



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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UNWANTED FISH ZOOMS TO HEIGHTS IN HALF A CENTURY

Because the Pacific sardine failed to make its annual appearance in American fishing waters in 1903, a new fishery was born.

When the sardine harvest failed, a few of a hitherto discarded species, the unwanted tuna customarily kicked back into the sea, were canned and offered to the American public. The fish were well received and tuna has become the principal fish canned in the United States.

In 1958, 36 canneries in seven States, American Samoa, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico, produced 277 million pounds of canned tuna and an additional two million pounds of tunalike bonito and yellowtail. Another 46 million pounds of canned tuna and 12 million pounds of canned yellowtail and bonito were imported in the United States. Tuna is now the No. 1 food fish in volume landed and the No. 3 food fish in value, exceeded only by shrimp and salmon.

The story of the growth of the tuna industry, told mainly by statistical tables covering a half century, is carried in a Department of the Interior publication--Fishery Leaflet 484, issued by the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Wildlife Service.

Although the industry was started in 1903, records are only available from 1911. In 1911, the Pacific Coast catch was confined to one species, the albacore--850,000 pounds live weight valued at \$5,000. In 1958, the catch included albacore bluefin, yellowfin and skipjack--326,000,000 pounds live weight, valued at \$44.6 million.

Up until after the close of World War II the American market was largely supplied by American fishermen, the imports playing a minor part. In the prewar year of 1939, only four percent of the pack produced in American canneries was from imported stocks. In the post-war year of 1949, the figure was three percent. But in 1958, more than 39 percent of the American pack was from imported tuna.

The increase in the ratio of imported tuna already canned to the total supply is not so noticeable. In 1939, the 10 million pounds of canned imported tuna was 12.6 percent of the supply; in 1958, the 46 million pounds imported already canned, was 14.3 percent of the supply.

The peak year for the American pack of bonito and yellowtail was 1947, when 9 million pounds were canned. In 1958, the pack was two million pounds. The peak of imports on these two varieties was 1957, when 15.5 million pounds of canned yellowtail and bonito were imported. In 1958, the imports of these varieties amounted to 12 million pounds.

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