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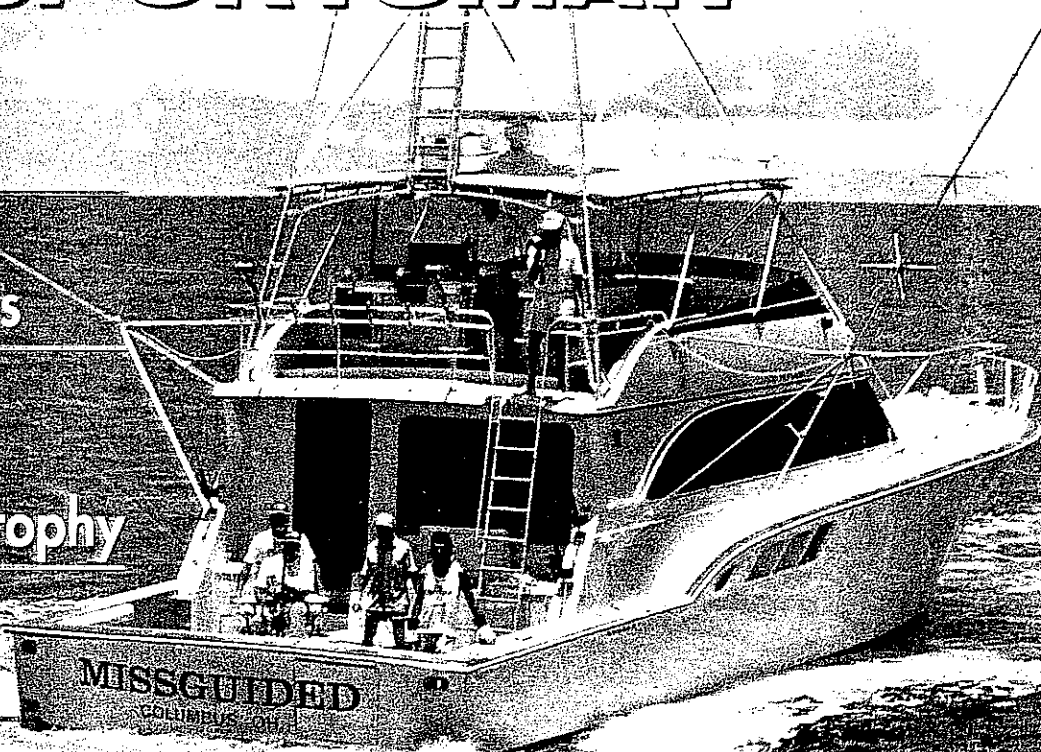
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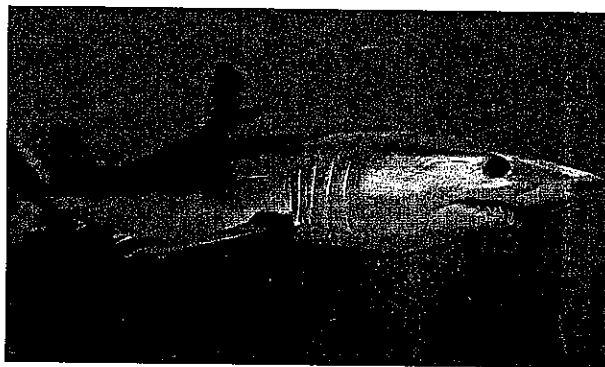
Shark Long-Line Effort Stopped Short In California

By Phil Troy

On May 14, 1992, sport fishermen in Southern California were finally successful in stopping the controversial experimental drift-long-line commercial shark fishery. The decision to deny the four experimental permits in their fifth and final year was the culmination of a four-year battle directed by AFTCO Manufacturing and United Anglers of California. If allowed to continue, this "foot-in-the-door" effort by commercial long-liners would have developed into a full-blown permanent fishery directed at mako sharks. Both the Department of Fish and Game and the Fish and Game Commission have now officially said "no" to long-lines off the Southern California coast.

Phone Call Started It

The effort to eliminate the experimental long-lines off California began back in January, 1988, when Bill Shedd of AFTCO in Irvine, California, received an anonymous phone call from an employee of the Department of Fish and Game. Owing to



Most mako sharks taken off Southern California by recreational and commercial fishermen are juveniles. It takes a mako five to seven years to reach breeding size.

the fact that at the time there was no United Anglers of Southern California, the anonymous caller contacted AFTCO because of their past involvement in marine resources issues.

