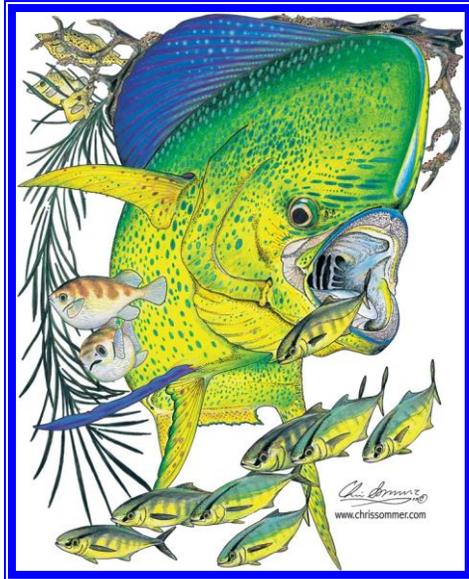


# Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

April 2013



*Thanks to the crew of the Missing Angel we now have a better understanding of the dolphinfish movements along the north and south coasts of this Caribbean island. All eleven recoveries of their fish tagged off the island have exhibited a westerly movement trend.*

## A Golden Fish from San Juan

The year 2012 will go down as a landmark for the Dolphinfish Research Program. The year saw a new time-at-liberty record for a domestic recovery, two Caribbean tag recaptures, a new time-at-liberty record for a Caribbean recovery, and the first successful deployment of a sat tag off the north shore of Puerto Rico. Now a late recovery report of a highly anticipated and long-awaited movement has been received.

This amazing story has its beginning with the crew of Manuel Botello's boat *Missing Angel*, based in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Manuel, along with his core crew of Irvin Baez, Alexis Alfalla and Wes Merten, have been responsible for tagging 375 dolphin and deploying three satellite tags in the past five years off Puerto Rico. Their efforts have resulted in the first successful deployments of satellite tags on dolphin off the north and south coasts of Puerto Rico along with the recoveries of 11 of their tagged fish. This crew shows what one boat crew can contribute to the science of dolphinfish.

On November 8, 2011, Capt. Botello and his crew got into a big school of small dolphin and had their best day of tagging, marking and releasing 60 fish off San Juan. One of these fish showed up off Rucia in the Dominican Republic, 345 miles to the west, 52 days later. Now a second fish from the school has been reported recovered.

On May 30, 2012, the commercial longline vessel *Capt. Bob*, home ported in Sea Isle City, New Jersey, recovered a tagged dolphin from one of their sets 107 miles east southeast of Georgetown, South Carolina. Capt. Robert Burcaw, owner of the boat, knew the importance of good information on the recovery of a tagged fish and wrote down the date, size, and location where the fish was caught.

Great job. But then the piece of paper got mixed in with all of the other paperwork that goes with commercial fishing, and he did not rediscover it until March 2013, at which time he sent in the information.

The fish was at liberty for 203 days (6.7 months) and had traveled 1,620 miles during the period, averaging 7.98 miles per day. The fish started out at 21 inches in fork length and wound up as a 34-inch fish, exhibiting a growth of 13 inches in length. This would indicate a growth rate of just under 0.5 inch per week.

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## Dolphinfish Research Newsletter

April 2013

Page 2.



*Capt. Robert Burcaw of Cape May Court House, New Jersey, is the first to report the recovery of a dolphinfish from the U.S. East Coast that was tagged off a Caribbean island. The fish traveled more than 1,600 miles to reach the recovery site.*

Utilizing the previous recoveries of dolphin tagged off the north coast of Puerto Rico, it is safe to bet the fish traveled the Old Bahamas Channel to reach the Florida Straits, passing the Dominican Republic and Cuba before reentering U.S. territorial waters. Tag recoveries from the Old Bahamas Channel suggest that dolphin may travel much slower through this area than when off the U.S. East Coast. This could mean that most of the liberty period transpired during this segment of the travel.

Upon reaching the Florida Straits, it may have remained on the east side of the Florida Current, allowing it to bypass the thousands of hooks that fishermen place in the water off the south Florida coast trying to remove any unsuspecting dolphin they can. This area is noted for having the heaviest offshore fishing pressure on the East Coast. By remaining on the eastern side in Bahamian waters, it likely reduced its chance of being caught. The location where the fish was finally recovered would support this since it was caught on the eastern side of the Gulf Stream current, well beyond the normal range of South Carolina recreational boats.

