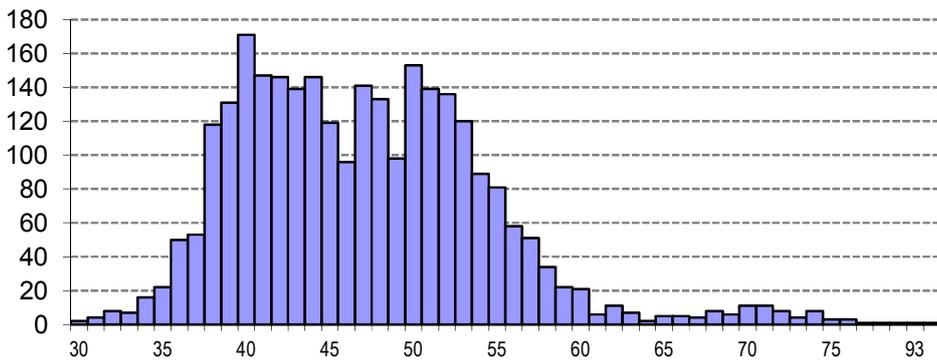
SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF TAGGED FISH

Figure 3 below shows the overall size distribution of fish tagged, by species, during Cruise 3.

Skipjack n = 11,696



Yellowfin n = 2,758



Bigeye n = 800

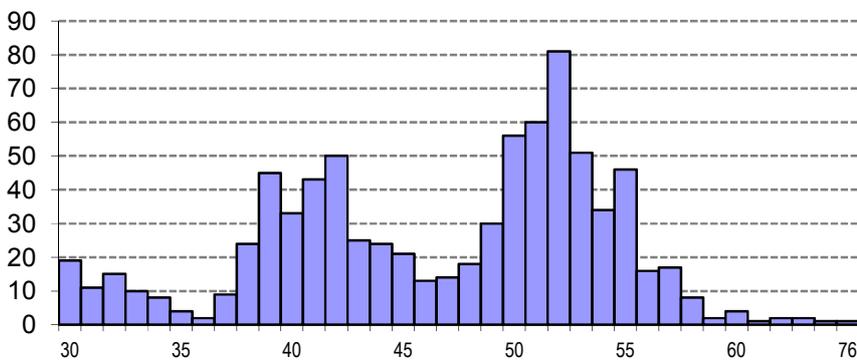


Figure 3. Size distribution of fish tagged during Cruise 3

The relatively wide skipjack size distribution (11,696 fish) shows a broad mode centered on 43cm, while the yellowfin size distribution (2,758 fish) shows polymodal structure. The large number of bigeye tagged (800 fish) showed several modes, centered on 43 and 52 cm respectively.

The sizes of fish tagged in the three areas show some contrast, though they are broadly similar, as summarized in the table below.

Area	Dates	Catch, total and by spp	Approx modal lengths
Area 2 (NE Bismarck)	01-03/3/2012	4,375 4043 SJ, 302 YF, 30 BE	SJ 43; YF 46,54; BE > 50
Areas 1,2 (north Manus)	05-07/3/2012	1,898 1185 SJ, 284 YF, 421 BE	SJ 37, 48; YF 51, BE 53
Area 2 (NE Bismarck)	11/3/2012	2,928 2227 SJ, 213 YF	SJ 48; YF 51
Area 4 (Solomon Sea)	12-15/3/2012	3,063 1926 SJ, 1133 YF, 4 BE	SJ 37 (53); YF 41, 58 (72)
Area 3 (east of Buka)	17-18/3/2012	2,897 2267 SJ, 293 YF, 337 BE	SJ 41; YF 40, BE 43

BAITING

Baiting was generally good except for the full moon period in the middle of the cruise and is summarized in Table 4 below. Anchovies and sardines dominated catches, with most successful nights' baiting yielding over 200 buckets of bait. Catches of good strong bait, mostly anchovy, on several occasions facilitated several large tagging days eg Rasch Passage (Madang), Nusandaula (New Hanover), Seeadler Harbour (Manus) and Taiof Island (Buka).

