

# SOLOMON ISLANDS TAGGING PROJECT

## CRUISE 3 SUMMARY REPORT

26<sup>th</sup> October – 25<sup>th</sup> November 2007

### INTRODUCTION

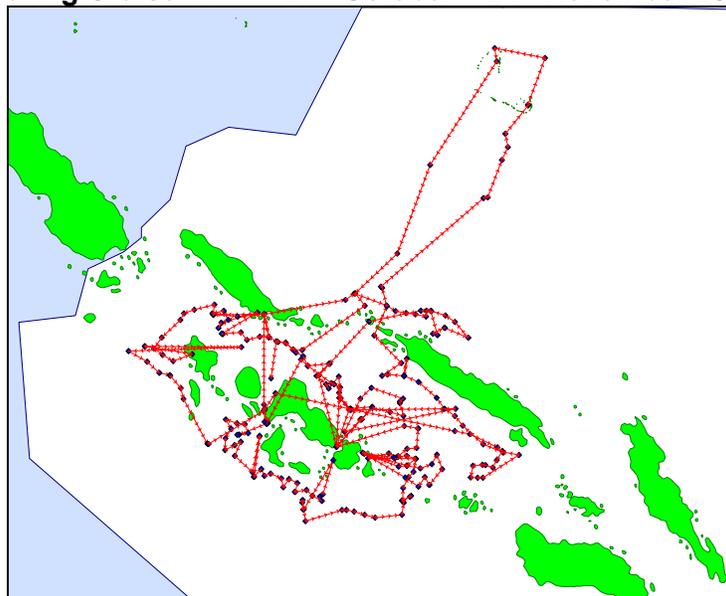
This report summarizes activities during a 31 day tuna tagging charter in Solomon Islands, from full moon October 26<sup>th</sup> to November 25<sup>th</sup> 2007, as an extension of the PNG Tuna Tagging project. Fishing activity was mostly carried in the northern part of the Main Group Archipelago (MGA), the central operating area of the pole-and-line fleet and more recently, the domestic purse seine fleet. An excursion late in the charter period was made to Ontong Java Atoll. The charter, again utilizing the Soltai No. 6, commenced and ended in Noro, with two brief port calls for provisioning during that time.

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF FISHING ACTIVITY

Fishing was initially directed at north-east Ysabel, after baiting at south Choiseul, but the few fish available around anchored FADs were not biting, and the vessel relocated to New Georgia Sound (the Slot) where very good fishing around anchored FADs was enjoyed for several days east of Marovo Lagoon before moving to south Choiseul. Good fishing was found there also before turning westwards via Vella Lavella, Ranongga and Simbo, then to Noro for the first port call; activities on the second leg of the cruise initially focused on Rendova and Tetepare, but finding few fish biting there, relocated to the southern end of the Slot, where good fishing was once again found near Mboroku Island before returning to Noro for the second port call. The final cruise leg started with fishing off south Ysabel, then along the west coast of Ysabel with moderate success, before heading for Ontong Java, fishing off north Ysabel en route. Strong winds and apparent low fish availability saw an early return to north Ysabel, and with bad weather continuing, thence towards Noro for the end of the charter and decommissioning of the vessel.

The track of the cruise, based on school and noon positions, is found below as **Figure 1** and a summary of general movements during the cruise and daily release numbers follows as **Table 1**.

**Figure 1. Track during Cruise 14 27<sup>th</sup> October – 24<sup>th</sup> November 2007**



**Table 1. Summary of cruise activity, with number of tagged fish released per day**

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Tag releases</b>
October 26 <sup>th</sup>	Charter commences; recommissioning vessel	
October 27 <sup>th</sup>	Depart Noro for Ropa baitground	
October 28 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs north-east Ysabel; baiting Rakata	4
October 29 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs north-east Ysabel; anchored Kologilo Passage	0
October 30 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs east of New Georgia; baiting Patutiva	689
October 31 <sup>st</sup>	Fishing FADs east of Marovo; baiting Patutiva	1151
November 1 <sup>st</sup>	Fishing FADs towards S. Choiseul; baiting Ropa	1152
November 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Fishing FADs S.Choiseul; baiting Lituni	1170
November 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Fishing FADs east of Vella Lavella; baiting Ropa	603
November 4 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs east / north-west Vella Lavella; baiting Vatoro	454
November 5 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs off Ranongga and Simbo; steaming in to Noro	163
November 6 <sup>th</sup>	Provisioning, fuel, water Noro; baiting Munda	In port
November 7 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs west of Rendova; baiting Munda	26
November 8 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs west of Tetepare; baiting Patutiva	153
November 9 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs south of Vangunu; baiting Patutiva	320
November 10 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs Mary Is to Gatokae; baiting Mbili	682
November 11 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs east of Gatokae; baiting Ketoketo	527
November 12 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs east of Gatokae; baiting Ketoketo	655
November 13 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs north east of Vangunu; baiting Patutiva	626
November 14 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs north of Vangunu; baiting Patutiva	1100
November 15 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs east of New Georgia; baiting Munda	134
November 16 <sup>th</sup>	Provisioning, fuel, water Noro; steaming towards San Jorge	In port
November 17 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing FADs south-west Ysabel; baiting San Jorge	200
November 18 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing west Ysabel coast; baiting Kolokofa	94
November 19 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing west Ysabel coast, north of Ysabel; drifting/steaming	523
November 20 <sup>th</sup>	Fishing/steaming towards Ontong Java; baiting Luaniua	89
November 21 <sup>st</sup>	Fishing east side Ontong Java; steaming towards N. Ysabel	0
November 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Steaming then fishing N. Ysabel; baiting Kologilo	535
November 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Fishing FAD south Choiseul, steaming to Noro	18
November 24 <sup>th</sup>	Decommissioning vessel	
November 25 <sup>th</sup>	Charter concludes	

## **TAG RELEASES**

Of the 31 days of charter, all or part of 25 days was spent fishing or baiting, with four days preparing and decommissioning the vessel, and two days in port for fuel, water and provisioning. Most days were productive for tuna fishing (3 zero catch days) with **11,168** fish tagged with conventional tags, at an average of 450 fish per fishing day, and **12 archival tags** deployed; on four days, over 1000 fish were tagged, and on 11 days, over 500 fish were tagged and released.

Releases of **conventional** tags comprised 7,476 skipjack (66.9%), 3,560 yellowfin (31.9%) and 132 bigeye (1.2%). The “yellowfin plus bigeye” proportion of the catch, at 33.1%, was a result of most fishing occurring on associated schools, with free schools generally having less than 5% yellowfin. Yellowfin comprised over 50% of the catch on several days, notably in the central Slot. Bigeye were encountered in good numbers in just one area, north of Manning Strait, and were generally very uncommon in the catch during the cruise, continuing the situation in PNG from earlier in 2007.

The Cruise 14 releases are summarized by school in **Table 3**.

During the cruise, around 70% of releases were made from FAD-associated schools, many in the Slot but well distributed throughout the northern MGA. 11.8% of releases were made from log-associated schools, 9.6% from drifting FADs and just 7.8% from free schools, which were encountered relatively infrequently, and often actively feeding on natural bait.

