

Dr Antony David Lewis

by John Hampton and Peter Williams



Dr Antony David Lewis – alternatively and affectionately known as Dr Fish, Yoda, ADL, or simply Tony – passed away on 23 September 2022 after a short illness. Tony was a fisheries legend in the Pacific, and his passing will be deeply felt by his many friends and colleagues in Australia, the Pacific, Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the world.

Tony grew up in Brisbane, Queensland, with a passion for fish and fishing. Always a gifted student, it was no surprise that he attended Queensland University and studied fisheries science, obtaining a BSc with First Class Honours in 1971. From there, Tony's journey in the Pacific began, as he took on the role of Principal Biologist in the Ministry of Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries in pre-independent Papua New Guinea. There, his interest in the burgeoning pole-and-line skipjack tuna fishery began, and he was instrumental in developing the first large-scale tagging programme for skipjack in PNG. The early results of that work, in particular the wide distribution of skipjack tag recaptures outside of PNG, stimulated his interest in larger questions around skipjack stock structure and regional productivity. His great friend and mentor, Bob Kearney, brought Tony to SPC Noumea for the first time in 1977, where he played a major role in setting up and implementing the first SPC-region-wide tuna tagging experiment, the Skipjack Survey and Assessment Programme. Tony's interest in all-things-skipjack continued, along with his other passion, scombrid taxonomy, which was the topic of his PhD at the Australian National University from 1978–1981.

With his newly minted PhD in the pocket, Tony then took on the role of Principal Fisheries Officer (Resource Assessment and Development) at the Fiji Fisheries Division in Suva, covering the gambit of coastal and offshore pelagic fisheries in Fiji. He continued his regular association with SPC during these years, attending all the regular fisheries meetings in Noumea before eventually being convinced to re-join the staff of SPC as Manager/Chief Scientist of the Oceanic Fisheries Programme (OFP) in 1988. This was a period of re-building and refreshment of OFP, and Tony brought his unique approach to leadership wholeheartedly to the task. A large new tagging programme focusing again on skipjack but now also on yellowfin tuna commenced, with substantial EU funding. Managing large field programmes such as this was Tony's forte, and he easily straddled the complex issues of scientific design, finance and administration, donor liaison and, importantly, motivating and encouraging the onboard team of scientists, technicians and the Tuvaluan crew of the chartered pole-and-line vessel *Te Tautai*.

During his 14 years at SPC, Tony shepherded many changes in OFP, including a broadening of the focus of the programme from primarily skipjack and yellowfin to also include the other species of tunas (bigeye and albacore), as well as billfish, sharks and other pelagic species impacted by the fisheries. Under his watch, the first forays into developing a regional observer programme were made, as well as large investments in data management and the application of cutting-edge stock assessment methodology to meet the emerging needs of regional fisheries management.

Such major programme development, of course, required substantial donor support. And bringing the donors onside and convincing them of the value of investing in OFP was an area in which Tony truly excelled. His "donor lunches" and early-morning fishing trips for representatives of the various donor agencies were the stuff of legends, and no doubt made a substantial contribution to many productive donor relationships that SPC, in particular OFP, enjoyed during this time.



Tony left SPC in 2002 to take up the Managing Director position at the Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority (PNG-NFA), which lasted until 2004, when he then served as a technical advisor (in a small team) that assisted the new Executive Director and Secretariat of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) in its formative years.

From 2005 onwards, Tony remained very active in the region through a range of consultancies (including several tuna supply chain studies), serving on scientific committees (e.g. the Threatened Species Scientific Committee in Australia), often playing a pivotal role in a range of regional and international fisheries and seafood meetings, and serving as technical advisor to industry associations.

As the Pacific Tuna Tagging Project (PTTP) Project Consultant/Coordinator, Tony brought his vast experience to assist with planning and provide overall coordination of this third major SPC-led tagging project over the period 2006–2019. During this time, he also achieved a significant milestone of personally tagging his 100,000th tuna, a record that is never likely to be broken.

From his exposure to the domestic fisheries in Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, particularly during the years of the SPC tagging projects, Tony recognised the importance and magnitude of catches from these fisheries and the potential impacts to WCPFC tuna stocks and the tuna fisheries of SPC member countries. He was significantly involved in developing the initial project documentation for the West Pacific East Asia Project (WPEA) that aimed to improve the monitoring and management of the domestic tuna fisheries of these countries.

The WPEA project began in 2010 and continues to be administered by WCPFC today with SPC contracted to provide ongoing technical assistance. Tony played a key active role in the WPEA project from the outset, with his technical expertise covering a range of areas, including the provision of expert advice on establishing capacity around species identification, technical advice on the annual catch estimation process, establishing observer and port sampling programmes, advice on rationalising import/export data, and advice on improving onboard fish handling and storage for the Vietnam handline fishery.

An example of the significant contribution he made through the WPEA project was the award of an official government medal from the Vietnam Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in 2013 for his services to improving the monitoring of Vietnam fisheries.

Tony was also a technical adviser of the International Pole and Line Foundation, an organisation dedicated to developing sustainable and equitable pole-and-line fisheries. One of his key roles in the organisation was co-chairing their Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee.

During his life, Tony was an acknowledged expert in fish identification throughout the Pacific. His passion for ichthyology was mostly undertaken in his own personal time and he was responsible for acquiring and compiling various information that resulted in the formal acceptance of several new fish species. He had the keen eye of a naturalist that allowed him to discern new species that were hiding in plain sight. His work in this area was acknowledged with several new fish species bearing his name, for example, Lewis' round herring (*Spratelloides lewisi*).

Tony is survived by his brother Geoff, six nieces and nephews and his son Arnaud. Arnaud, who lived close to Tony in Brisbane for the past 10 years, has inherited his dad's love of fishing, his good humour and love of a good time. All with a delightful French accent. Can you imagine!