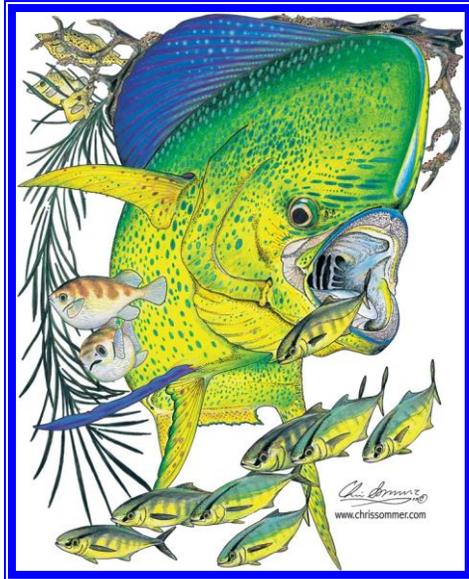


# Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

February 2015



## 2014 Tagging Award Winners

The 2014 dolphinfish tagging activity was surprisingly strong. Anglers tagged an amazing 2,096 fish during 2014. This is the second-highest number tagged in a single year and comes just two years after the Dolphinfish Research Program (DRP) experienced its lowest tagging activity, in 2012. The increase in the number of fish tagged is a good indicator of an increased availability of dolphin to recreational fishermen in 2014. Such a fast rebound in the abundance of dolphinfish should not come as a surprise, since these fish are almost an annual crop. Studies have shown that only a small fraction of each year's spawn will live more than 12 months, but the fish can obtain weights of 40 pounds within that time.

The DRP is very fortunate to have leading recreational fishing tackle businesses supporting this important research effort and allowing the program to offer year-end awards for the top taggers each year. **Haddrell's Point Tackle** of Mt. Pleasant and Charleston, South Carolina, provides Shimano TLD reels to go on **Star Hand Crafted** standup rods donated by **Big Rock Sports** of Graham, North Carolina, for the first-place finishers in each category. **Costa Del Mar** of Daytona Beach, Florida, sends the second-place finishers a gift package of their products, including the winner's choice of their world-famous sunglasses. **Costa Del Mar** also provides additional gift cards for the recipients choice of a free pair of sunglasses. These are used for special recognition and incentive awards. These incentive awards have motivated boat crews to put forth extra effort in tagging dolphin as shown by the fact that this year's award recipients tagged a total of 1,015 fish -- 48.4 percent of the fish tagged in 2014.



Top quality **Star** rods and **Shimano** reels valued at \$550 to \$650 are awarded to the boats who have tagged the most dolphin in each of the four divisions: Mid-Atlantic Bight, South Atlantic Bight, Gulf of Mexico, and Tropics (Bahamas and Caribbean Islands). Boat crews must tag a minimum of 20 fish in a calendar year to qualify.

In the overall category, the boat crew of Don Gates' boat *Killin Time II*, based in Cudjoe Key, Florida, easily captured the Top Private Boat award, tagging 300 dolphin in the Florida Straits. Top Charter Boat award went to Capt. Jimbo Thomas's vessel *Thomas Flyer*, which fishes out of Miami, Florida, for tagging 196 fish. These fishermen will receive a Star Hand Crafted standup trolling rod with a TLD 50 reel. These two boat crews have been among the top five contributors of tagged fish since 2005. Don Gates' crew is the only boat crew who have tagged dolphin in every year since the program started in 2002. Capt. Thomas and his brother Rick were the first to reach the milestone of 2,000 fish tagged. Together, these two crews have tagged and released an amazing 4,035 dolphin over the course of the study. Even if you discount the value of their recaptures, just putting that many fish back into the system to fulfill their role in the life cycle of the

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Capt. Richard DeLizza, right, assists one of our military veterans who caught his first dolphin and offered it up to be tagged during a trip off Islamorada, Florida. He was one of several veterans that Capt. DeLizza hosted on an offshore fishing trip aboard his boat The Rock Boat as part of the Wounded Warrior program.

species is a phenomenal contribution to the conservation of the species and the health of the recreational dolphin fishery along the U.S. East Coast.

The heaviest competition for the awards was in the South Atlantic Bight Division with 14 sports fishing vessels qualifying for the awards. These qualifying boats tagged a total of 1,332 fish, 63.5 percent of the total tagged. It was the crew aboard Dr. William Pomenti's boat *Scungilli* based in Islamorada, Florida, that took first-place award, tagging 186 fish. The Second-place award was earned by Capt. Jack Conroy and crew aboard *It's a Keeper* based in Islamorada, Florida, for tagging 122 fish. These two boat crews have a good competition going. Last year their finishes in the year-end awards were reversed.

Only two boats tagged fish in the Gulf of Mexico during 2014, but these two were serious. The crew aboard the Texas-based boat *Latitude Adjustment* owned by Capt. Bob Felinski of Richmond, Texas, eased ahead of their competitor by tagging just two more fish, 47 total, to win first place and a rod and reel. Second-place went to Capt. Matt Parramore of Lynn Haven, Florida, and his crew aboard his boat *Weedline Fever* for tagging 45 fish. It is unfortunate that we cannot get more anglers involved in the Gulf. There have only been 394 dolphin tagged in the Gulf. The GOM current patterns suggest that dolphin in the western half have a different movement pattern than those in the eastern Gulf but we need more fish tagged to determine their route.

