



**Fisheries New Zealand**

Tini a Tangaroa



## Gamefish Tagging News November 2018

The tag release information from the 2017-18 season has been processed and the results presented to the Highly Migratory Species Working Group chaired by Fisheries New Zealand. Thanks to all the club staff and records officers for getting this information in on time. The table below show the number of billfish tagged by species and fishing year over the last 10 years.

**Table 1. Number of billfish recorded in the New Zealand gamefish tagging programme.**

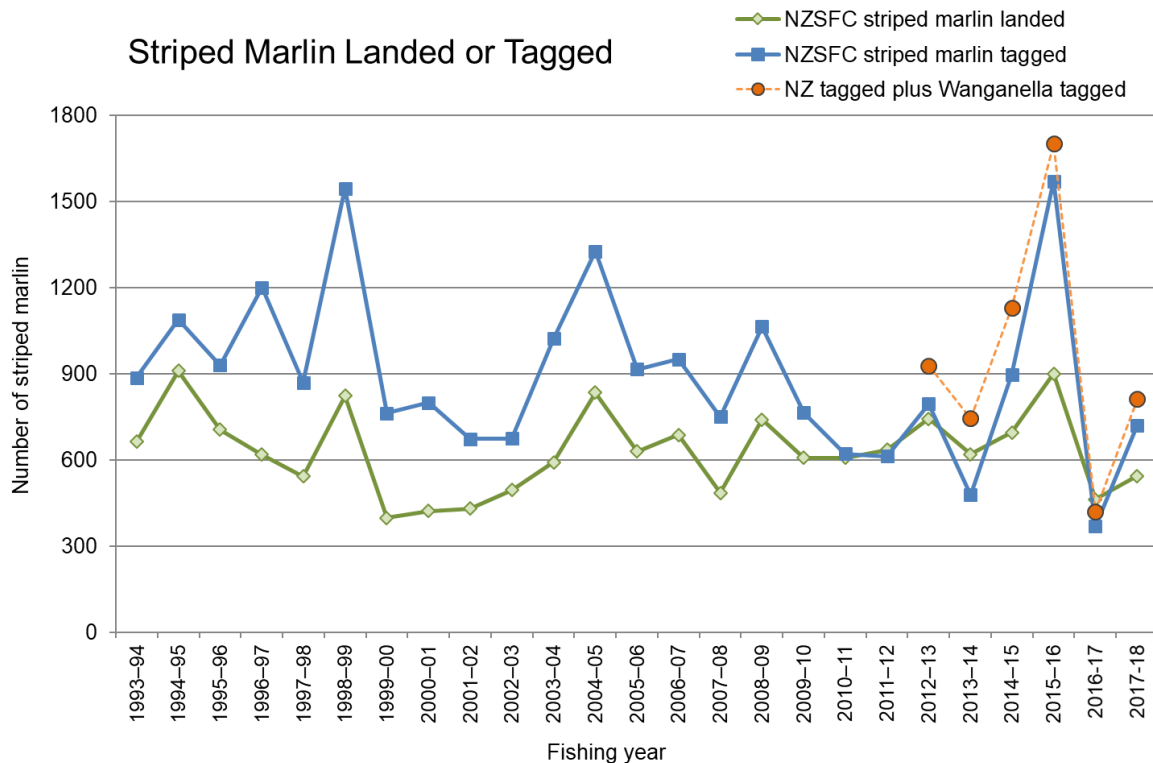
Tagged Fish	2008–2009	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015	2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018	Average 2009 to 2018
Striped marlin	1 058	858	733	663	858	520	1 088	1 658	513	617	<b>857</b>
Blue marlin	24	32	78	50	18	9	37	35	34	68	<b>39</b>
Shortbill spearfish	5	15	21	5	0	6	12	26	12	22	<b>12</b>
Swordfish	24	18	37	51	47	38	34	29	31	50	<b>36</b>
Black marlin	2	3	1	3	3	4	7	5	4	5	<b>4</b>
Billfish recaptures	3	2	1	1	4	4	2	7	3	4	<b>3</b>

The number of striped marlin tagged in 2017–18 was below average, while the number of blue marlin (68), shortbill spearfish (22) and swordfish (50) tagged in 2017–18 were above average. There were also three striped marlin and a swordfish recaptured in 2017–18 (Table 1).

