

# Tombo Ahi

## albacore tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*)



**Albacore tuna** is commonly known as tombo ahi in Hawaii. Other names for this species include tombo, Pacific albacore and “white meat” tuna. Tombo means dragonfly in Japanese, a name used for these fish that have very long pectoral fins.

### Seasonality & How They Are Caught

#### Availability and Seasonality:

Tombo ahi is seasonally available in significant quantities, but is scarce in the off-season. The peak in landings usually occurs from May through September. There are also wide fluctuations in the annual catch of tombo ahi. Availability is greatly influenced by oceanographic conditions. Tombo ahi is believed to migrate along ocean temperature “edges” rich in food, hence, disruption of ocean-wide current systems,

such as brought about by “El Nino” climate events, may affect catch rates in Hawaii.

#### Fishing Methods:

Most of the tombo ahi catch in Hawaii is landed by commercial longline boats that set hooks at the swimming depths of the large tombo (450-900 ft). A small portion of the catch is made by the small-boat handline (ika-shibi) fishery based on the island of Hawaii.

The tombo ahi caught in the vicinity of the Hawaiian Islands are large (40-80 pounds in round weight) adult fish. Smaller, immature tombo migrate extensively throughout the North Pacific far north of the Hawaiian Islands.

#### Distribution:

The longline catch and much of the handline catch of tombo ahi is mar-

keted through the Honolulu fish auction. The remainder of the handline fishery catch is sold through intermediary buyers on the island of Hawaii where this fishery is centered.

### Quality

Most of the Hawaii catch of tombo is sold fresh. Some longline boats catching tombo ahi are at sea for up to 10-12 days, but with proper care, the fish will retain a high quality for three weeks after capture. Although not as old when landed, the quality of handline-caught tombo is more variable because of differences in handling by the small-boat tuna fleet.

#### Product Forms and Yields:

The preferred market size of tombo ahi for use in fresh or processed

products is greater than 50 pounds in the round. The larger fishes have a higher yield of finished product -- 60-65%.

Fresh albacore is also marketed as loins, loin sections, or steaks at fish markets or supermarkets with fish counter service or self-service counters. Tombo is one of the preferred species for gourmet smoked fish products.

**Color, Taste, Texture:**

Tombo ahi has flesh that varies from whitish-pink in smaller fish to deep pink in larger fish. This is a desirable

attribute for raw fish preparations. As raw fish, tombo is softer than other ahi or aku and, hence, more difficult to slice into sashimi. The flesh becomes much firmer when cooked than when in the raw state. Cooked tombo turns bright white.

**Preparations:**

Restaurants usually grill tombo ahi, but other cooking methods will work as well. Tombo has a tendency to dry out quickly, so it is important to avoid overcooking. Tombo works well in raw fish dishes as sashimi, sushi, poke and ceviche.

## Historical Note

Albacore is the only tuna species which can be canned as “white meat tuna” in the U.S. The west coast albacore fishery began in the early 20th century as canning techniques were perfected. Frozen albacore remains an important species for tuna canning. Hawaii no longer has a tuna cannery, so local landings of albacore enter the fresh market.



### Hawaii Seafood Council

Acknowledgement: produced with support from PacMar, Inc., and NOAA (Award No. NAO6NMF4520222) [hawaii-seafood.org](http://hawaii-seafood.org)

