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Talking to Tuna, and other Fishy Tales: Ethnography of Sustainable Seafood Market Routes

Southern Bluefin tuna have historically forged a human and non-human network of migration and consumption within the Asia-Pacific region. In 2009 a Japanese and Australian team of scientists working with Clean Seas Tuna managed to get captive Southern Bluefin tuna to spawn on land. This was heralded as a first step in producing wholly sustainable Bluefin tuna, one of the world's most expensive food commodities. This break through takes place in a context whereby illegal and over-fishing have reduced the tuna to critically endangered. To adequately capture the complexity of the tuna export market takes us into 'research in the wild', as Michel Callon characterises 'the new forms of techno-science-society interactions, in which non-scientists work with scientists to produce and disseminate knowledge.' (2003) Callon's earlier work on the scallop industry in France pointed to a new way of understanding the dynamics of networks of scientists, fishermen and scallops. However he, along with much of ANT, ignores the sensuality of the material connections they trace. Here I will engage with what I have previously called a rhizo-ethnography of bodies as a necessary addition to his conception of networks. Through ethnographic and interview research with a wide range of players we will begin to see how human and tuna appetites forge historical and sensual networks essential to the promotion of sustainable seafood markets, in ways that open out the question of sustenance and sustainability.