

**IMECOCAL, MEXICAN RESEARCH PROGRAM OF THE CALIFORNIA
CURRENT: ICHTHYOPLANKTON**

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Abstract

The California Current System has been studied for several decades and for different reasons concerning with the full understanding of its physical and biological dynamics. The California Current has been referred to as the most intensively studied oceanic system in the world. Zooplankton surveys dated from more than 50 years constituted a very extent time series of data, reflecting the efforts of two countries USA with the CalCOFI Program (California Cooperative Oceanic Fisheries Investigations) (initiated in 1949) and Mexico with two main research programs, the CICIMAR program, in the West Coast of Baja California (1982-1995) and the IMECOCAL program (Spanish acronym for Mexican Research Program of the California Current) (initiated in 1997). Fish larvae from IMECOCAL zooplankton surveys are the issues attaining this work. The two Mexican programs are directed to study the south portion of the California Current (Mexican portion). Most recently, IMECOCAL Program includes oceanic and coastal zooplankton seasonal surveys made with Bongo and Calvet nets and CUFES, following the methods and station plan from the CalCOFI program. Between both Mexican programs a total of 239 taxa of fish larvae have been identified, while CalCOFI program registered a total of 249 identified taxa between 1951 and 1984. Most of the fish larvae species identified by IMECOCAL have a Transitional, Tropical and Subtropical affinity. During IMECOCAL surveys two important conditions have been registered: The 1997-1998 “El Niño” and the 1998-1999 “La Niña” events in the Eastern Tropical Pacific. Both reflected in the ichthyoplankton composition found, compared with “Normal” conditions, by means of anomalous abundance and number of several species (both increase and decrease), presence of “rare species”, and similar species responses compared with other “El Niño-La Niña” conditions. Now IMECOCAL program extends to the year 2005 and one of the final results will be the creation of a time series data base of ichthyoplankton collected, as well as several scientific papers, done and in progress, along with postgraduate thesis and local subprograms. The final goal of the entire program is the achievement of the capacity of prediction, in a realistic way, of the response of the epipelagic ecosystem to the global and regional climatic change, as well as the fisheries influence and other anthropogenic perturbations.

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