St Andrews anchorage failed to provide bait for the second time on the charter, and an exploratory stop at Rondahl Hbr (New Britain) revealed no signs of bait. Cape Lambert provided a catch of disappointing species composition on this cruise, unlike on previous visits. Isolated Sherburne Reef provided a good supply of sprats. The regular baiting sites of Seeadler Harbour, Nusandaula, Lindenhaven and Taiof Island (Buka) once again provided reliable catches; no baitfish access problems were encountered.

Table 4 Summary of bait fishing activity during PNGTP Cruise 3

Date	Location	Catch (bkts loaded, hauls)	Species
Feb 29 th	Rasch Passage	272 (1)	Anchovy (heterolobus)
Mar 2 nd	Sherburne Reef	282 (1)	Sprats (delicatulus, lewisi)
Mar 3 rd	St Andrews	0 (2)	
Mar 4 th	Seeadler Hbr	310 (2)	Anchovy (devisi, indicus)
Mar 6 th	Seeadler Hbr	52 (3)	Anchovy (devisi, punctifer)
Mar 9 th	Nausen Is	100 (1)	Sardines
Mar 10 th	Nusandaula Is	272 (2)	Anchovy(h,d), sprat (gracilis), sardines
Mar 11 th	Cape Lambert	132 (2)	Sardine, pony fish, pike, some anchovy
Mar 12 th	Rondahl Hbr	0	
Mar 13 th	Lindenhaven	257 (2)	Sardine (2 spp), l/priests, anchovy (h,p)
Mar 14 th	Lindenhaven	307 (3)	Sardine (2 spp), anchovy (h,p) l/priests
Mar 16 th	Taiof Is., Buka	300 (1)*	Anchovy (d,h), few fusiliers, Rk, priests

* Partial loading only

SUMMARY

Cruise 3 provided a very successful conclusion to the two month charter, with over 15,000 fish tagged across all four designated release areas. More than half the releases were made in the north-eastern Bismarck Sea. Close to 3,000 fish were tagged daily on three separate occasions. As on the first cruise, relatively large numbers of bigeye were tagged, with over 2,000 for the charter, a success rate never before achieved in PNG waters.

The success of the cruise was facilitated by the uniformly good weather, with light easterly winds prevailing, and very few of the expected north-westerly blows. Vessel and crew performed with increasing efficiency, and it was possible to take advantage of good baiting and fishing conditions routinely.

During the overall charter period, a shortened two months, virtually the same number of fish were tagged as on the 3 month period in 2011, with a relatively high percentage of bigeye and yellowfin, as noted.

