AUSTRALIAN TAGGING PROGRAM

East coast billfish movements

Australia’s east coast has offered sensational marlin fishing over the past few months, and as a result has led to a number of interesting tag recaptures. A black marlin released on 26 August 2014 by Newcastle & Port Stephens club boat Megabite II, while fishing off Cape Bowling Green in north Queensland, was recaptured on 25 January this year off Broken Bay, NSW. The fish was originally estimated at 13kg and on recapture was approximately 22kg. The fish was recaptured by an elderly lady reef fishing for snapper in 80m of water, so gave her quite a surprise! The fish had made a (straight line) swim of at least 183 nautical miles in 41 days at liberty. This is the tenth fish released off Cape Bowling Green to be recaptured in NSW under the tagging program. A black marlin released on 29 December 2014 by Gold Coast club boat Sure Power was recaptured on 3 January this year by Newcastle club boat Judy. The fish had travelled six miles east of Grassy Head, on the mid-north coast of NSW. Over the course of five days the fish had travelled a (very unusual) straight-line distance of 174 nautical miles south-west. There was little difference in estimated weight with both anglers calling it approximately 40kg. The fish was in good condition and re-released with the original tag still in place.

In contrast to the above recaptures, this fish headed approximately 1600 nautical miles in a north-easterly direction, well into the tropical waters of the Central Pacific Ocean and, after a lengthy stint of 494 days at liberty, finally ran out of luck! Lastly, a striped marlin released off Ulladulla in southern NSW on 23 March, 2014 by George Lirantzis aboard Ulladulla club boat Sale Effect was recaptured on 28 January this year by Darren Butdijk of Greensville club while fishing aboard Back N Up off Eden in southern NSW. The marlin had been at liberty for 314 days before it was recaptured and re-released.

This marlin’s recapture location indicated that it had travelled a (straight-line) distance of around 187 nautical miles in a south-westerly direction. It is most likely, however, that this marlin had headed north with the receding EAC during the late autumn/winter months of 2014 (and may have headed all the way towards the known striped marlin spawning grounds situated over the Norfolk Ridge – the undersea mountain ridge between New Zealand and New Caledonia) before moving back south with the warm currents to feed on the plentiful baits along the NSW continental shelf.

The NSW DPI Game Fish Tagging Program issues tags free of charge to individuals and fishing clubs and works in close association with the NSW Game Fishing Association and the Game Fishing Association of Australia. Over 420,000 fish have been tagged under the program so far. The program is run using funds from the NSW Recreational Fishing Trust. If you would like to get involved in the program, please phone (02) 4424 7417 or email gamefish.tagging@dpi.nsw.gov.au.

– Phil Bolton and Mick Gamble

NSW Department of Primary Industries

NEWSLINES

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