



Tag and Release of Billfish and Sharks

The Programme

Tag and release is an important part of deep sea angling in New Zealand. New Zealand anglers tag and release about 1000 marlin and 300 sharks each year. This shows the commitment of recreational anglers to the conservation of the resource. The tagging data is critical for research into the growth and movement of these fish, which is difficult to collect in any other way. The New Zealand Gamefish Tagging Programme is funded by the Ministry of Fisheries and the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council. When a fish is recaptured a letter and reward shirt is sent to the angler who returns the tag and information. A letter and T-shirt is also sent to the angler who tagged the fish and returned the completed tag card.

Tagging Gear

- ⊕ It is best to use good quality tagging gear which will help with proper tag placement and attachment to the fish. Tag shedding is a problem in all striped marlin tagging programmes and with all tag types. The following guidelines aim to maximize the chances of producing successful recaptures in this programme.
- ⊕ For marlin and sharks a tag applicator pin 75 mm long is recommended.
- ⊕ Keep the tag applicator clean to prevent infection in the tag wound.
- ⊕ Rubbing the tag steamer with wax will act as anti fouling and still allow the tag wound to heal. Tags have been returned after 3 weeks with goose barnacles growing on them which contributes to the problem of tag shedding.

Tagging procedure

- ⊕ Tag and release fish that are in good condition and likely to survive. Marlin and sharks should be tagged while they are in the water.
- ⊕ Place the tag in the slot of the applicator and check that the number on the tag matches the number on the tag card (with old style tag poles use a rubber band to hold the tag in place).
- ⊕ To bring the fish along side the boat it is best to be steaming ahead at about 4 knots, as the fish will lead in while swimming ahead and be less inclined to go under the boat.

- ⊕ The fish should be under control before tagging to ensure proper tag placement and to prevent unnecessary injury to the fish.
- ⊕ Aim to insert the tag in the shoulder below the dorsal fin with the steel tag head pointing forward on an angle that allows the tag to stream with the water flow. (See pictures at bottom of page)
- ⊕ Marlin are relatively thin skinned so a firm and controlled tag shot is best. Sharks have tough skin and it may be best to sharpen the tag head with a file.

Releasing your fish

- ⊕ Estimate the length and weight of your fish.
- ⊕ The hook should be removed from marlin hooked in the jaw or the trace cut as short as possible if hooked deep. However, with sharks it is best to cut the trace and note on the tag card that the hook was left in.
- ⊕ Most marlin suitable for tagging should be released straight away, but if it needs to be revived it should be towed slowly behind the boat in an upright position.
- ⊕ Fill the tag card out immediately after the fish has been released. Please include latitude and longitude.

You must return your tag card!

- ⊕ It is vital that tag cards are completed and returned for the programme to be effective and fishers to be properly acknowledged. Hand your completed tagging cards into your fishing club or post them to: The Ministry of Fisheries, PO Box 19747, Auckland 1746, New Zealand