APPENDIX TABLE 1

Project PNGTP - Papua New Guinea # 2					Cruise		3 To	3	Vessel Soltai 105					
Event no	Tagged sch no.	Date	Lat	Lon	Sch type	Assoc.	Start	Stop	YFT	TAG TOTALS				TOTAL
										BET	SKJ	OTH		
81	1	01-Mar-2012	0432.175S	14707.080E	1	4	1015	1030	4	0	0	0	4	
83	2	01-Mar-2012	0419.700S	14731.600E	1	3	1324	1353	21	0	0	0	21	
85	3	01-Mar-2012	0408.080S	14811.035E	2	8	1828	1850	50	0	178	0	228	
86	4	02-Mar-2012	0408.450S	14815.340E	1	8	0710	1017	189	30	3227	0	3446	
87	5	03-Mar-2012	0303.440S	14751.000E	5	8	0805	0845	25	0	92	0	117	
90	6	03-Mar-2012	0238.060S	14750.890E	4	3	1250	1324	0	0	10	0	10	
91	7	03-Mar-2012	0235.050S	14749.330E	4	4	1350	1444	13	0	536	0	549	
93	8	05-Mar-2012	0119.881S	14655.500E	4	3	0925	0953	9	0	51	0	60	
94	9	05-Mar-2012	0111.900S	14701.226E	4	1	1110	1120	0	0	114	0	114	
96	10	05-Mar-2012	0048.700S	14707.850E	1	3	1407	1434	12	0	326	0	338	
97	11	05-Mar-2012	0031.880S	14710.220E	1	3	1644	1710	22	63	277	0	362	
98	12	06-Mar-2012	0001.400S	14659.550E	1	3	0545	0710	28	366	311	0	705	
100	13	07-Mar-2012	0156.130S	14814.700E	1	8	1335	1338	0	0	26	0	26	
101	14	07-Mar-2012	0157.500S	14814.070E	1	8	1353	1433	213	0	79	0	292	
102	15	11-Mar-2012	0315.574S	15054.580E	3	8	0617	0910	701	0	2227	0	2928	
104	16	12-Mar-2012	0515.850S	15230.915E	2	1	1255	1305	0	0	45	0	45	
105	17	12-Mar-2012	0528.000S	15224.000E	4	2	1434	1437	0	0	15	0	15	
107	18	13-Mar-2012	0610.313S	15030.237E	3	1	0927	1030	20	0	53	0	73	
108	19	14-Mar-2012	0621.000S	15029.600E	4	1	0744	1000	366	1	1329	0	1696	
109	20	14-Mar-2012	0623.040S	15023.540E	2	7	1046	1058	1	0	0	0	1	
111	21	14-Mar-2012	0627.442S	15017.440E	2	1	1405	1410	98	0	33	0	131	
112	22	15-Mar-2012	0618.530S	15027.300E	3	1	0622	0710	207	1	98	0	306	
113	23	15-Mar-2012	0617.270S	15029.600E	4	1	0735	0750	40	0	58	0	98	
114	24	15-Mar-2012	0618.370S	15044.456E	4	7	0923	1043	425	0	214	0	639	
116	25	16-Mar-2012	0538.540S	15354.700E	4	1	1001	1035	21	2	131	0	154	
118	26	18-Mar-2012	0458.000S	15600.120E	1	3	0515	0700	293	337	1625	0	2255	
119	27	18-Mar-2012	0517.000S	15608.160E	4	1	0918	0925	0	0	234	0	234	
120	28	18-Mar-2012	0532.000S	15605.000E	4	1	1112	1142	0	0	408	0	408	
CRUISE 3 TOTALS									2758	800	11697	0	15255	

APPENDIX 1

DAILY LOG EXTRACTS – PNGTP – 2, Cruise 3

February 29th

Farewell to ANT and ropes away 1800hrs with pilot onboard; headed for Rach Pass after pilot got off, arriving 1915 hrs. BML distributed shopping from Brisbane, with everyone concerned very happy. BES called village elders via mobile phone to notify them of our activity. They requested some fish for a funeral feast so BES and Chris went ashore to deliver; esa looking good on sounder; wind picking-up again and might have to wait for it to abate; weather forecast looks ok in central Bismarck for the next 3 days with NE and E wind up to 10 kts, possibly 15 kts on Saturday.

March 1st

272 bkts of nice blue anchovy in one set at 0015 hrs; up anchor at 0105 hrs and through the pass at 0115 hrs to head in direction of "Thomas Seamount" (550 m on the chart, about 160 nm away). Very quiet steaming with the wind in our back and flat sea; passed 4 miles west and north Hankow reef 0615 to 0700 hrs; few shearwaters around but no fish; two FADs (one aRD style half sunk and on drift with gps buoy) met in the morning but only yellowfin not coming to the boat; 4 Z tags on baby YF; FAD C18 fished at 1215 hrs but only a few undersize fish and mahi. FAD C17 at 1330 hrs but only YF present, probably a nice school with different sizes but mostly large fish over 20kg; only 21 YF around 40 cm tagged after 20 min of hard work. FAD RD 8467 no fish; found a large school of jumping YF at about two miles from the position of C16. No takers...and no fish at FAD C16. At about 5 miles SSW of seamount, FM decided to stop the boat when he saw fish jumping in front of the boat; 1825 hrs and fished for 25 min to release 228 fish including 50 YF; total for the day: 253 with 75 YF. Stop engine at 1900 hrs and start drifting with good expectation for tomorrow morning.

