

## Tagging update: Another blue marlin recapture rewrites record books!

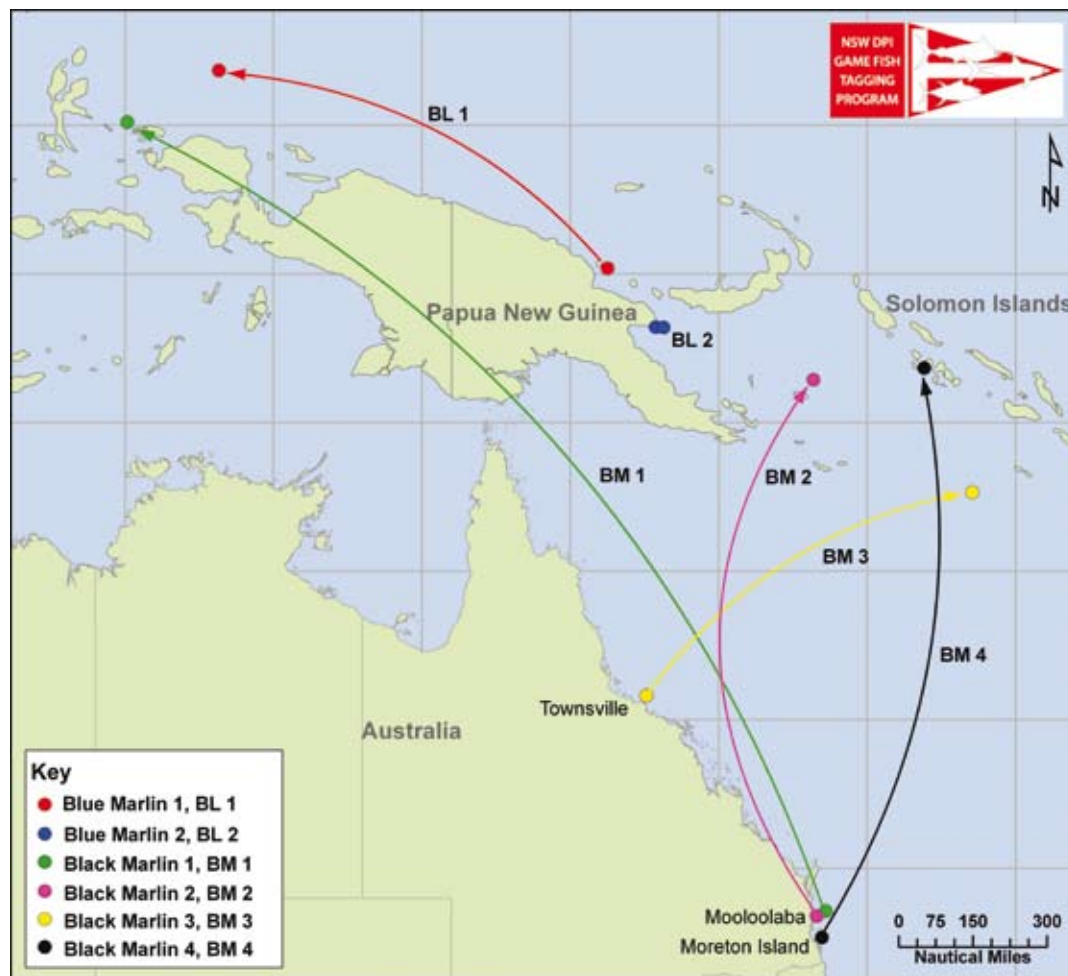
**ANOTHER** record-breaking blue marlin has recently been reported to the Industry and Investment (I&I) NSW Game Fish Tagging Program (GFTP).

A blue marlin originally released in October 2001 by Madang GFC boat MV *Talio* was recaptured almost seven years and seven months later at a location 90 nautical miles from Pulau Bras, Papua New Guinea. This beats the previous record (reported in *Bluewater* Issue 74) by over four months.

The blue marlin had grown from an estimated weight of 85kg to an estimated weight of 140-160kg. The relatively small weight gain over its seven years at liberty is probably attributable to the fish being a male (although this wasn't specified). This weight is at the top of the weight range for male blue marlin, which are slower-growing and shorter-lived than their female counterparts.

The blue marlin had travelled a minimum distance of 2765 nautical miles between original release and recapture locations.

The distance record is currently held by a blue marlin tagged north of Sydney and recaptured 18 months later by a Japanese longliner south of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean, a straight-line distance of 5507 nautical miles.