With this recapture, we have now identified three different supply routes for dolphin entering the U.S. East Coast fishery. The first supply line was identified as coming from the east side of the Bahamas with fish crossing to the west side of the Gulf Stream as far south as Fort Pierce, Florida. The second supply route was from the Gulf of Mexico with the 2012 recovery of the fish from Pensacola, Florida. Even though common sense would dictate that the fish off the Florida Keys came from somewhere in the Gulf, it had not been documented by a recovery. Now with the recovery of this fish from San Juan, the process of determining the importance of the Old Bahamas Channel to the U.S. East Coast fishery begins.

## SAFMC Dolphin/Wahoo Advisory Panel Meets



*Fishermen appointed to represent the private recreational, commercial fishermen, for-hire boats (charter boats), and wholesale seafood dealers met in Charleston, South Carolina, on March 27, 2013, to provide input into the management of the dolphin and wahoo fisheries.*

Eleven fishermen appointed by the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC) to the Dolphin/Wahoo Advisory Panel met in North Charleston, South Carolina, to discuss proposed changes to the management of East Coast dolphin and wahoo. This group is intended to represent all segments of the fisheries from Key West, Florida, to Oregon Inlet, North Carolina. They make recommendations that go to the Dolphin/Wahoo subcommittee of the SAFMC which in turn makes the final recommendations to the full board of the SAFMC.

Don Hammond, director of the Dolphinfish Research Program was invited to speak to the panel on the latest findings from the dolphin study. He presented a summary of the overall movement patterns revealed by the study and the relationship of dolphin in widely separated areas of the western North Atlantic. The talk highlighted why more attention should be paid to the dolphin fisheries in the Caribbean and Bahamas.

Some of the recommendations made by the AP were:

- Since dolphin are virtually an annual crop, there should be no deduction from the subsequent year's allowable harvest if the allowable catch is exceeded in one year.
- Recreational for hire boats holding all necessary commercial licenses should be allowed to sell the recreational limit of dolphin and wahoo.
- Set allocations based on average total catch (recreational plus commercial) of the past five years, with the commercial fishery allowed 10 percent or roughly 1,534,485 pounds and the recreational fishery allowance set at 90 percent, 13,810,361 pounds.

**The Dolphinfish Research Program needs your financial support. No federal funds support this important research. This program exists because of private donations.**

# Dolphinfish Research Newsletter

April 2013

Page 3.

- In the event of the total allowable catch being approached, the catch rate should be reduced by reduction in the bag limit rather than closing the fishery.

All offshore fishermen who fish for dolphin owe the members of this panel a note of gratitude. These fishermen serve on the panel without pay. These long, technical meetings are not fun and the diverse opinions can lead to some impassioned discussions. These fishermen serve because of their dedication to conserving the resource and ensuring their segment of the fishery remains healthy. They should be commended for their efforts.

## Financial Support Needed

The Dolphinfish Research Program is a research effort by fishermen for fishermen. The 2012 program was amazingly successful in revealing new information on dolphin in the Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico. Fishermen as well as fishery management personnel who have heard talks on the results of the study are impressed by the success of the program in revealing important facets of the dolphin life history.

This program needs your help to continue. It does not receive any government funding, relying on private donations for its financial well-being. This year many of the long-term sponsors have reduced their contributions and it is vital that new donors step forward. It is private fishermen, fishing organizations, and businesses that have provided the funding to allow this research to continue. The DRP works in concert with the Hilton Head Reef Foundation, a 501 (c) (3) organization, which allows all donations to be fully tax deductible.

Please consider making a donation to keep this important and highly successful research program operating. The dolphinfish stock is too important to the recreational fishery to wait until the stock is over-fished to begin collecting needed information. Checks should be made out to Reef Foundation/Dolphin Study and sent to the DRP office at the address shown at the end of this newsletter.

## Newest Sponsors for 2013

Franklin O. Hendley, Cheraw, SC  
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West Palm Beach Fishing Club, West Palm Beach, FL



## Recreational Angling and Sharks

Kate McClellan, a PhD student at the University of Massachusetts under the direction of Dr. Andy Danylchuk, an assistant professor of fish conservation, is conducting a study on recreational

angling as it relates to sharks. She is seeking anglers input through a survey that she has posted online. I encourage you to take the survey.

Recreational angling for sharks is becoming a popular leisure activity worldwide. Sharks are also landed as bycatch when recreational anglers target other fish species. Given the important role sharks play in marine ecosystems, developing a better understanding of when recreational anglers encounter sharks and how they handle sharks once landed is important for their conservation and management. Please consider taking this short survey that begins to compile angler-based information regarding sharks. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WM33P85>

## 2013 Financial Supporters

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**Your donations to the Dolphin Study are  
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**Make checks out to:**

**HH Reef Foundation/Dolphin Study**

Mail checks to the address below.

**For More Information, Contact**

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