March 2nd

Started engine at 0545 hrs, about 10nm south of the seamount. No fish under the boat, and waited for some rain to stop before steaming back toward summit at 0605 hrs; met the first fish and birds at 0640 hrs but waited until 0710 hrs to start chumming; then a quite remarkable tagging session of almost 3 hours non-stop resulting in 3446 releases with 94% SJ - no relocation, just fishing in the one spot; with all bait gone, headed to Sherburne where we anchored at 1715 hrs.

March 3rd

One set at 0145 hrs produced 282 buckets of sprats, blue and lewisi. Left anchorage at 0545 hrs toward 179m summit; right on the position, found a large area with actively feeding fish, SJ between 35 and 50 cm with some YF < 45 cm, but hard to attract them to the boat, spent 2 tanks of bait for 117 tags before decided to find another school. FAD RD 8352 at 1020 hrs had a school of medium to large size YF that didn't come to the boat. FAD RD8447 had some fish that never bit, probably YF as well. One RD FAD not on the list produced a few tags (10) at 1300 hrs but the fish stayed mostly deep - maybe not the right time of the day; met a school associated with a dFAD+ gps buoy before 1400 hrs and finished the bait there with 549 releases; headed toward St Andrews anchorage at 1450 hrs, with daily total 676.

March 4th

First net at 0330 hrs in St Andrews under difficult conditions (wind and current together) with zero catch; checked the light boat but nothing under; decided to wait till the morning and sail to Seeadler; arrived about 1300 hrs and anchored close to village as advised by Malakai's uncles to avoid unnecessary happenings; arrangement made for night baiting and all fish given to people (around 400 kg), just in time as refrigeration still not working; visit to Ndrilo village by BML, BES and Chris. Chairman of the Pitylu Madih Group, Mr Jack Daniel also paid a visit to the boat...everything good...got some fish and later came back to get some for the Minister (Job Pomat) and money for crew phone credits; moved to baiting location 1700 hrs.

March 5th

First net at 0215 hrs for 200 buckets loaded - let the rest go for better survival; second set on light boat at 0330 hrs for top up with 110 bkts; steaming 0430 hrs towards seamount 104m, 30 nm away; found fish on the seamount but alas, only big YF; first FAD TPJ9653 with a school but not cooperative and only 60 tagged; free school at 1110 produced 114 tagged SJ. The following FAD, so-called UNK during cruise 2 and where many BE were tagged, didn't provide any fish this time; another FAD about a mile away had a ranger boat tied up to it, discouraging any fishing; at 1407 hrs, found a FAD not on our lists, from which we got 338 tags. At 1644 hrs, FAD C40 had a school of small fish associated that produced 362 including 63 small BE; by then, too late to reach another FAD before dark so started to steaming to the TAO Eq buoy; total for the day 874, with 63 BE.

March 6th

Started fishing at TAO in the dark at 0545 hrs and the bigeye start biting right away; bigger ones first then length slowly decreased (from about 70 to 50 cm); SJ appeared at about 0615 hrs; needed a lot of bait to keep the fish at the boat, maybe due to the strong current and finished the bait at 0700 hrs; total tagged 706 fish including a useful 366 bigeye (8 archival); one purse seiner passed very slowly at about a mile from us, possibly Japanese; steamed back to Seadler Hbr in 10 to 15 kts of easterly wind; at anchor at 2045 hrs.

March 7th

First net at 0030 hrs but moon too bright - zero catch; second set at 0400 hrs produced 36 bkts; third set on light boat only got 16 bkts. Up anchor at 0550 hrs and started steaming toward Los Reyes; arrived at Los Reyes ridge around 1300 hrs and tried to fish subsurface schools detected with few birds and echosounder; probably not best time of the day but managed to get one cooperative school that produce 292 fish with over 70% YF; finished the bait at 1430 hrs and start steaming to Kavieng, doing only 8 kts with current against us; passed many SJ rippling schools around 1700 hrs, but sori no esa, no bonus...