Another PNG blue marlin tagged by Lae GFC boat *Mudman* was recaptured 102 days later by a commercial fishing boat approximately 15 nautical miles from the original release location. This fish was estimated at 100kg on release and was weighed in at

SPECIES	TAG NUMBER	RELEASE DATE	RELEASE LOCATION	EST. RELEASE LENGTH/WEIGHT	RECAPTURE DATE	RECAPTURE LOCATION	EST. RECAPTURE LENGTH/WEIGHT	DAYS AT LIBERTY	APPROX. DISTANCE MOVED (NM)	MAP REF
Blue marlin	S111951	28/10/01	Madang, PNG	85kg	24/05/09	90nm NW of Pulau Bras, Indonesia	140-160kg	2765	880	BL 1
Blue marlin	B031060	06/01/09	Tami Island, PNG	100kg	18/04/09	Tami Island, PNG	87kg dressed	102	15	BL 2
Black marlin	B007432	23/02/05	Barwon Banks, QLD	25kg	25/11/08	North Halmahera Sea, Indonesia	60kg	1371	2124	BM 1
Black marlin	B033941	12/01/09	Mooloolaba, QLD	30kg	17/04/09	Solomon Sea, PNG	-	95	1082	BM 2
Black marlin	B019742	20/09/08	Cape Bowling Green, QLD	10kg	16/08/09	110nm SSW of Rennell Island, Solomon Islands	38kg	330	755	BM 3
Black marlin	S180815	26/01/06	Moreton Island, QLD	18kg	07/07/09	Gizo Island, Solomon Islands	200cm TL	1258	1168	BM 4

87kg dressed (that is, headed and gutted) on recapture.

This brings the total number of recaptured blue marlin to 19 since the program began in 1973, five of which have been reported in the past 12 months.

All of the recent recaptured fish have come from tropical northern waters and have been relatively small in size.

This is not unexpected as a large proportion of fish caught in the warm waters of lower latitudes tend to be the smaller, male fish.

Further south, it's more common to encounter larger, female blue marlin. It is thought that outside the spawning season, females head to the cooler waters of the more southern latitudes to seek rich feeding grounds found there.

As well as these exciting blue marlin recaptures, four significant recaptures of black marlin have been reported to the program within the past six months.

The furthest travelled was a fish tagged off Barwon Banks, south Queensland, by Jeff Oates from the Sunshine Coast GFC onboard *Keneka*. It was recaptured by a commercial fisherman using a handline 2124 nautical miles away in the North Halmahera Sea, Indonesia, after a period at liberty of three years and nine months.

A juvenile black marlin tagged during the peak season off Mooloolaba last January from Sunshine Coast GFC boat *Blu Reela* headed northwards during its 95 days at liberty.

It was recaptured in April in the Solomon Sea, near Woodlark Island, PNG. During this time it had completed a straight-line journey of about 1080 nautical miles.

A black marlin tagged by Townsville GFC boat *Flotation* in September 2008 was recaptured at a location south of Rennell Island, Solomon Islands, after almost 11 months at liberty.

The fish had grown from an estimated 10kg to 38kg and travelled a minimum distance of 755 nautical miles. This is a useful recapture in that it confirms estimates of early rapid growth rates of black marlin.

It's interesting to note that two of the marlin reported in this update (including the record-breaking blue marlin)



Of the four recaptured black marlin recently reported, the fish at liberty for the longest period was one tagged from Moreton Bay Boat Club vessel *Playin Hard*. Tagged in January 2006 off Moreton Island, the fish was recaptured over three years and five months later off Gizo Island, Solomon Islands, by a local fisherman in a 2m dugout canoe.

In the style of *The Old Man and the Sea*, the fish was reported to have towed the captor for over an hour before he managed to paddle into shallow water and secure the marlin to his canoe.

It's interesting to note that two of the marlin reported in this update (including the record-breaking blue marlin)

have again been recaptured (and, importantly, reported) from a relatively localised area in Indonesia.

This is the same area that produced the three blue marlin recaptured and reported in *BlueWater* Issue 74. This further emphasises the suggestion that marlin captures throughout this region are quite significant, possibly in relation to anchored FADs throughout this area.

The table below provides details on all of the recaptured 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 taken much less direct

journeys than the distances reported here.

New tagging program certificates are now available and are being issued for all recaptured fish. An example of the recapture certificate is shown above.

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

– **Phil Bolton, Fisheries Manager, I&I NSW; and Dr Julian Pepperell**