

Blue marlin recapture rewrites record books

BLUE marlin are known to be capable of travelling very large distances. Movements have been recorded across oceanic equators, and even from one ocean to another.

There are two fish that have shown inter-oceanic movements. The first was a blue marlin tagged in the USA, released off South Carolina in the Atlantic Ocean and recaptured three years later near Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. The second was a fish tagged north of Sydney and recaptured 18 months later by a Japanese longliner south of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean.

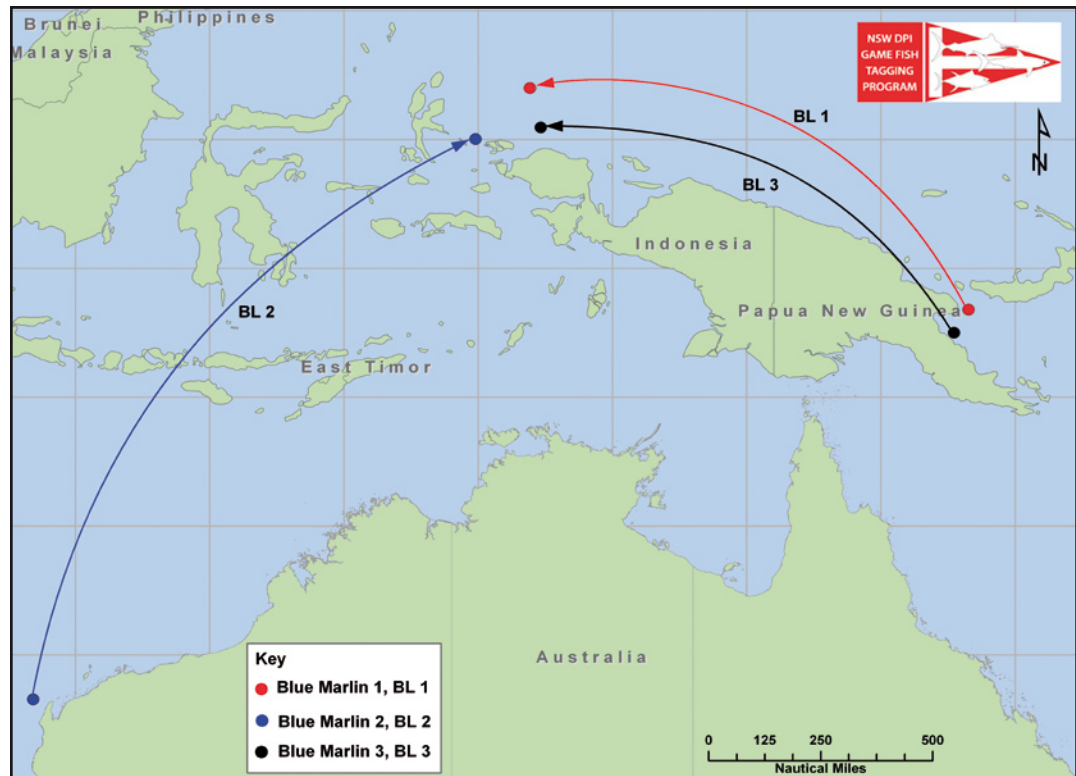
A relatively small number of blue marlin have been tagged to-date by the NSW DPI Game Fish Tagging Program (GFTP). The total numbers stand at 5187, compared to 46,845 black marlin. Blue marlin also have a relatively low recapture rate of 0.33 per cent – the lowest of the Pacific marlin species.

This low recapture rate is, undoubtedly, due to a number of factors. The most likely is the low rate of interaction with fishermen (especially as blue marlin tend to spend more time in deep oceanic waters, with less association to land masses than black and striped marlin).

Other factors may include their large geographic range and great mobility, tag loss and non-reporting issues.

There have been a total of 17 blue marlin recaptured since the Australian program began in 1973. Of these fish, three have been reported in the past six months.

All fish have recorded extensive movements, the shortest being 931 nautical miles and the furthest being 1619 nautical miles. All were at liberty for over a year, with one fish clocking up over seven years at large!



This was a blue marlin tagged in the Huon Gulf by a member of the PNG GFA. It was recaptured seven years and 71 days later by a small commercial boat fishing around a FAD near Pulau Fani, Indonesia. This fish more than doubled the previous record of longest time at liberty for blue marlin (which was three years and two months).

The record-breaking fish was reported to have been released at an estimated weight of 80kg and recaptured at a dressed weight of 129kg (that is, headed, tailed and gutted), which converts to about 165-170kg whole. This relatively small increase in weight over seven years is probably due to the fish being a male (although that was not confirmed).

The maximum size of male blue marlin is about 180kg; however, female blue marlin

are known to reach over 750kg. Males may reach sexual maturity at around 35kg-plus, whereas females don't usually mature until at least 50-80kg.

Blue marlin grow rapidly; however, at the onset of sexual maturity, the growth rate of the male fish decreases while the females continue to grow quickly. Males also have shorter life spans.

It is very interesting that the three recaptures of blue marlin have occurred in the same general area in Indonesia. Many artisanal fishermen use handlines in the area targeting the anchored FADs.

These FADs are deployed by tuna fishing companies, and the local fishermen take advantage by tying up to the FADs and fishing mainly for large yellowfin tuna. The fact that three tagged blue marlin

have been recaptured and, importantly, reported from this area suggests that marlin captures throughout the region are probably quite significant.

The table, below, provides details on all of the recaptured blue marlin. Remember, all of the distances moved represent straight-line distances from the point of release to the point of recapture. The fish are likely to have moved much further than the distances reported here.

The NSW DPI program is funded by the NSW Recreational Fishing Trust and continues to issue tags free of charge to participants. If you would like to participate in the program, please phone (02) 9527 8411 or email gamefish.tagging@dpi.nsw.gov.au ■

– Phil Bolton
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SPECIES	TAG NUMBER	RELEASE DATE	RELEASE LOCATION	ESTIMATED RELEASE LENGTH/WEIGHT	RECAPTURE DATE	RECAPTURE LOCATION	DAYS AT LIBERTY	DISTANCE MOVED (APPROX.)	MAP REF
Blue marlin	S198799	28/01/07	Madang, PNG	70kg	19/02/08	Irian Jaya North (58nm NE of Pulau Fani)	387	931nm	BL1
Blue marlin	B010890	20/12/06	Exmouth, WA	160cm	10/05/08	Halmahera Sea North (114nm SW of Pulau Fani)	507	1619nm	BL2
Blue marlin	S186593	20/01/02	Huon Gulf, PNG	80kg/200cm	01/04/09	Irian Jaya FAD (45nm E of Pulau Fani)	2628	1076nm	BL3