These tallies do not include fish tagged with New Zealand tags by vessels travelling outside the 200 nmile Exclusive Economic Zone. Most notable of these are large numbers of striped marlin tagged mainly in Australian waters on the Wanganella Banks by long range New Zealand vessels.

Data from the annual catch tallies in New Zealand Sport Fishing Council yearbooks shows that since 1993–94 an average of 892 striped marlin were recorded as tagged per year and an average of 632 landed per year. Overall, that is a tagging percentage of 59%. In good years the number of marlin tagged can far exceed the number landed, as in 1999 and 2016 (Figure 1).

While clubs do weigh and record fish for non-members, there will be a number of landed fish not recorded and a lesser number of fish tagged that are not included in club records. Over the last 9 years the tagging rate has declined (Figure 1). In part this is due to a structural change in the recreational sport fishery in northern New Zealand. The number of large long-range charter boats which typically record all their catch has declined. The number of well-appointed trailer boats targeting pelagic gamefish has increased. These can launch at a wide variety of locations and are less likely to be affiliated to a club than owners of vessels moored at one port.

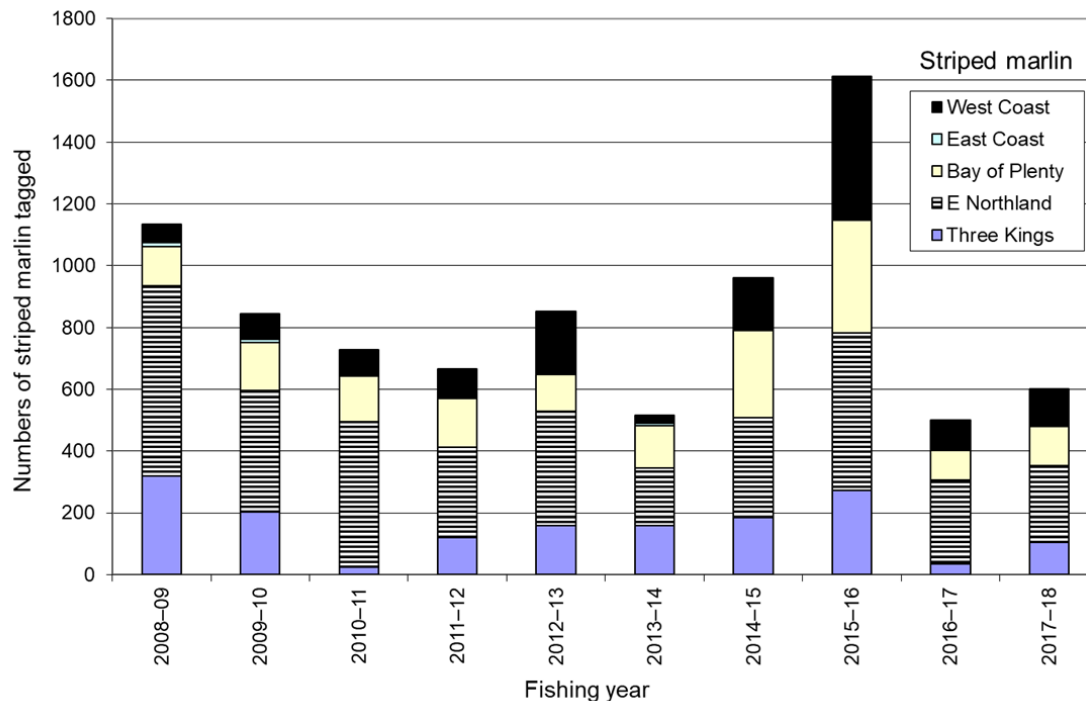


**Figure 1: The number of striped marlin landed by sport fishers and the number tagged and release by year from New Zealand Sport Fishing Council records.**

Tag and release has important conservation and research goals that are supported by NZSFC. For many years placing a tag has been the definition of catch for fish that are released and a useful means for collecting information on the capture. The introduction of fishing practices from overseas may see more billfish released without tags and a reporting system for untagged fish should be developed to record catch information.