The caller was concerned about the potentially severe damage that would be done to the Southern California mako shark population if a commercial long-line fishery was allowed to develop. Mako sharks have a very low reproductive capability because of their role as a top-of-the-food-chain predator. A further problem with the biology of mako sharks is that they are slow to reach sexual maturity, taking about five to seven years to reach the

breeding size of about 500 pounds.

Almost all of the mako sharks taken off Southern California, both commercially and by sport fishermen, are juveniles in the one- to two-year-old range. The unique biology of the mako shark in waters off Southern California, coupled with the fact that local waters are part of a mako nursery area, means that the mako sharks are at an extreme risk of being overfished.

A real concern was that the mako shark in Southern California was headed for the same fate as the thresher shark. Threshers had been commercially over-harvested with gillnets in only a few short years. The thre-

sher shark gillnet fishery also started as an experimental fishery. In the case of the thresher shark, fishery managers in California reacted too late to signs of collapse in the fishery, and today threshers are considered a rare catch on the West Coast. After the anonymous call to Shedd, it was decided that AFTCO would assemble a group of concerned shark fishermen to fight the experimental long-line program.

Greg Stotesbury of AFTCO had fished for makos since 1981, and from his on-the-water experiences he had a clear understanding of the declining state of the mako fishery. He became the leader of the concerned shark fishermen's conservation effort and recruited Ken Kukuda, former editor and publisher of a sport fishing publication, to co-direct the effort with him.

Commercial Quota Established

At the February, 1989, Fish and Game Commission hearing in Long Beach, California, *Continued on page 63*

Shark Long-Line Effort Stopped Short In California

Continued from page 44

Stotesbury and Kukuda were successful in organizing 130 recreational shark fishermen to voice their opposition to the renewal of ten experimental permits for the 1989 long-line season. At that initial hearing the long-liners were successful in getting their permits renewed, but a 240,000-pound quota was imposed on their catch.

As a result of the continuing concern for the mako shark resource, Stotesbury and the other concerned shark fishermen decided that sport fishing bag limits for sharks would be necessary. The popularity of makos as a sport fish was growing every year, and a reasonable bag limit of two fish per person per day would help reduce some of the sport catch. In April, 1989, the concerned shark fishermen met with the California Department of Fish and Game, which recommended that the recreational bag limits should be imposed.

The Department took until October, 1991, to impose the bag limits, but the sport fishermen were now on record with their shark resource concerns. This was the first time that there had ever been specific bag limits on a shark species in California.

The long-line fishery ended the 1989 season with a total of 167,000 pounds of makos landed, while the drift-gillnet fleet took another 210,000 pounds of makos. In all, the total commercial catch that year weighed in at 400,000 pounds.

The sport catch of makos in 1989 continued to get tougher, and big fish were less evident. The catch per unit effort (C.P.U.E.) for the sport fleet had dropped from 1.38 fish per trip in 1987 to .64 fish per trip during the 1989 season. The average size for makos was also down from 56.7 pounds in 1987 to 38.5 pounds in 1989.

In March, 1990, the long-line association again approached the Fish and Game Commission to request permits for the 1990 summer season. Despite vigorous opposition from the concerned shark fishermen, the permits were re-issued.

Concern for the health of the mako stocks was growing. Sport fishermen in California experienced another poor season in 1990, with a total catch of 123,884 pounds. The long-line fleet landed 173,000 pounds of mako, and again they were not able to make their quota.

In April, 1991, the long-liners re-applied for their experimental permits. The long-line association was again successful in obtaining them.

The recreational catch that season was the poorest ever, at a C.P.U.E. of .61 fish per day. Many long-time mako sport fishermen described the 1991 season as the worst they had ever seen. Meanwhile, the total long-line and gillnet catch for the 1991 season was also the lowest ever recorded: 331,000 pounds.

Prior to the Fish and Game Commission hearing in 1992, AFTCO and the concerned shark fishermen aligned themselves with the efforts of United Anglers of Southern California (UASC). This is a newly formed fisheries-conservation group supported by sport fishing publications, such as *Salt Water Sportsman*, the sport fishing industry, fishing clubs, and many individuals. The network of contacts that UASC could provide the concerned shark fishermen proved to be a huge help to the anti-long-line effort.

UASC chartered a bus to transport concerned anglers to the hearing. AFTCO's Stotesbury and Shedd presented the case and both the Department of Fish and Game and the Fish and Game Commission agreed that now was the time to act to protect the fragile mako fishery. By a unanimous vote, the permits were denied—four solid years of commitment by AFTCO and concerned recreational shark fishermen had paid off. ~

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