With a relatively high incidence of smaller fish, 29.6 % of releases of conventional tags were the smaller 11cm Z tags, with 57.5% (1891) of these yellowfin and 2.5 % (82) bigeye. These releases normally involved fish less than 38cm, as the standard cut-off size, and rarely less than 30cm, even though numbers of very small fish were available to be caught on occasion.

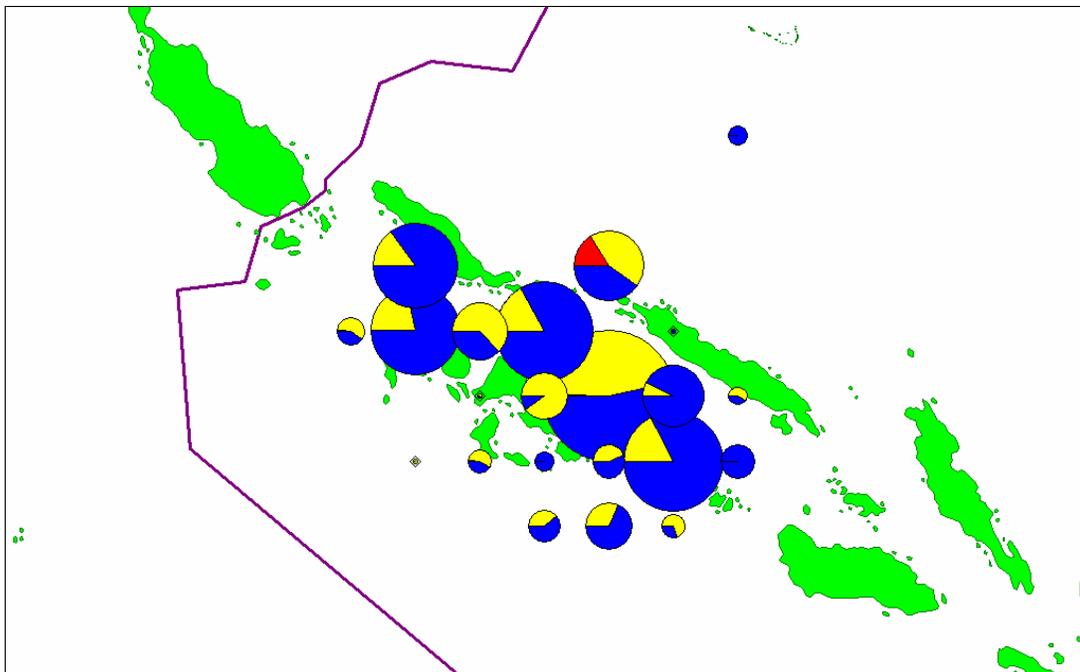
**Figure 2** shows the distribution of the releases by 0.5 degree square, by species.

**Archival tag summary**

During Cruise 14, 12 fished were tagged and released with archival tags – 7 bigeye and 5 yellowfin. Larger yellowfin were rare in the catch and night jigging was attempted (without success) on just one occasion. The bigeye (39 to 47 cm) were all tagged from one school with the small LTD 2410 except one which received a MK9. The yellowfin (59 to 75 cm) were all tagged with MK9 tags.

Cruise 14	W. Vella L.		NE Ysabel		Slot		Total	
	BE	YF	BE	YF	BE	YF	BE	YF
Free school		1	7			2	7	3
Fad		2						2
Log								
<b>Total</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>			<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>

**Figure 2. Distribution of releases by half degree square, by species, for Cruise 14 (27/10 to 23/11/2007)**  
**Maximum circle size 1200 fish; blue = SJ, yellow = YF, red = BE**



## BAITING

Baiting was generally good and frequently exceptional during the cruise, with the Solomons proving to harbour an even better resource than PNG overall. Baiting was carried out on 20 nights, in 11 locations. On ten occasions, a single haul was sufficient to fill the tanks, with the surplus released. The number of buckets actually loaded per night averaged in excess of 200 over the twenty nights of baiting on the cruise. Anchovies (*Encrasicholina devisi*, *heterolobus*) were dominant in the catch at most locations, but fusiliers (*Gymnocaesio*, *Pterocaesio*) and herrings (*Herklotsichthys quadrimaculatus*, *Pellona ditchela*) were also important contributors, as well as sprats (*Spratelloides gracilis*, *S. lewisii*) in more oceanic areas eg Ontong Java.

Patutiva, in Marovo Lagoon, was an exceptional location, visited on 5 occasions with full hauls each time. The lagoons of southern Choiseul were also consistently productive. Towards the end of the cruise, partial loading of high quality bait (*E. heterolobus*) from multiple sets was employed with success to prolong bait survival in tanks, with the bait kept with high survival rate for nearly 5 days until used on the last day of the cruise. Predators, notably *Ulua mandibularis* and *Caranx tille*, disrupted baiting activity at two locations. The table below summarizes bait catches by location during Cruise 14.

**Table 2. Summary of baitfishing activity during Cruise 14**

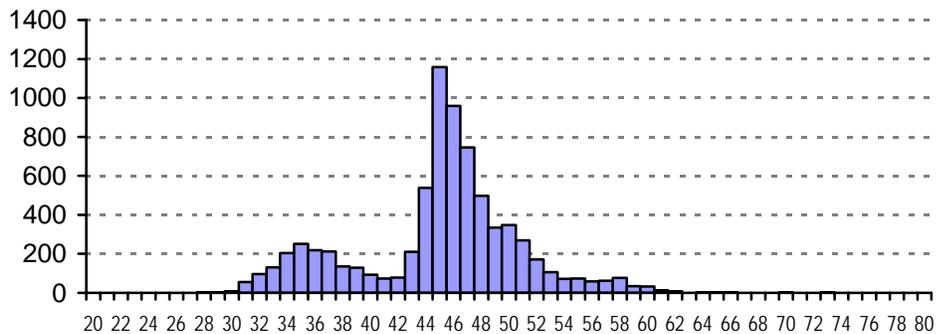
Date	Location	Catch (bkts, hauls)	Species
Oct 27 <sup>th</sup>	Ropa	192 (2)	Fusiliers (Gg), anchovy, Hq
Oct 28 <sup>th</sup>	Rakata	154 (2)	Fusiliers (Pp), sardines, lantern
Oct 29 <sup>th</sup>	Kologilo Pass	No haul	Large bait mass, all depths
Oct 30 <sup>th</sup>	Patutiva	268 (1)	Anchovy (devisi, heterolobus)
Oct 31 <sup>st</sup>	Patutiva	270 (2)	Anchovy (devisi, heterolobus)
Nov 1 <sup>st</sup>	Ropa	330 + (1)	Fusiliers, Hq
Nov 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Lituni	226 (4)	Anchovy, Hq, fusiliers
Nov 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Ropa	256 (3)	Anchovy, Hq, fusiliers
Nov 4 <sup>th</sup>	Vatoro	300 (1)	Fusiliers (Gg)
Nov 6 <sup>th</sup>	Munda	211 (2)	Anchovy, Hq, Pellona, fusiliers
Nov 7 <sup>th</sup>	Munda	114 (2)	Anchovy, Hq, Pellona, fusiliers
Nov 8 <sup>th</sup>	Patutiva	300 + (2)	Anchovy, Pellona, Hq
Nov 10 <sup>th</sup>	Mbili	173 (4)	Anchovy (d,h), sprats (g,l), fusiliers
Nov 11 <sup>th</sup>	Ketoketo	204 (1)	Anchovy (d), sprats (l,g), fusiliers
Nov 12 <sup>th</sup>	Ketoketo	300 (4)	Anchovy(d), sprats (g), Pellona, fusiliers
Nov 13 <sup>th</sup>	Patutiva	306 + (2)	Anchovy (d), Hq
Nov 14 <sup>th</sup>	Patutiva	300 (1)	Anchovy (d), Pellona, Rk juvs
Nov 15 <sup>th</sup>	Munda	144 (5)	Anchovy (d), Pellona
Nov 17 <sup>th</sup>	San Jorge	600 (1)	Anchovy (d)
Nov 18 <sup>th</sup>	Kolokofa	1000 (2)	Anchovy (h, some d)
Nov 20 <sup>th</sup>	Luaniu	250+ (1)	Sprat (g)
Nov 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Kologilo Pass	No haul – wind	

## SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF TAGGED FISH

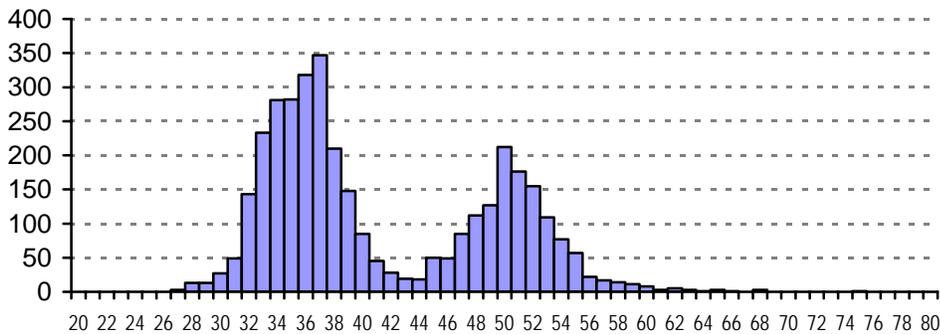
**Figure 3** shows the size distribution of fish tagged during the cruise leg. The skipjack size distribution on the cruise was bimodal, with size classes centred on 35 cm and 45cm, but with most fish of the larger size (~ 2 kgs); the yellowfin size distribution was bimodal (modes at around 37 cm and 50cm), but with the smaller mode the more abundant; both species had a significant tail of larger sized fish. The small number of bigeye taken (133) was in the range 30-56 cm, with most fish < 42 cm.

**Figure 3. Size distribution of fish tagged Cruise 14 (27/10 to 23/11/2007)**

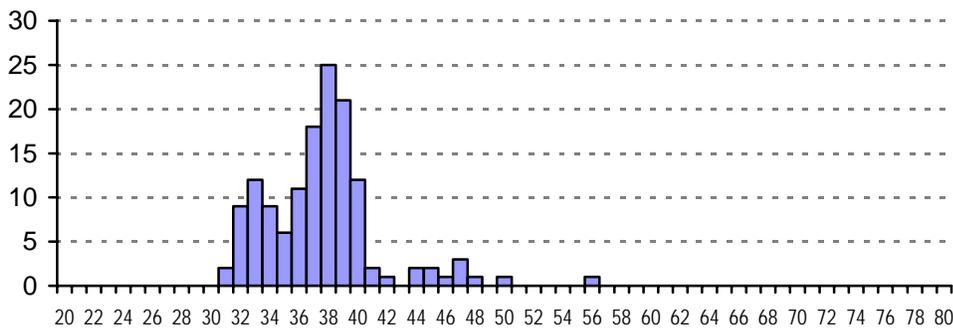
### SKIPJACK n = 7473



### YELLOWFIN n = 3563



### BIGEYE n = 139



A compilation of the daily log extracts, detailing daily activities, is provided as **Appendix 1**.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS**

With the vessel and crew enjoying home ground advantage, the cruise was expected to be successful and this proved to be the case, but with release numbers probably exceeding expectations. Good numbers of fish were released throughout the main operational area of the pole-and-line fleet, and a side trip was made to Ontong Java, unfortunately hampered by bad weather. With the cooperation of NFD, FAD positions were obtained prior to departure, this proving useful for the planning and execution of the cruise, particularly in conjunction with reliable supplies of good bait adjacent to fishing areas. The number of fish released was particularly pleasing in view of the generally low fish catchability at the time, with the Soltai pole-and-line fleet being recalled during the week of November 19<sup>th</sup> and tuna schools generally biting poorly in the presence of large amounts of natural bait.

A good proportion of yellowfin releases in the catch (32%) was achieved, with more than half of these tagged with Z tags. Bigeye however proved to be elusive during the cruise, with the exception of one location, and larger yellowfin suitable for archival tagging were not often encountered, other than in actively feeding schools not amenable to pole-and-line fishing.

Tag returns, predominantly by the purse seine fleet, were being received in good numbers, and at the time of reporting (25<sup>th</sup> November), over 700 tags (6%) had been returned.

The presence of the tried and true “usual suspects” contributed greatly to the success of the cruise, as did the dedication of the officers and crew of Soltai 6, and the support of SFPL and NFD. Solomon Islands fisheries observer Paul Jay Tua made useful contributions to the work of the cruise.

