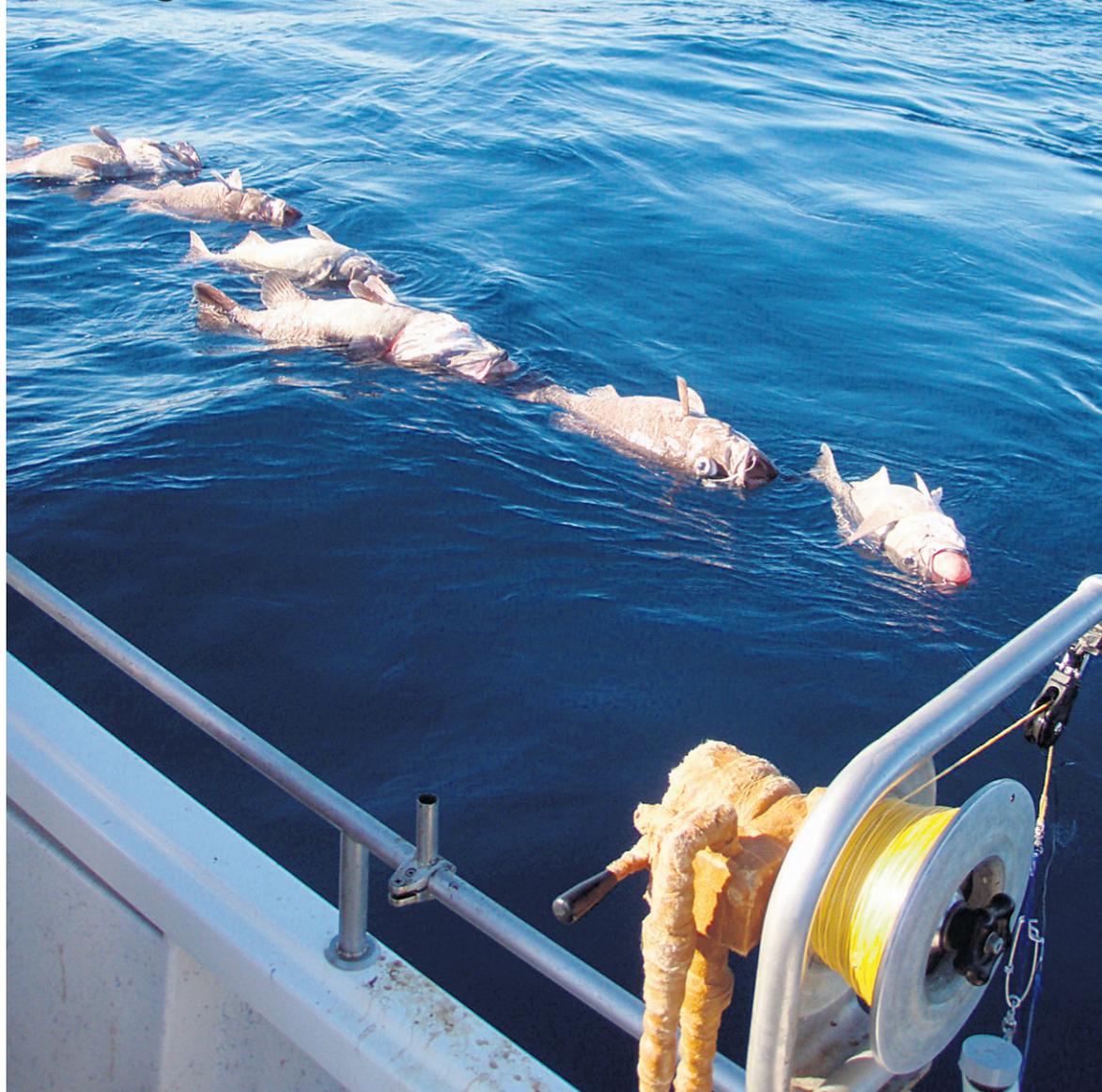


Reels conquer Australian deeps

– big fish from seamount fishery



AUSTRALIAN fisherman Jo Rowley went to French company VirHydro to source some tough deck machinery for fishing in deep water.

He is fishing on a seamount and his main species are flame snapper, ruby snapper, barcod, bass grouper and blue-eye trevalla. They are exported to Hawaii and the U.S., as well as supplied to the growing domestic market.

He tells *FNI* that he has been fishing for more than 30 years. He and his father helped pioneer the Australian longline fishery for tuna in the 1970s and 1980s as the first Australians to export sashimi grade tuna to Japan and the U.S.

"We had the largest boats on the east coast and regularly fished 1000 miles from the coast using monofilament longlines," he says, adding that these were 24 to 28 metre vessels.

"During these fishing trips we also discovered a source of deepwater reef species on seamounts and, again, pioneered the seamount fishery. In the early '90s we moved our operations to the tropics

and established deep setting longlining to target bigeye, yellowfin and albacore in waters adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park."

Jo Rowley tells *FNI* that licensing issues and the desire to expand operations prompted a move to south-east Queensland where they established a fishery for broadbill swordfish.

Jo Rowley recalls: "We expanded our fleet to ten vessels and two processing factories and, within two years, the fishery grew to a fleet of 100 vessels catching more than 2500 tonnes of swordfish.

"In early 2002, after my father suffered a heart attack, we decided to wind down operations and I sold my last large vessel in 2006. We sold off the processing plants and I bought a 12 metre boat for something to do in my retirement.

"I fitted it out with comprehensive electronics, including a MaxSea 3-D plotting program, RoxAnn bottom classification and dual-frequency 3 kW Furuno sounder."

"Since then I have discovered vast areas of uncharted grounds



and seamounts just over the continental shelf within 40 nautical miles of the coast.

"I started using electric jigging machines imported from Europe, but they just couldn't handle the load. We don't use any of the jigging programs or require auto operation.

"After burning out electric motors, circuit boards and having to constantly repair them, I got in contact with VirHydro and imported some of their reels, modified to suit my conditions."

He is now working with VirHydro to fine-tune the

Australian line fisherman Jo Rowley has located deep water fish that he exports to Hawaii and the U.S., as well as supplying a growing domestic market in Australia. He went to the French company VirHydro for the tough deck equipment that he needs for line fishing down to 1000 metres.

Pictures: Jo Rowley

company's reels for this type of fishing.

Jo Rowley tells *FNI*: "So much for being retired. I have ordered a new 15 metre boat custom-built for this fishery!"

"There is great interest in this type of fishing as it does not require large vessels. Operating and fuel costs are low, and there is a great demand for premium, line-caught, white fleshed fish high in Omega-3."

He explains that straight after capture fish are brain-spiked, gilled and gutted before being placed in slurry ice.