

# Dolphinfish Research Program™

Made possible by a grant from the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation

February 2021



**Reported Tagging Progress from 1/25/2021-2/25/2021:**

**Guy Harvey (Makaira) 2**

COVID 19 restrictions have kept vessels docked and borders closed to international travelers in Barbados and Guadeloupe, respectively. In both of those locations, our top taggers have not been fishing much as a result of local restrictions and lack of booked trips. South of Puerto Rico, however, has been a different story. While the season was slow to start around Puerto Rico, since early January we have documented the catch of several 50-70 pound fish mostly caught by local artisanal commercial fishermen. But, anglers do report that while they are seeing 5 to 12 schools of fish per outing it is hard to get the fish to take the bait. A reoccurring anecdotal report that we get from south of Puerto Rico is the feeding pattern of large fish in these schools is not conducive to consistent hookups even when fish are under the boat and anglers are using live bait. This time last year, however, fishing was very slow and did not turn on until late March and early April. Further to the west off the Caymans, 2 fish were tagged and released along a weedline where a 42# bull was also caught. Off Quintana Roo, Mexico, a lack of sargassum has been reported to date but March is typically the time of the year when dolphin fishing picks up according to our source there. In the Florida Keys and south Florida, the fishing tournament season is just about to begin and some recent reports indicate that the first tournament to run, the Shamrock Shootout, could see good results. A 61# fish was caught off Miami this past week by L&H and other reports viewed through social media indicate larger schoolies >24" have been caught frequently over the past several weeks. Looking back at past annual reports, dolphin are likely beginning to appear off South Carolina. Spring is here!

**Year to 2/25/2021 for Reported Releases:**

**6 tagged & released for conservation and science**

**1 Recaptures to date in 2021 1 verified**

**0 PSAT movements**

**0 PSAT Deployments 0 Acoustic Tag**

**Reported Recaptures Since 1/25/2021**

# Congratulations 2020 Top Taggers!

**TOP PRIVATE BOAT**  
**KILLIN' TIME II (FL)**



**TOP CHARTER BOAT**  
**MADATET (GUADELOUPE)**



**TOP BOAT SAB**  
**WAMJAM (FL)**



**TOP BOAT MAB**  
**KRAKEN (RI)**



**TOP BOAT GOM**  
**LATITUDE ADJUSTMENT (TX)**



**TOP BOAT TROPICS**  
**WINE DOWN (BARBADOS)**



A SPECIAL THANKS TO THE 2020 YEAR-END AWARD SPONSORS



2020 DRP INTERNATIONAL TAG AND RELEASE AWARD WINNERS

**2020  
TOP OVERALL PRIVATE BOAT  
KILLIN' TIME II  
CAPTAIN DON GATES**



We would like to thank **Star Rods**, **AFTCO**, and the **Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation** for providing strong incentives for fishermen to tag and release small, healthy, dolphinfish for the **Dolphinfish Research Program (DRP)** in 2020. These premier fishing tackle companies and sponsors of the **DRP** have shown their commitment to the conservation of this important fishery by donating top quality equipment and art for incentive awards to encourage fishermen to assist the **DRP**. This year, we are distributing \$2,500 worth of gear and art to 15 captains and their crews who collectively tagged and released 960 dolphinfish! View the images to the left to see what each top tagger won for their 2020 tagging effort. A complete list of all 2020 award winners is listed below. Congratulations to our 2020 top taggers!

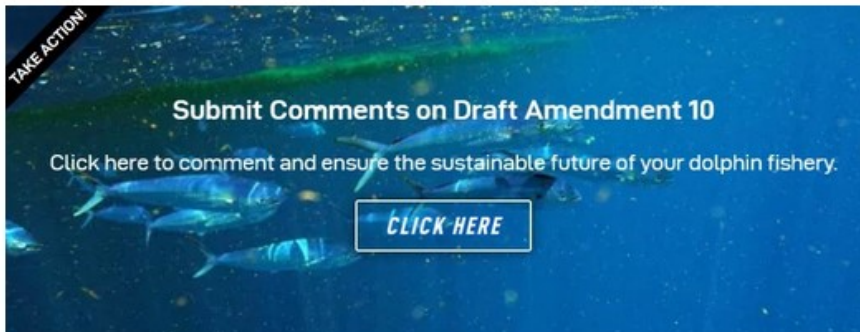
To qualify for the **DRP** year-end awards, a vessel needs to tag and release and submit at least 20 dolphinfish tag deployment reports to the **DRP** by 12.31.2021. This year, we are also offering monthly tagging awards, [recapture awards](#), and free tee shirts for any angler or captain that tags at least 10 dolphinfish. We are also continuing our regional MAB tagging awards program. Tag some dolphinfish this year to increase data collection on this species and we will reward you for your effort!

