



PIER Deep-set Buoy Gear -EFP status report 10/19/2015

Chugey Sepulveda, PhD, Pflieger Institute of Environmental Research (PIER)

Timing: The PIER deep-set buoy gear (DSBG) EFP commenced in early September, 2015, upon receiving final clearance and approval from the NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region Sustainable Fisheries Division. Due to abnormally warm waters associated with the on-going 2015 El Nino and anticipated low catches in the southern California Bight based on previous El Nino events, cooperative fishers were encouraged to fish sparingly and to base operations on fish availability to ensure existing monitoring resources could extend through December, 2015. Nonetheless, DSBG deployments were performed throughout the performance period to assess catch and comply with the timing of the EFP window.

Vessels and trip description: The PIER DSBG EFP commenced with a staggered cooperative fisher enrollment plan that now includes four cooperative vessels and the one research application deploying DSBG in the 2015 season. A second vessel will join the efforts in 2016 pending receipt of financial support for needed observer coverage. Vessel trip days have ranged from one to six days aboard vessels that range in size from 40' to 65' in length. Crews typically include the captain and one other crew member and fishing activities have mainly focused on the waters from Point Dume to the Mexican Border and out 50nm.

Progress to date: ~42 sets have been made by the 4 cooperative fishers with a collective observation rate of approximately 50% (minimum mandated coverage 30%). DSBG catch to date has consisted of 41 swordfish, 24 bigeye thresher sharks, 1 opah and 1 escolar. These data are preliminary and include sets associated with training and the initial set up of the vessels. During the same period, research trials focused on tagging swordfish and gear development yielded similar catch statistics, with 11 sets resulting in 10 swordfish, 6 Bigeye thresher shark, 1 oilfish (*Ruvettus* spp.) and 1 opah. These data are preliminary as the EFP is ongoing with vessels actively fishing.

Catch composition: There were no observed or reported takes of any non-target ESA species or any species of special concern. The fishing operations to date have resulted in a similar catch composition to that presented previously under the NOAA Fisheries sponsored research trials (2011 to 2015). The catch has been composed entirely of marketable species, however, not all of the bigeye thresher sharks were retained for sale given the low price-point offered for this species. All non-retained thresher sharks were released alive.

Catch in perspective: To date, 2015 has yielded low catches from the harpoon fishery and a slow start to the drift gillnet season, as most fishers are awaiting the fall conditions to commence fishing operations. Given the early stage of the EFP and slow fishing conditions of 2015, initial DSBG catch rates and consistent selectivity suggest an optimistic outlook for the remainder of the 2015 season.