**TABLE 3. Tag releases (all tags) by school during Cruise 14**

Event no	Tagged sch no.	Date	Lat	Lon	Sch type	Assoc.	Start	Stop	TAG TOTALS				SHK bite	
									YFT	BET	SKJ	OTH		TOTAL
1	1	28-Oct-2007	0710.303S	15802.975E	1	3	0737	0748	4	0	0	0	4	0
14	2	30-Oct-2007	0748.000S	15749.000E	1	3	0544	0626	11	0	60	0	71	0
15	3	30-Oct-2007	0754.588S	15741.657E	2	3	0738	0800	45	0	126	0	171	1
16	4	30-Oct-2007	0759.105S	15747.000E	1	2	0843	0850	3	0	5	0	8	0
17	5	30-Oct-2007	0801.365S	15748.511E	1	3	0910	0925	27	1	0	0	28	0
19	6	30-Oct-2007	0800.719S	15754.788E	4	3	1115	1140	37	0	10	0	47	0
20	7	30-Oct-2007	0806.352S	15754.740E	1	3	1218	1243	171	0	15	0	186	2
21	8	30-Oct-2007	0812.813S	15800.001E	1	3	1337	1400	149	0	29	0	178	1
22	9	31-Oct-2007	0817.930S	15806.980E	1	3	0537	0640	242	1	550	0	793	8
23	10	31-Oct-2007	0811.269S	15812.985E	1	3	1000	1012	3	2	0	0	5	0
24	11	31-Oct-2007	0812.300S	15801.000E	1	3	1146	1220	214	1	44	0	259	0
26	12	31-Oct-2007	0800.813S	15754.809E	1	3	1416	1445	82	0	12	0	94	1
27	13	01-Nov-2007	0754.209S	15742.820E	1	3	0540	0640	118	0	892	0	1010	4
29	14	01-Nov-2007	0749.193S	15736.669E	1	3	0916	0947	20	0	50	0	70	0
30	15	01-Nov-2007	0743.989S	15734.112E	2	1	1117	1127	0	0	14	0	14	0
31	16	01-Nov-2007	0740.472S	15728.378E	1	3	1215	1232	108	0	116	0	224	0
32	17	01-Nov-2007	0736.767S	15724.273E	1	3	1310	1325	12	0	3	0	15	0
33	18	01-Nov-2007	0736.360S	15720.000E	1	3	1355	1405	1	0	2	0	3	0
34	19	01-Nov-2007	0733.808S	15714.800E	1	3	1443	1544	160	1	55	0	216	2
35	20	02-Nov-2007	0733.800S	15714.800E	1	3	0555	0617	1	0	0	0	1	0
36	21	02-Nov-2007	0733.600S	15709.650E	1	3	0655	0722	31	0	19	0	50	0
37	22	02-Nov-2007	0735.260S	15702.459E	1	3	0826	0831	3	0	0	0	3	0
38	23	02-Nov-2007	0731.196S	15659.021E	1	3	0905	0920	1	0	0	0	1	0
39	24	02-Nov-2007	0732.023S	15648.852E	4	2	1034	1137	152	0	577	0	729	16
40	25	02-Nov-2007	0731.846S	15648.232E	2	2	1325	1420	86	1	299	0	386	5
41	26	03-Nov-2007	0728.883S	15646.407E	2	3	0610	0624	2	0	0	0	2	0
42	27	03-Nov-2007	0724.450S	15652.000E	1	3	0702	0745	12	0	62	0	74	0
44	28	03-Nov-2007	0721.000S	15643.000E	4	3	0915	1033	123	0	404	0	527	17
45	29	04-Nov-2007	0721.809S	15643.551E	1	3	0545	0649	20	0	433	0	453	1
46	30	04-Nov-2007	0716.263S	15644.142E	1	3	0725	0730	1	0	0	0	1	0
54	31	05-Nov-2007	0739.150S	15659.330E	1	3	0628	0700	6	0	9	0	15	0
57	32	05-Nov-2007	0752.948S	15613.096E	1	3	1023	1113	81	1	55	0	137	9
61	33	05-Nov-2007	0831.250S	15640.800E	1	3	1805	1817	12	0	1	0	13	0
63	34	07-Nov-2007	0825.448S	15703.139E	2	3	0622	0645	3	0	2	0	5	1
72	35	07-Nov-2007	0846.437S	15705.612E	6	1	1458	1526	12	1	9	0	22	0
76	36	08-Nov-2007	0848.342S	15712.307E	1	3	0704	0715	0	0	1	0	1	0
79	37	08-Nov-2007	0854.529S	15722.914E	6	1	0915	0931	0	0	1	0	1	0
82	38	08-Nov-2007	0856.998S	15729.674E	1	3	1134	1210	48	0	33	0	81	5
86	39	08-Nov-2007	0859.516S	15743.526E	2	1	1446	1452	0	0	68	0	68	0
87	40	08-Nov-2007	0858.311S	15745.231E	2	1	1516	1521	0	0	2	0	2	0
88	41	09-Nov-2007	0906.531S	15734.224E	1	3	0602	0650	72	0	111	0	183	8
90	42	09-Nov-2007	0901.404S	15733.818E	1	3	0728	0735	1	0	0	0	1	0
93	43	09-Nov-2007	0907.597S	15802.848E	1	3	1230	1236	1	0	0	0	1	0
96	44	09-Nov-2007	0909.299S	15829.777E	1	3	1550	1605	4	0	1	0	5	0
97	45	09-Nov-2007	0902.874S	15830.775E	2	1	1653	1659	1	0	1	0	2	0
98	46	09-Nov-2007	0901.795S	15830.357E	2	3	1709	1728	89	0	39	0	128	3

100	47	10-Nov-2007	0901.681S	15829.770E	1	3	0537	0635	110	0	243	0	<b>353</b>	4
101	48	10-Nov-2007	0854.999S	15830.411E	1	3	0720	0732	1	0	1	0	<b>2</b>	0
104	49	10-Nov-2007	0839.190S	15837.662E	1	3	1000	1040	37	0	290	0	<b>327</b>	2
105	50	11-Nov-2007	0838.137S	15827.534E	2	3	0632	0700	37	0	38	0	<b>75</b>	0
107	51	11-Nov-2007	0839.250S	15837.300E	2	3	0900	0937	44	0	77	0	<b>121</b>	4
108	52	11-Nov-2007	0842.957S	15832.561E	2	3	1016	1125	40	0	291	0	<b>331</b>	12
110	53	12-Nov-2007	0844.320S	15840.129E	1	3	0650	0757	125	0	419	0	<b>544</b>	9
111	54	12-Nov-2007	0842.105S	15846.596E	1	3	0840	0850	3	0	0	0	<b>3</b>	0
112	55	12-Nov-2007	0837.000S	15849.500E	2	3	0930	0940	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>	0
117	56	12-Nov-2007	0849.275S	15831.620E	2	1	1437	1450	0	0	107	0	<b>107</b>	1
118	57	13-Nov-2007	0837.850S	15827.700E	2	3	0622	0716	51	0	71	0	<b>122</b>	4
121	58	13-Nov-2007	0822.839S	15838.896E	1	3	1110	1255	17	0	456	0	<b>473</b>	7
122	59	13-Nov-2007	0821.550S	15831.100E	1	3	1350	1413	24	1	6	0	<b>31</b>	1
123	60	14-Nov-2007	0817.961S	15806.375E	1	4	0530	0656	458	2	614	0	<b>1074</b>	6
124	61	14-Nov-2007	0811.838S	15813.148E	1	3	0800	0810	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>	0
125	62	14-Nov-2007	0814.138S	15823.105E	1	3	0917	0928	17	0	8	0	<b>25</b>	1
131	63	15-Nov-2007	0812.300S	15900.000E	1	3	0525	0610	48	0	33	0	<b>81</b>	0
133	64	15-Nov-2007	0800.700S	15754.700E	1	3	0750	0802	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>	0
134	65	15-Nov-2007	0759.188S	15751.571E	6	1	0833	0900	12	0	2	0	<b>14</b>	0
135	66	15-Nov-2007	0758.449S	15750.062E	2	1	0903	0922	22	2	16	0	<b>40</b>	0
139	67	17-Nov-2007	0835.000S	15926.360E	1	3	0932	0950	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>	1
146	68	17-Nov-2007	0849.398S	15915.383E	4	2	1440	1511	0	0	199	0	<b>199</b>	0
147	69	18-Nov-2007	0835.540S	15926.700E	4	3	0545	0626	0	0	27	0	<b>27</b>	0
151	70	18-Nov-2007	0806.385S	15849.294E	4	1	1302	1345	0	0	64	0	<b>64</b>	2
152	71	18-Nov-2007	0757.896S	15839.119E	6	1	1510	1539	0	0	3	0	<b>3</b>	0
159	72	19-Nov-2007	0707.247S	15818.635E	4	1	1651	1854	150	119	261	0	<b>530</b>	4
160	73	20-Nov-2007	0618.592S	15918.101E	3	9	0615	0653	0	0	89	0	<b>89</b>	0
164	74	22-Nov-2007	0710.197S	15803.459E	1	3	1613	1703	182	6	47	0	<b>235</b>	2
165	75	23-Nov-2007	0740.430S	15728.400E	1	3	0653	0710	12	0	1	0	<b>13</b>	0
166	76	23-Nov-2007	0736.900S	15724.200E	1	3	0807	0815	4	0	1	0	<b>5</b>	0
<b>CRUISE 14 TOTALS</b>									<b>3565</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>7476</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11180</b>	<b>144</b>