March 8th

Steamed all night against the current, doing only 7 -8 kts; at 0600 hrs, still 40nm from Kavieng; boat cleaning all morning, haircuts and laundry; arrived in Kavieng at 1145 hr;. Samol Kanawi was here to help with customs clearance, water, shopping; pick up ADL at airport at 1730 hrs and a relaxing night in Nusa resort for some, howling on the boat for others.

March 9th

Part of the morning at the market for vegetables and fruit; fuel finally arrived at about 1000hrs but a second delivery was needed in the afternoon; cast the ropes at 1700 hrs for a short demonstration baiting session before moonrise at nearby Nausen; opportunity was given to the college to bring students onboard and Samol arranged it for 10 of them. At anchor at baitground at 1810 hrs; wind squall but net set at 1940 hrs and about 100 bkts of sardine caught; about 50 bkts of smaller bait loaded in one tank and kept the rest for consumption; wind had dropped by return to wharf 2100 hrs.

March 10th

Last market in the morning before saying good bye to Thomas who took the 0900 hrs plane back to PoM fully loaded with a 26 kg sample esky and numerous crabs; after custom clearance, cast the ropes at 1520 hrs and headed towards Byron Strait - Nusanduala baitground; arrived 1730 hrs and at anchor at 1800 hrs after putting down the light boat; first net at 1950 hrs, because of moon, for 172 bkts of mainly large blue anchovies (*heterolobus*). Second net on light boat at 2045 hrs for 85 bkts of sardines; decided to go straight to Djaul seamount and drift there till morning; started steaming at 2125 hrs with ETA about 0300 hrs.

March 11th

Arrived near Djaul seamount at 0330 hrs, and drifted; started fishing at 0545 hrs, with strong MSL showing on sounder; found the fish at 0615 hrs and fished this typical seamount associated rippling and splashing school for almost 3 hrs with a few breaks of 5 to 10 minutes; sizes from 37 to 58cm for the SJ (mode 43 to 45 cm) and 40 to 58 for the YF (24 %); fish still biting when stopped to head for Cape Lambert; total tagged 2929, including 2228 SJ and 701 YF; arrived at Cape Lambert at 1700 hrs; caught a nice ~18kg spanish mackerel before anchoring. First net at 2000 hrs with surprisingly (after last visit) not so good species - pony fish, sardines, small barracuda and just a few anchovies for 130 bkts; second set on light boat at 2110 hrs but aborted when the boom broke; quick and efficient repairs and finally finished the haul at 2230 hrs but for 3 bkts only - bait had dispersed under bright moon; started to sail toward St Georges Channel at 2245 hrs.

March 12th

Passed closed to Rabaul at 0530 hrs; nice sunrise on the volcano and Queen Mary 2 entering port; no fish seen in the early morning; first school chummed at 1000 hrs but no success and looked like big YF; then only found small rippling SJ school but very difficult to catch with big sardines and small barracudas as bait; managed to tag 61 fish; decided to check Rondahl Harbour if any baiting possible there; at anchor at 1825 hrs in 25m of water by 05 33 037S/151 52 118E; set lights till 2100 hrs but no signs, and left the bay at 2115 hrs, heading towards Lindenhaven some 100nm distant.

March 13th

Drifting south of Cape Dampier 0445 hrs in calm conditions; started searching at 0600 hrs towards RD 8335 position, but only found schools of small SJ and few YF just 4 nm out in front of Lindenhaven; once again hard to attract them with the too big Cape Lambert baits...total tagged 73 (53 SJ and 20 YF); did not venture more than 10 nm or 4 nm offshore so still not clear where fish might be; at anchor in Lindenhaven at 1115 hrs; gave away the rest of large bait (2 baskets, 70 kgs) to the locals; shore party for swim in blue pool late afternoon; bait gathered gradually; hauled 2100 hrs for 170 bkts mixed sardine, priests, anchovy; second haul on lightboat 2200 hrs for 87 bkts - mostly sardines (two spp - some brachysoma ?), little priests and anchovy;

