



Proposal for A UK Bluefin Tuna Catch And Release Tagging ('UK CHART') Program.

Background

2019 once again saw substantial numbers of Atlantic bluefin tuna present from Cornwall and Devon all through the UK's Western waters as far as the Outer Hebrides. Anglers are increasingly encountering Atlantic bluefin as bycatch.

In common with other far NE Atlantic Bluefin 'hosts', Ireland, Denmark and Sweden, the UK has in recent years operated a small scale, hi-tech satellite tagging program for Bluefin in UK waters.

New Opportunity

However, we believe there is an opportunity to expand the UK's efforts to build a baseline knowledge of these and bring it in line with those three other coastal nations. .

2018 rule changes by ICCAT have been designed to better facilitate large scale Floy tagging programs in these new seasonal habitats for Bluefin. A combination of hi-cost narrow satellite tagging and large scale Floy tagging is determined by ICCAT to provide the best overview of the when, why and where? of this change in distribution.

Others Taking The Lead

Ireland, Denmark and Sweden have all in fact operated such a dual track approach for several years now. It is apparent from the approvals and operation of these programs that ICCAT, the named member state governments, and regional scientific institution partners are all very happy to see these wider research programs incorporating recreational anglers take place.

Ireland tagged 208 bluefin in 2019 under their CHART program using an authorised fleet of 15 vessels. Parallel satellite tagging operations were undertaken in 2019 showing floy and PSAT tagging programs can and should operate alongside one another. The programme proved very successful; So much so that the Irish government has [announced](#) that the programme will operate in an expanded form in 2020 and it is intended to continue in 2021 and 2022.

Denmark authorised up to 70 vessels to participate in their third year of research in

2019 and floy tagged 50 bluefin, of which 30 also received PSATs. Sweden also authorised 24 vessels to operate with floy tags in the Baltic after a successful year of deploying PSAT tags in 2017.

We believe a strong argument exists to supplement these three existing programs with a similar one in UK waters. It is clear that ICCAT regulations allow members to establish such programs, and ICCAT seems very happy to endorse them.

The scale of such a program in the UK, both in terms of numbers of fish recorded and tagged, as well as the geographical range of captures, could be very substantial and add greatly to the UK's knowledge of this species in our waters. It would also complement the satellite tagging work undertaken by ThunnusUK in 2018-2019.

Benefits

Allowing recreational anglers to participate via trained and authorised vessel owners in a wider scale program would bring further benefits.

- Shifting the bulk of the burden of the financial costs of such research onto the private sector would enable large scale research to be undertaken at a minimal cost to the public purse.
- The economic benefits to the ports hosting the vessels could be substantial. Many of these ports are in areas identified by the government as being economically challenged and with GDP/capita levels well below the national averages. Even a one-year pilot program would be of benefit to communities in need of an economic boost.
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Previous objections from MMO officials regarding widening ThunnusUK have talked about not sanctioning a fishery when recreational anglers aren't currently legally allowed to target bluefin. We have questioned this logic previously and it is now clear from the support and endorsement ICCAT have provided to such programs in Ireland, Denmark, and Sweden that the governing body have no such issues regarding these pilot research programs.

An angler-lead floy tagging programme would be utilising recent ICCAT rule changes clearly designed to encourage, support and sanction such operations.

We believe the UK should take advantage of this opportunity now.

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