## APPENDIX 1

### DAILY LOG EXTRACTS

#### October 27<sup>th</sup>

Finally departed Noro at 11:45 in calm weather after getting 2 oil drums for the main engine - surely the first delay ever due to a truck running into a cargo boat and being disabled. Delayed original departure (1700 hrs Friday) to allow everything to be in place, and last four boxes only arrived from Honiara at 1600 hrs. Steamed across Slot to Ropa, Choiseul, planning to get bait (full moon last night) and depart by midnight, heading for Manning Strait; FADs offshore in early AM then possibly to Ontong Java. Anchored 1800 hrs in 42m at Ropa, after deploying light boat; surface bait activity in area, but little cloud. Bait gathered quickly, hauled 1930 hrs just before moon rise for 106 bkts of mixed bait (Gymnocaesio, Sard, Hq, gold anchovy); section of float boom broke on retrieving and had to be replaced; second haul on light boat 2115 hrs for 86 bkts, despite makeshift boom repairs - mostly anchovy (h,d) and Hq; up anchor 2145 hrs and headed for Manning Strait; very pleasing catch one night after full moon !!

#### October 28<sup>th</sup>

Good steam overnight slowed by south-setting current in Manning Strait; first FAD position (NFD08) at 0650 hrs but missing; NFD 09 at 0737 hrs - birds but fish had mostly left FAD; RR and 4 YF tagged at stern - first fish of the adventure !! NFD 10 not found and NFD 20 not plotted so not checked; NFD 11 reached at 1015 hrs - no fish save RR; similar with NFD 12 and 13 plus an UNK FAD between them; headed towards the 695m seamount - one good free school (~ 3 kgs SJ) which came up but did not bite at 1400 hrs; several other free schools approached but birds scattered before chummed; school near reef chummed at 1730 hrs but again no response; a disappointing day, since some fish around after reaching Rakata area but just not biting; 5 FADs fished (including one unlisted), 3 missing and several others not visited; float boom repaired with sleeves on way in; anchored at Rakata just a little late, at 1905 hrs, in 35m. Still an estimated 130 bkts in good condition. First set 2030 hrs for 128 bkts of mostly very small fusiliers, plus some large sardines, lantern fish etc; second set on light boat trying to fill up - 2200 hrs for 28 bkts of mostly large Sardinella, so close to full tanks.

#### October 29<sup>th</sup>

Departed Rakata 0340 hrs for FADs with full bait tanks, arriving near NFD 16 at 0530 hrs - again RR only and little on sounder; several larger YF seen; 2 missing rafts and 3 more without fish (21, UNK 2, 15) before heading towards seamount; large area of birds west of seamount, eventually near FAD UNK 3; chased and chummed for long period but only rose briefly in wake - zero catch; wind fresh and sea moderate but following; very little in the afternoon - heading for passage to the Slot; several good bird flocks approached but flighty and mostly YF; anchored Kologilo Passage in 43m after a zero day; thoughts of baiting at Danny's suggestion - plenty of bait - sprats, h/heads plus other below - but eventually did not; huge quantity of bait at surface when lights turned off.

#### October 30<sup>th</sup>

Departed Kologilo Passage for FADs in the Slot 0110 hrs, under bright moon and clear sky; arrived near NFD 64 at 0515 hrs - reasonable fishing but slow bite, with 71 fish tagged (11 YF); NFD 65 fished in competition with Soltai 63 - 171 tagged (45 YF); log school fished briefly for 8 fish (small YF) then NFD 063 at 0910 for 28 fish, mostly small YF; nothing on NFD 062 (1025 hrs), then NFD UNK at 1115 hrs for 45 fish (35 YF); good quick bite on NFD 061 (no birds) for 186 (171 YF); bait then used up on NFD 060, with 178 tagged, mostly small YF (149); total of 689 for the day and heading for Patutiva before 1500 hrs !! Net hauled 0930 hrs for 268 bkts of mostly anchovy; no second net - tied up to Eritai's bouy and waited till early departure (0300 hrs) for fishing ground.

#### October 31<sup>st</sup>

Started fishing first light (0537 hrs) on NFD 058 - good prolonged bite (one hour), with 794 fish tagged (242 YF, 1 BE) most of good size; next two FADs missing, so headed for old NFD FAD

position; not there but found UNK 5 - fish below in good quantity but bait prob not getting past RR and frigates; 5 tagged (3 YF, 2 BE); pause to change engine oil 1015 hrs; checked NFD 61 at 1220 hrs - 259 tagged, mostly smallish YF; NFD 061 produced zero, unlike yesterday, and finally UNK 4 yielded 94 fish; headed for home at around 1500 hrs with two tanks intact. Total of 1151 fish for the day (541 YF, 4 BE), but most in the first 1.5 hrs fishing. Much communication with Noumea about tag crisis - a suivre ! Obtained FAD positions west of Choiseul from Soltai 63 - there are fish there, so would be good for a few days out of Ropa etc. Anchored Patutiva 1830 hrs and set light boat. First haul 2100 hrs for 214 bkts; dolphin lazily feeding alongside net on discards; second set on lightboat 2220 hrs for 56 bkts to fill up. Departed baitground 2320 hrs for NFD 064.

### **November 1<sup>st</sup>**

Arrived in vicinity of NFD 65 (with light) at 0430 hrs and drifted until 0530 hrs; fished very well for an hour, with 1,010 tagged (mostly good-sized SJ, 118 YF) before calling a halt after temporarily running out of tags; just over one tank of bait used; moved off to NFD 064, Fishing Master's favourite, but no fish came up; NFD 066 missing, then slow bite on NFD 067 at 0915 hrs (70 fish, 20 YF); free school not too far from NFD 069 location (14 fish), but alas, that seductive FAD number was missing; heading now in general direction of Choiseul, with NFD 102 next; will probably bait at Ropa tonight, 10-15 nm from the array of FADs; NFD 102 produced 224 fish (108 YF, mostly very small), then 103 for 15 fish (12 YF, small), 103 for 3, then finally a good bite of medium YF on NFD 105 to finish the bait - 216 (150 YF); headed for Ropa, anchoring 1730 hrs; 1552 for the day- 1132 SJ and 419 YF; first and only haul 2115 hrs to fill up and let bait go - dolphins nearby during set; 330 bkts of fusiliers and Hq; an excellent day - will probably stay in the area tomorrow then head towards Fauro on Saturday. NFD 105 looks good for a flying start in the morning.