March 14th

Up anchor 0520 hrs and out through the pass to start fishing where small fish found yesterday, then plan to continue further offshore; found the fish at 0745 hrs and tagged 1696 fish in a bit more than 2 hours (mostly small Z tags on SJ (78%), with a few P tags on YF); then many pure YF schools encountered that didn't want to play; stopped at noon for an hour to regroup, then fishing again 1300 hrs; with bait nearly finished, found a mixed YF and SJ of medium size at 1400 hrs and finished the baits - 131 tagged in this last flurry; good mix of bait for the day, with priests, anchovy and smaller sardines; caught a nice blue marlin (in the 120-150 kg range) on the way to bait ground and anchored at 1615 hrs in Lindenhaven; a useful day really... total 1828 tagged with 25% YF and one lonely BE. Canoe invasion started immediately on arrival and BES tradestore in full swing; first net at 2050 hrs for 157 bkts; second haul at 2200 hrs on the light boat for 95 bkts.

March 15th

Third net of the night at 0400 hrs for 55 bkts, mostly of sardines; up anchor at 0600 hrs to start the long journey to Buka; found the fish as soon as outside, less than 2 miles in front of the reef, large area with mixed YF/ SJ schools; tagged about 400 fish between 0622 and 0750 hrs, ending up on the Lindenhaven seamount; then, on a current line to the south-east, tagged another 544 fish, with more than half of this on a log near the current line; took decision to stop and keep the bait (2 tanks left) for further horizons; steamed in calm weather with following current at start but against it in the afternoon, doing only 7.2 kts at 1800 hrs and most of the night...many bird flocks seen during the afternoon , and several current lines with fish; total tagged for today 948 (320 SJ, 627 YF and again one lonely BE); ETA Taiof Passage late afternoon unless current weakens.

March 16th

Smooth passage overnight with boat speed increasing in early morning to 8.5 kts , improving our ETA to about 1430 hrs; a few patches of birds encountered; first attempt to chum one at 0945 hrs but no success with our sardines on what looked like small SJ; then next school produced 153 tags (including 21 YF and 2 BE) until bait ran out bait and start steaming towards Buka in flat calm and very hot weather.... arrived in Taiof at 1530 hrs and CL team went in dinghy to Buka passage finding money, few vegies and buai... returned successfully to the boat at 1700 hrs; first and last bait net at 2130hrs in very smooth operation, despite an army of very vocal canoes sticking to the main boom as fleas on a dog... very nice anchovies to fill all tanks and some to give away to the crowd.

March 17th

Up anchor at 0540 hrs and alongside Buka wharf at 0610 hrs; quick raid to the bank where the ATM was wide open with no one there including security... some shopping, market, waiting for water to come in the morning as was supposedly arranged for days; finally arrived at 1130 hrs. Custom formalities went ok but no immigration to stamp passports...from custom officer it seems that not necessary...then waiting for the delayed plane from PoM to arrive with Leontine who was carrying 3 laptops + other toys (bought by Thomas) for some crews; casted the ropes at 1600 hrs with not much time left in the afternoon to catch fish; first school seen was big YF and second school vanished as soon as we started chumming; started steaming towards TAO 5S/156E, against the sea and wind (but not too bad), with ETA 0200 hrs.

March 18th

Arrived at the buoy at 0220 hrs; nice detection close to the buoy, typical bigeye school; tried to chum it at 0420 hrs but fish didn't start to bite until 0515 hrs; fished till 0700 hrs then stopped when small SJ only biting, and kept 2 tanks of bait; released 2255 fish including 1625 SJ, 293 YF and 337 BE; found 2 free school to finish the baits - 642 SJ releases, bringing the day total to 2897 fish; very nice weather for the final run to Noro; quite a few school in the afternoon near the border between PNG and Solomon waters, including whales, as seen on the trip up form Noro in January; ETA Noro around 0700 hrs.

March 19th

Anchored in Noro stream 0645 hrs after smooth passage overnight; awaiting clearance; end of charter and day spent removing, cataloguing and storing all equipment.