



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Pam and Gil Groszmann with a 10-pounder.

Fishing boats' holds are full

Selling albacore direct from the boat

By JOHN McNICHOLAS
Sentinel Staff Writer

When all but one of the major fish canneries on the West Coast decided last week to stop buying albacore in midseason, thousands of fishermen up and down the coast were caught with tons of fresh-caught albacore in their holds and no place to sell them.

So, like Wayne Bassano and Gil Groszmann of Santa Cruz, they are selling the fish directly to the public, fresh frozen from the holds of their boats.

Albacore is a kind of tuna, the top-grade white meat which goes into the most expensive canned tuna.

The major albacore importers, Japan, Korea and Taiwan, are locked in a fierce competition of their

own, and have flooded the albacore market here at prices below what American fishermen can afford to accept. Last week, the canneries were stacked to the ceiling with foreign fish, Groszmann heard one fisherman in San Pedro report. They closed the buying facilities which normally operate in ports along the coast, and left fishermen like Bassano and Groszmann high and dry.

Bassano said selling fish directly is "kind of neat — I've never handed a fish directly to the consumer before." But he also said when the hold of his boat, the Marie H docked at Aldo's Restaurant, was empty, he'd tie it up and wait for the herring season. "There's no reason to go out and kill fish you can't sell. Why go back out? I was hoping to make my boat payment with this catch."

Across the harbor, aboard the "West Coast,"

Pam and Gil Groszmann sold a seven-pound albacore for \$7 to a couple who said they were bringing friends back to get in on the deal.

Pam said of the foreign fishermen, "What they're doing is underselling us, and knocking us out of business — all of us. The buyers are out of business — it's not just us, but all the little people along the way. We're going to get out of it," she said. "I'm not going to sell the boat," her husband explained. "It's all I've done, all my life, and I love it. But I'm going to have to seek an alternate living, and keep this just as a supplemental one." "When I was a kid in the '50s, I sold fish off my dad's boat for the same reason. It was kind of resolved until just recently, and here I am, 38 years old, back at it again."

One cannery in San Pedro is still buying albacore, the two fishermen explained, but only 25 tons

a day. Fishermen are lined up, and some may wait as long as a month to unload their catch.

William Perkins, general manager of the albacore fishermen's representative group, the Western Fishboat Owners Association, said "What's happening in Santa Cruz is happening on the entire Pacific Coast. Unfortunately, there's no duty or restrictions on raw tuna brought in by ships or containers. That's something we're not protected against at all.... "Basically, the major canneries — Van Camps and Starkist — have access to foreign markets on albacore which have put us in a non-competitive situation."

He said the cutthroat competition within the foreign market couldn't continue, and that next year

SEE BACK PAGE

Sentinel - 9/28/82

Albacore

FROM PAGE 1

prices would have to come up again. But in the meantime, fishermen will unload their boats a fish at a time, a dollar a pound, which Perkins pointed out was "quite a bargain."

As for a long-term solution, Groszmann said, "As much as I hate to say this, we're going to need some government regulation to give us some help."