### **November 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Departed Ropa 0420 hrs for fishing ground (NFD 105); started fishing 0555 hrs but disappointing after good catch yesterday afternoon - disturbed by pilot whales, not good bait (fusiliers) etc ? Slightly better on NFD 106 - only 50 fish, but good YF; very little on 107/UNK 6 and 108, except large numbers of runners and triggerfish; not looking good for this area today; fortunate to find nice floating log with fish not too far from NFD 109 - 729 fish tagged, mostly good SJ and YF (152); one recapture during the bite - released a few minutes earlier; finished 1130 and drifted near log until 1320 hrs, with just 1.5 tanks of bait left; fished log again for another 386 fish (86 YF), making 1170 for a day which started very slowly, and over 1,000 three days in a row; anchored Lituni (sabbath at SDA Ropa) 1705 hrs in 43m ; Soltai 101 also there, with 2 light boats; not much bait early - first haul 2100 hrs for 58 bkts, anchovy (devisi, Tb) and fusiliers; second haul on light boat 2215 hrs for just 21 bkts, anchovy and large Hq; will need 3rd haul for the first time on the cruise; relocated 2245 hrs for third haul.

### **November 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Third haul 0130 hrs for 55 bkts, 4th shot 0215 hrs on light boat again (92 bkts, anchovy); two dolphins waiting for a free breakfast; headed for NFD 110 at 0320 hrs and arrived in vicinity 0610 hrs - chummed but just 2 YF; NFD 111 at 0700 hrs - repeated passes and fish on sounder but did not bite well - 75 tagged (12 YF); NFD 112 at 0830 hr - but no fish; finally good bite on NFD 113, with log nearby again, at 0915 for over an hour; all bait used, for 527 fish tagged (123 YF); with that, 5,000 passed and first bonus achieved; headed for baiting ground (Ropa), anchoring 1345 hrs in 39m. Also the end of the first week of the cruise !! one down, three to go ! Soltai 5 baiting nearby; one tag returned - caught today, released yesterday, from Sch 24 (log); first haul 2050 hrs for 136 bkts (Hq, anchovy, fusiliers); second haul on lightboat for 43 bkts; will need to do 3rd haul after midnight.

### **November 4<sup>th</sup>**

Third haul 0100 hrs for 78 bkts, mostly anchovy; fourth set 0145 hrs aborted due to heavy rain and fierce wind gusts (guba) - headed for NFD 113 at 0230 hrs; fishing NFD 113 at 0545 hrs -

pulse bite over an hour before breaking off - 453 tagged, but very few YF (20); NFD 114 with RR only - 1 fish tagged; proceeded to NFD 116, towards Vella - both 115 and 116 with good signs but no fish; then headed towards FADs NE of Vella, after by-passing a school of large YF; similar there, with NFD 52 and 53 also no response even though fish there; poled one free school near seamount, but RR, MT and AT only on deck; headed for Vatoro 1500 hrs and anchored in 32m at 1650 hrs. A paltry day by recent standards - 454 fish but a healthy 5623 overall. Four reasonably good tanks left for the morning even before baiting. Good signs early - hauled 2100 hrs for close to 300 bkts of mostly fusiliers (Gg) - 240 bkts loaded; will head out for NFD 051 area at 0200 hrs

### **November 5<sup>th</sup>**

Left anchorage 0145 hrs - wind SSW; drifted near NFD 051 at 0445 hrs; began fishing 0535 hrs but nothing; NFD 050 at 0630hrs produced no fish, and NFD 049 just 15 (5 YF); 3 hour steam to FADs west of Ranongga; hopeful of free schools late in the afternoon off Simbo - often at this time of year; two UNK FADs on the way to Ranongga - second produced 137 fish (81 YF, one BE) and first two ATs released (YF); westward side of Ranongga still with plenty of land slips after earthquake and tsunami last year; NFD 54 no catch at noon; NFD 55 at 1300 hrs - no biting; NFD 56 at 1400 hrs - no fish; very plankton-rich area between Ranongga and Simbo; two foamers seen, one with whale (Bryde's ?), but went down before got there; no other sightings, so headed for two mythical FADs out wide - one found just on 1800 hrs but only very small fish - cruel deception indeed, with another 212 fish needed for second bonus and 6,000 fish for the leg. Steamed in towards Noro with beautiful sunset and flat calm sea. Alongside 2300 hrs.

### **November 6<sup>th</sup>**

Early start for market then provisioning; some deck maintenance and other work; lunch and memorable Melbourne Cup day chez Crockett thanks to Dr. FMD Bruno; all done and departed Noro 1625 hrs for Munda baiting ground; anchored 1745 hrs 32m; first haul 2145 hrs for 99 bkts, mostly anchovy; second haul on light boat 2245 hrs for 112 bkts. 211 bkts total plus around 40 left from haul at Vatoro (4/11). ~ 8 large batfish (Platax) removed alive during haul.

### **November 7<sup>th</sup>**

Left baitground 0300 hrs for FADs west of Munda; drifted near NFD 30 at 0500 hrs; no signs and steaming to NFD 031; good sounder trace but mostly island bonito; 5 tagged (2 YF); NFD 029 at 0720 hrs, then 24 and 29 - all no fish tagged; NFD 25 and 26 (double raft) no fish; NFD 27, 32 and 28 no fish; finally spotted a large school with whales, sharks etc over wide area and many big fish; as so often, did not bite - feeding on punctifer; 60m of fish on sounder at one stage; several break-offs; 22 tagged (11 YF, one BE) plus one YF AT (75 cm); headed for Munda via NFD 35 but no birds so by-passed; came up on raft at 1800 hrs, just outside Munda Passage; some small YF and school of small tuna nearby but no response; just 26 including one AT for the whole long day; anchored Munda 1915 hrs in 29m; first haul 2230 hrs for 71 bkts, mostly anchovy but mixed as last night; second haul on lightboat 2355 hrs for 43 bkts - total with remnants ~ 164 bkts.

### **November 8<sup>th</sup>**

Departed Munda baitground 0100 hrs for vicinity NFD 36; arrived 0415 hrs and drifted; chummed 36 but few signs; 37 at 0630 hrs (no fish); UNK11 with good amount of small fish but not biting well - 1 tagged (SJ) plus Decapterus; 38 no fish except a few kawakawa poled; long run to NFD 39 (16 nm) but diverted to UNK 12 (no fish) then free school (foamer), but as yesterday, no biting (one fish); fish down to 80m on sounder; UNK 13 then NFD 39 at 1045 hrs (both no fish); UNK 14 finally provided fish - school nearby returned to FAD when chumming started - 81 tagged (48 YF); 40, 41 and 43 - no fish (the last the reputed bigeye FAD); free school sighted on the way to last FAD (42) - 68 tagged (all SJ) then 2SJ from another school nearby; headed for Patutiva with bait nearly finished 1530 hrs; 153 for the day (48 YF) but just short of 6,000 (5968). Anchored Patutiva 1915 hrs; one tag return from Uepi Passage - rel. 1/11/07; first net 2115 hrs for 238 bkts of mostly anchovy; second on light boat 2230 hrs to fill up - 60 bkts loaded, 30 let go.