2017 was a relatively poor year for striped marlin even though warm sea temperatures saw a number of species range further south than usual. There were patches of fish available at times, notably in March and April off Ocean Beach, Whangarei, where numerous marlin were seen feeding on schools of bait fish.

East Northland tends to attract most striped marlin fishing effort and report more tagged fish than other regions. Fishing success in the Three Kings area can be quite variable and 2017 and 2018 were relatively poor years there and in Bay of Plenty (Figure 2). Waihou Bay did have good water and good numbers of billfish tagged and released in 2018.



**Figure 2: The number of striped marlin tagged and released by sport fishers by year and region.**

### Tag recaptures

As mentioned in our last GameTag News a **striped marlin tagged off New Plymouth in March 2016 was recaptured** two years later off Raglan. This fish had a steel anchored tag and was about 110 kg on release and weighed 122 kg on recapture.

**A swordfish tagged in April 2016 in the Bay of Plenty** was recaptured in mid-January 2018 by a tuna longliner in the outer Bay of Plenty. It was estimated to weigh 100 kg on release and 115 kg when it was recaptured. Typically, swordfish and marlin breed in sub-tropical waters in spring or early summer and in the case of these fish have returned to New Zealand in subsequent years.

**A striped marlin tagged at the Wanganella Banks was recaptured 150 nautical miles west of New Caledonia** on 20 June 2018 by a local longline boat. This fish was released on 30 March 2018 from the vessel *Bwana II* and estimated at 50 kg. Therefore, it had travelled 700 nautical miles NNE in 82 days.

**Three mako sharks were recaptured.** All were tagged in the first three months of 2017 and were all caught six to nine months later in other countries. A 50 kg mako tagged off Kawhia was recaptured in August by a longliner from Noumea and released alive with the tag intact. A 35 kg mako tagged off Whangarei Heads was recaptured in Tongan waters in October 2017 after 272 days at liberty. A small mako free tagged (without being hooked) off Tangimoana was caught by a recreational fisher in Bass Strait 284 days after it was released. This fish was retagged and released.

## **Reporting recaptures**

If you recapture a tagged fish, please provide the same information you would put on a release card. **Please measure kingfish by laying them flat on a measuring board and recording the distance from the nose to the vee of the tail.** It is highly likely that a tagged kingfish was measured this way on release. Send the information to the new postal address below.

Only recaptures with all the relevant information enter the annual lucky draw for \$1000 cash. The Winner for last year was drawn at the 2018 New Zealand Sport Fishing Council AGM. Congratulations to Kaifi Muller-Marchie who recaptured a 10 kg kingfish in Golden Bay on 27 January 2018. This fish had travelled 208 nmiles south from Raglan in about 14 months.

## **Change of Address**

The Fisheries division of the Ministry for Primary Industries has changed its name and moved to a new address at the MPI campus on Maurice Wilson Avenue, near Auckland Airport.

**Please note the new Postal Address for all tag cards and recapture information:**

**Gamefish Tagging  
Fisheries New Zealand  
PO Box 53030  
Auckland 2150**

Mail to the old Auckland postal address will be redirected, but only for a limited time.

We have also been trialling a website that allows fishers to report recaptures and some releases online. This was set up to assist fly fishing guides who have been using small plastic dart tags to track kingfish they catch in some North Island harbours and on the flats in Golden Bay. There have been some problems with entry of release information but reporting recaptures has worked well. Fishers can upload a photo of the fish and the tag. In future gamefish tags will have the website printed on them as a reporting option. Go to:

**[Fishtagnz.co.nz](http://fishtagnz.co.nz)** and click on **Report a tag recapture**