

Tuna tag recoveries in Papua New Guinea

SPC's Principal Tag Recovery Officer (TRO) Caroline Sanchez spent two weeks in Papua New Guinea (PNG) last February to supervise the organisation of tag recoveries in the country. Caroline worked with local TROs Andrew Rahiria, Jacinta Eddie and Priscilla Wrambin in the towns of Wewak, Madang and Lae, respectively.

These local TROs were trained in 2011 to publicise the tagging project, organise the collection of recovered tags brought in by fishers and provide them with rewards. A reward of USD 10 is given to tag finders when they return a recovered tag and the associated catch information (species, size, date and position of recapture, name of fishing vessel). They can also choose to be rewarded with a t-shirt or a hat bearing the project's logo.

The three TROs in PNG use a custom-designed tag recovery database to complete their work. This computerised interface allows for each returned tag and its associated information to be saved for later analysis. On a monthly basis, the TROs report to Caroline with the data they have accumulated and the data are subsequently integrated into the master tagging database at SPC's headquarters in Noumea, New Caledonia.

Andrew, Jacinta and Priscilla spend most of their time visiting the fishing or carrier vessels that unload their catch in port. They also work with the tuna canneries, where many tags are recovered, and they collaborate with fisheries observers, who embark on fishing vessels to monitor all aspects of fishing activities. This networking role is very important to publicise the tuna tagging project. Observers, fishers and cannery staff are made aware of what a tag is and what information they should record when they find one.

For each recovered tag, a tag recovery form is completed by the finder or the TRO. Tag finders are also asked to provide their name and contact address so they can enter the regular lotteries that are run in the major ports in PNG. During her mission, Caroline and her colleagues ran a lottery in each town. These lotteries were organised with the support of collaborating fishing companies. In Lae, the lottery was drawn at Frabelle PNG Ltd compound. The winner, Elmarson Tolentino, a fishing vessel crew member was at sea but his win was posted on the notice board. In Madang, RD Tuna Cannery hosted the lottery draw. The winner, Bernard Nalul, a local unloading crew, was very pleased and announced that his gains

would be used to pay for this son's school fees. Finally, in Wewak, the lottery was run at the South Seas Tuna Corporation refectory, where Eugenio Luzada Sr and Colas Meseo were drawn winners. Each winner was awarded USD 250. Surely this is an incentive to continue reporting recovered tags in the future.

Andrew, Jacinta and Priscilla continue processing tag recoveries and promoting the tuna tagging project. The success of a tagging project is largely based on the quantity and, more importantly, the quality of the data returned. Accurate size measurement, date and position of recapture are particularly important.

Other TROs are based in Honiara, Pohnpei, Majuro and recently Tarawa, some of the major tuna ports in the region.

A tag recovery guide for the general public that details the actions to be taken when a tagged fish is recaptured can be downloaded from the tagging website at this address: <http://www.spc.int/tagging/en/recovery-form/recovery-documents>.

For more information:

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Lottery winner Bernard Nalul in Madang surrounded by RD staff and TROs.