### **November 9<sup>th</sup>**

Departed 0100 hrs for NFD 070, arriving 0515 hrs; apparently not there or wrong position; turned around and fished FAD two miles away, presumably still 70 - slow bite but 183 tagged (72 YF); free school next did not bite; one fish on UNK 15; NFD 074 and 045 no fish; one on 46; most of older FADs as entered last night from wheelhouse plotter seem to be missing; 47 at 1320 hrs - two FADs very close, older possibly 82 - no fish on either; 48, last of new FADs at 1400 hrs - only mahi and runners; decided to head for FADs near Mary Is - some fished last month - then steam overnight to 59 and 60 etc where fish caught last week; if good fish this afternoon, will tie up for some hours since 3 plus tanks of good bait left; long steam to 90 - good fish on sounder but just 5 small fish (4 YF); free school not too far from 091 - 2 fish at stern, then reasonable bite with small fish on 91 - 128 tagged (89 YF, mostly 35-38cm); briefly checked 95 but no signs; returned to 91 to tie up for the night, since several areas of fish working around the FAD; will fish the same area tomorrow morning with the remaining 2 plus tanks; tied up 1900 hrs; jigging at various times but no touches.

### **November 10<sup>th</sup>**

Jigging from 0200 hrs without success (no larger fish on sounder); cast off from FAD and fished 0537 hrs; slow biting and mostly small fish - 353 tagged (110 YF); second FAD (96) just 2 fish, and UNK 16 zero, despite good birds on approach; nothing on 99, and ready to turn for home when big red spot under 128 - 327 tagged (but just 37 YF) before ran out of bait; decided to bait at Mbili - anchored 1400 hrs in 32m; 682 for the day - a good result - and very close to 3rd bonus. First haul 2100 hrs with new Baitmaster Brian - 81 bkts of good bait; second haul on lightboat 2215 hrs with 14 bkts. Intending to make 2 more hauls before heading to FAD.

### **November 11<sup>th</sup>**

Third (60) and fourth hauls (18) unobserved for 173 bkts total; left anchorage 0400 hrs for close FADs; 143 missing, plenty of fish on 144 but slow bite; 75 tagged (37 YF) in driving rain; conditions rough soon after, with strong N wind and squalls; revisited 128 from yesterday afternoon, with some difficulty - 121 tagged (44 YF), then 321 on UNK 17 (40 YF); actually two FADs close by each other - both fished in the rough conditions; finished bait then headed for baitground 1130 hrs, with side-on sea. Passed one FAD (142 - with birds) on the way in; 527 for the day (23% YF) and close to 7,500 total - 1,500 in last 3 days. Anchored Ketoketo 1500 hrs in 40m. First haul 2330 hrs under difficult situation - strong current and wind, but retained 204 buckets - mainly anchovy, blue sprats and others - herring, red bait etc. Headed to passage/Mbili just before 0000 hrs.

### **November 12<sup>th</sup>**

Reached UNK 17 vicinity 0500 hrs; wind had dropped and sea moderated; no fish on chumming 0545 hrs and second nearby FAD from yesterday had drifted off; headed for 125 - slow to get to bite but then good bite for extended period; 544 tagged, but with relatively few YF (125); next two FADs (130,129) with fish signs but not biting - few fish only; large Tursiops pod on one may not have helped; 131 at 1030 hrs but no fish; 123 missing, 122 with RR and one BuM but no bite; 124 at 1245 hrs no fish but dolphins nearby; 151 nothing, then success on free school past UNK 16, with 107 SJ tagged before bait finished; headed for Ketoketo 1510 hrs, anchoring in 50m at 1810 hrs; good bait showing early - first haul 2140 hrs for 84 bkts of mostly sprats; many trevally which disturbed bait; second haul on lightboat 2300 hrs for 70 bkts; one manta ray discarded; third haul will be necessary.

### **November 13<sup>th</sup>**

Third haul 0200 hrs - 85 bkts; fourth haul 0300 hrs for 62 bkts - 300 total; departed 0345 hrs for FAD 144, arriving 0625 hrs in vicinity; laborious effort to get 122 tagged (51 YF, mostly small); no fish on 146; 145 missing; presumed 193 missing, with drifting FAD nearby; 192 and 156 missing before success on 191 which turns out to be a Global FAD; incredible persistence and

doggedness by Fishing Master over nearly two hours, with 473 fish tagged (17 YF); large amount of bait used but some produced out of the hat to check one last FAD (UNK18) on the way in - 31 fish (24 YF and one BE); headed for Patutiva 1430 hrs, anchoring around 1800 hrs in 35m. First haul 2145 hrs for 182 bkts, second haul on lightboat 2300 hrs- huge catch of mostly small devisi; 184 bkts loaded - full tanks, over 300 bkts released.

#### **November 14<sup>th</sup>**

Departed 0230 hrs for NFD 59 vicinity, arriving 0445 hrs; good bite over a long period; paused when ran out of Z tags at one stage; very small fish generally rejected; 827 of the 1074 tags were Z tags, but many close to the cut-off (36 or 37 cm); 458 YF overall; one tag return from same FAD two weeks before; one fish only off next FAD (UNK 5) despite plenty of fish on sounder (as on previous visit); 25 fish on 167, mostly YF, then nothing on 163 (Global) or 188; 3 FADs missing then nothing on 171 or 169 before bait exhausted; very little since 8 hours earlier, when bait was down to 2 tanks and a 0900 hrs early shower seemed possible; headed for Patutiva 1600 hrs where light boat already in position by previous arrangement; anchored just after 1900 hrs; a good day, with 1100 tagged and the 10,000 at our mercy; with visits to known productive FAD on the way on to Noro tomorrow, 11,000 is not out of reach, an unthinkable prospect at various stages during the cruise. First haul at boat 2230 hrs after rain and some wind - 300 bkts of good-sized anchovy and juvenile Rk - full tanks, with neither light boat needed; finished 2345 hrs.

#### **November 15<sup>th</sup>**

Departed 0300 hrs for NFD 60; in vicinity 0540 hrs; slow to bite, with many very small fish on surface and larger fish below; 81 tagged (48 YF); NFD 61 at 0700 hrs; just one on UNK4 - many fish below but did not come up; totally calm conditions (mer d'huile); came across very large area of foamers - medium-large YF and large IB (60 cm plus); predictably would not bite but 12 tagged including two ATs; soon after, a patch of smaller YF and some SJ - slightly better bite with 40 tagged; enough to fall over the 10,000 line; all schools feeding on small punctifer and as usual, no interest in chum; headed for our best FAD (65) which has sadly gone missing since the last visit; FAD 67 at 1115 hrs - small tuna rose briefly but no bite; bird flock turned out to be small fish at 1210 hrs; began heading for Noro/Munda; briefly alongside 1600 hrs for an hour, to collect tags(37), office call, email etc; steamed to Munda 1715 hrs, preceded by one lightboat (from 105).Anchored around 1800 hrs in 34m; first haul 2245 hrs for 63 bkts, mostly anchovy; much escaped during haul.

#### **November 16<sup>th</sup>**

Second haul on lightboat 0015 hrs; just 29 bkts after removing 4 baskets of large Ulua mandibularis; no doubt bait unsettled by all these predators during the haul; 3rd haul 0100 hrs for 38 bkts and another 50 plus mamula; set lights on Soltai 6 for 4th haul - 0415 hrs for 15 baskets (at least) of Ulua and 8 bkts of badly battered bait; final and 5th set after 0500 hrs for just 6 bkts; total 144 hard-won bkts, plus over a tonne of Ulua; up anchor 0550 for Noro, liberating; troops for market foray on way past, loaded water, fuel and provision for the next 7 days. All of Noro ate trevally that night but just a few baskets of fish unloaded to Tautai (750 kgs the previous port call) . Plenty of tag recaptures were processed and paid for and more trips to Solomon Emerald PS re tag recapture, payment etc. Crew bonuses (3,4,5,6) were also paid out. Departed to fishing ground around 1610 hrs, very calm weather.