2014 Tagging Progress by Zones, January 19, 2015.

Zone	Area	Southern Limit	Northern Limit	Number Tagged
1	Bahamas	22° N	28° N	68
2	FL Straits	23° N	25° N	797
3	South Florida	25° N	27° N	716
4	Central Florida	27° N	30° N	26
5	North FL & GA	30° N	32° N	29
6	Southern SC	32° N	33° N	55
7	N. SC - S. NC	33° N	35° N	89
8	Northern NC	35° N	36.5° N	0
9	Virginia	36.5° N	38° N	12
10	N. Mid-Atlantic	38° N		11
11	Gulf of Mexico			92
12	W Central Atlantic			88
13	Caribbean Sea			113
	Total			2096

The anglers in the tropical waters of the western north Atlantic had a good year in their efforts to aid the Dolphinfish Research Program. Six boats qualified to win the year-end awards. Participating anglers in the Caribbean Sea had their second-best year of tagging with 113 fish marked. The tropical western north Atlantic off Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands had a productive year with 89 fish tagged. Tagging in the Bahamas was fair, with 68 fish marked, mostly in Exuma Sound. It was Manuel Botello and his crew aboard his boat *Missing Angel* out of San Juan, Puerto Rico, that put forth the extra effort to handily win the first-place in the division having tagged 71 fish. It was Mark Mitchell of Stuart, Florida, and the crew aboard *Mr. L.T.D.* that finished in second-place, having tagged 48 dolphin in Exuma Sound, Bahamas.

The DRP is very fortunate to have the support of **Haddrell's Point Tackle**, **Star Rods of Big Rock Sports**, and **Costa Del Mar** to provide these fantastic incentive awards. These prizes have worked very well to inspire more tagging, as shown by the fact that just ten boats tagged 60 percent of the fish. The next chance you have to speak to representatives of these companies please thank them for supporting the DRP.

For more information on the 2014 tagging activity please visit our Web site [Dolphintagging.com](http://Dolphintagging.com) (link not active in PDF) and click the Study Results page, scrolling down to the 2014 results. The winners along with all of the boats tagging fish are listed with the number of fish they tagged.

## Ups and Downs of Fishing

To say that dolphin fishing is erratic, would be an understatement. Every fisherman has experienced good and bad days of dolphin fishing. If you do your Intel work prior to leaving the dock, you have a good idea of where you need to go and what to expect in the way of fish. Even when you are armed with the latest information, you can still get skunked.

**Your donations to the Dolphin Study are Fully Tax-Deductible**

Make checks out to:

**HH Reef Foundation/Dolphin Study**

Mail checks to the address below.

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

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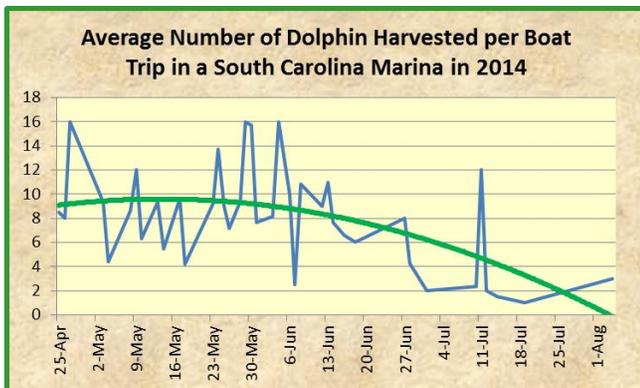
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With such high variability in the week-to-week and even day-to-day fishing, it is hard to get an overall view of the season. The DRP conducted a study in 2014 to record the number of dolphin caught each day by individual boats operating out of one marina. The weather conditions, quality of fishing, and the day of the week affected the number of boats fishing each day. These boats almost wholly engaged in trolling to catch their fish. This fishing technique tended to result in larger but fewer fish than other fishing methods.

In this study 142 boat trips successful in catching dolphin on 40 days from April 25 to August 4 were intercepted. It was rare for a boat not to catch at least one dolphin during the peak season from late April to mid-June. Surveyed boats brought in a total of 1,071 fish. The number of successful boat trips interviewed on a given day ranged from 1 to 9 and averaged 3.5 trips per day.

The following graph depicts how successful boats were over time that were fishing for dolphin as demonstrated by the catch of one or more dolphin. The decline in the catch rate in late July and August was not from an absence of fishing effort. There were many days where multiple boats went fishing but did not catch a dolphin and very few, if any of other fish. This sharp decline in fish being caught, was a major factor stated by anglers that kept them from going fishing.

The blue line in the following graph denotes the average number of dolphin caught per boat trip each day. Just looking at this line, it is hard to describe the overall fishing during this period. When you inject a polynomial trend line, the green line, it provides an understandable progression of the fishery catch rate for dolphin.



This graph indicates that the best dolphin catches occurred in late May and early June but the probability of a good fishing trip remained about the same from late April to mid-June. During this time the daily catch rates swung from a low of 2.5 to a high of 15.7 fish and averaged 9.25 fish per day. What this does not show is how the size of the fish being caught changed over time, but that is a subject for another issue of the newsletter.

## Newest Sponsors for 2015

Central Florida Offshore Association, Orlando, FL  
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