#### **November 17<sup>th</sup>**

Arrived near NFD 203 0630 hrs - speed slightly down during night; good conditions, with light wind and rain squalls; nothing on 203, 204 missing; passed Global netboat 0730 hrs; 206 birds but no fish; 205 looked like biting but large shark deranged; steam to 207 - no fish, as with UNK 20; nothing on 209, 210 missing then ran into some recalcitrant free schools north of Russell (10 nm) - persisted with the second of these - fast moving but eventually slowed down by a small log and 199 big SJ (56-64 cm) poled, to the great enjoyment of all concerned until bait ran out; one local dinghy also fishing the school; headed off 1515 hrs for San Jorge baiting ground, some 4

hrs distant; glorious weather, bright moon in cloudless sky; anchored near San Jorge Is in 25m at 1745 hrs; first haul held back until after moonset.

### **November 18<sup>th</sup>**

First haul 0045 hrs - good showing near bottom which rose sharply on dimming; probably over 600 bkt of prime (but small) gold anchovy taken, 305 loaded; left 0300 hrs to start the day on FAD 205 and work along the west coast of Ysabel; arrived 0540 hrs in heavy rain; very slow bite with 27 tagged, all SJ; UNK 21 at 0815hrs - fish but no catch; same on two Global rafts; 1200 hrs - visited Yuh Fa No. 2 tied to GLO 3 - passed on posters, cap for captain and promises to contact other boats (just 3 vessels in total now fishing); only 10t onboard at present, and fishing poor; chased large area of fast-moving splashing/foaming free schools, rippling at times; 69 tagged, all medium-large SJ; much of the small devisi has died - just one tank now left; one FAD by-passed (no birds); large area of foamers - v. large YF (80 kgs plus ?), skipjack, sharks, one whale (Sei/Brydes'?) - did not bite, as usual - presumably feeding on punctifer; 3 SJ caught before moving on; two more whales nearby, heading NW; last chance on NFD 165 - few fish lazily jumping but no bite; bait finished and headed for Kolokofa 1700 hrs; plenty of schools visible on the way in - will try them tomorrow morning; anchored in 35m 1845 hrs. Very good signs by 1930 hrs - some cloud over bright moon; first haul 2200 hrs was large (400 bkts) - loaded 30 bkts in each tank (40 in one) then released the rest; will do the same on second haul (in same location) after removing mortality from first haul - nice luxury with abundant bait; light boat as fall-back.

### **November 19<sup>th</sup>**

Second haul 0130 hrs - another huge catch, probably over 500 bkts; 90 bkts loaded and the rest (400 ?) released; beautiful bait, mostly good sized heterolobus; probably close to 1000 bkts in two sets; left 0345 hrs for NFD 165 - nice marlin feeding display but no fish; nothing on GLO 182; on to 172 but no signs; headed back towards Kolokofa and free schools; once again played with foamers and big YF but again no catch; opted to head for other side through Manning Strait earlier than planned to fish the afternoon; weather worsened coming through the Strait with rain and stiff NW wind - not good; NFD 011 tried but little on sounder; some fish rose briefly but no bite; headed for bird school 3 miles away; this dispersed but eventually found a large area of smaller fish than those seen in earlier free schools; in moderating wind, but sloppy conditions, fished for several hours, eventually with lights on, and tagged 530 fish; most pleasing was the good proportion of mostly small bigeye, with 112 tagged as well as 150 yellowfin, plus 7 BE tagged with the small ATs; a good end to the day, and closing on the 11,000 mark; drifted in the area until 2100 hrs, in the hope of attracting fish to the boat, but no luck and headed NE, to be near Roncador Reef at daybreak and just 5 hrs to southern end of OJ from there. Great day with the bigeye numbers !

### **November 20<sup>th</sup>**

Steaming overnight in sloppy seas, with wind and swell side-on; slowed down to be near (but not on top of) unlit Roncador Reef; good rippler early just south of Roncador - bit well early then began to move about; 89 fish tagged, all SJ; headed past Roncador towards OJ - 4 wrecks on reef, including 3 large vessels, prob l/l; reef quite large - 7 miles longest axis, with shallow lagoon inside marked on plotter as possible anchorage; chased one flighty school for over an hour - came up once from long way back but did not bite in the end; another school 1300 hrs but similar; very little on approach to Ontong Java SE corner - hope not the case for the next two days; anchored 1545 hrs off Luaniua village, then ashore to secure access from chiefs; a lengthy process - details another time; sprats gathered despite rough conditions - hauled 2000 hrs for ~ 300 bkts, of which 170 loaded, of which 150 in three tanks; will sleep until dawn as passage not negotiable in dark.

### **November 21<sup>st</sup>**

Exit through winding passage 0600 hrs; wind still from NNW, occasionally strong with squalls - unpleasant fishing conditions; no sightings all morning, but searching very difficult; wind freshened, reaching 25 kts, more in gusts, so eventually reduced speed and headed for Pelau;

one bird flock close inshore chummed (prob mostly IB/AT but perhaps some SJ) without success; inside lagoon 1710 hrs and anchored off Pelau 1800 hrs; went to village by dinghy, met chief, paid access (for the goodwill and the future); the great Ontong Java adventure ended in sadness and despair; up anchor 2000 hrs and headed for N.Ysabel, with partially following wind and sea, at least initially.

### **November 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Outside the OJ north passage at 2100 hrs and steaming all night in improving conditions; conditions in fact never improved much - confused sea and wind turning slightly NW but gradually easing; should be near area of bigeye catches, to the west of Dufour Ridge, by about 1420 hrs; nothing in the immediate area, with wind now SW and still 15 kts; headed towards NFD 09, by-passing 10 which was missing on previous visit; good concentration of small YF around the FAD - 235 tagged (182 YF, 6 BE) before calling it a day, with another rippler nearby - fish quite small with YF avge 33cm; headed for Kologilo, still in moderate sea and fresh wind, anchoring 1940 hrs in 35m; experienced wind from most points of the compass today, starting NNW, then NW, SW and finishing NW again. Will need to drop to be able to haul net tonight; anchored dragged and nearly on reef 2130 hrs - headed off for Slot at reduced speed as baiting not possible and 2 tanks bait left; conditions still poor all night.

### **November 23<sup>rd</sup>**

Steaming in strong NW wind and rough sea overnight; high drama when net washed overboard but recovered before wrapped around prop and stored on deck; in vicinity of 102 0645 hrs - conditions difficult and probably worsening; smallish fish only (13 tagged), so moved to 103 - similar situation, with just 5 tagged; agreed to check just one more FAD with conditions now challenging - smallest fish of all on 104, with YF, IB and SJ < 25cm; battled our way into lee of Kolombangara, then easy pasage to Noro, docking 1415 hrs to first unload net; great resolve by the crew last night and this morning - just confirmed the high regard in which we hold them - journey's end but a good month. Perhaps once more with feeling in February ?

### **November 24<sup>th</sup>**

### **November 25<sup>th</sup>**