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- Top Private Boat Tagging: **Don Gates** *Killin' Time II* – 367 Tagged
- 2nd Private Boat Tagging: **David Neblett** *Hit that!* – 37 Tagged
- Top Charter Boat Tagging: **Julien Brossel** *Madatet* – 89 Tagged
- 2nd Charter Boat Tagging: **Jimbo & Rick Thomas** *Thomas Flyer* – 78 Tagged
- Top Youth Taggers: **Scouts** at Florida Sea Base – 72 Tagged
- 2nd Youth Taggers: **Bo & Thomas Feliniski** *Latitude Adjustment* – 54 Tagged
- Top Boat Tagging in the SAB: **David Wamer** *WamJam* – 84 Tagged
- 2nd Boat Tagging in the SAB: **Chad Carter** *Miss Caroline* – 20 Tagged
- Top Boat Tagging in the Tropics: **Gary Marshall** *Wine Down* – 50 Tagged
- 2nd Boat Tagging in the Tropics: No Qualifier
- Top Boat Tagging in the MAB: **Jeff Jones** *Kraken* – 42 Tagged
- 2nd Boat Tagging in the MAB: **Chris & David Jobs** *Pair of Docs* – 22 Tagged
- Top Boat Tagging in the GOM: **Bob Feliniski** *Latitude Adjustment* – 54 Tagged
- 2nd Boat Tagging in the MAB: No Qualifier
- Notable Mentions for Tagging More Than 10 Dolphin:  
**Frank Betz** *Leviathan*; **Tim & Michelle Heiser** *Irish Wake*; **Wilmer Sanchez** *The Big Deal*; **Phillippe Louchez** *Sailfish*

## Dolphin/Wahoo Amendment 10 Update



Dolphin/Wahoo Amendment 10 Webinar during

SAFMC's March Council Meeting

Webinar Registration at Link Below:

[Wednesday March 3rd 10:00 am to 4:00 pm EST](#)

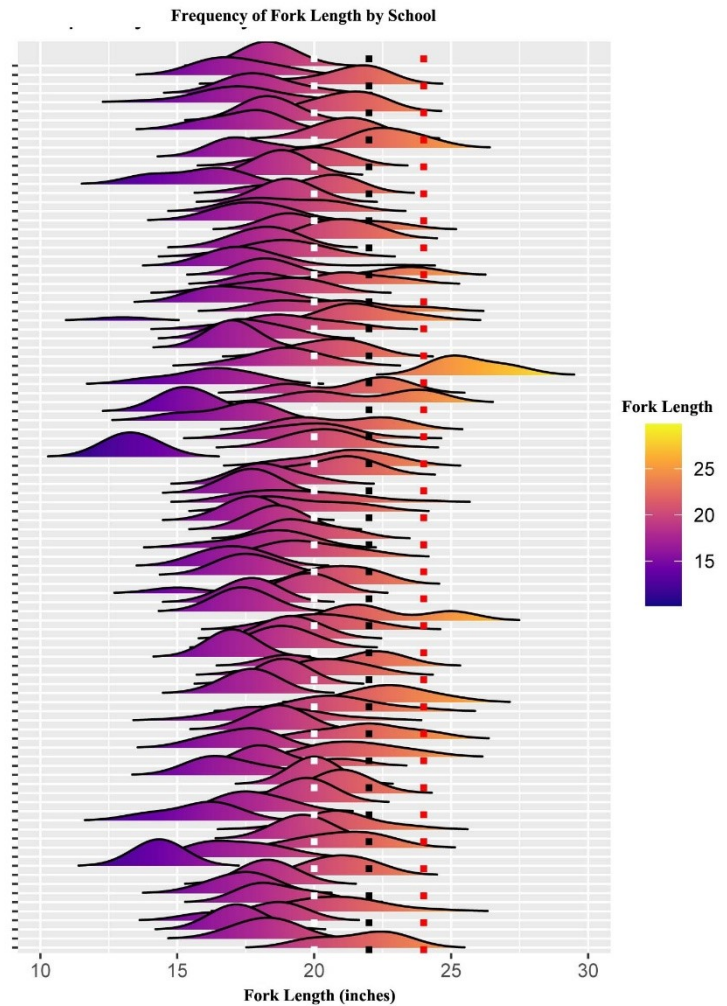
Followed by public comment period.

A special thanks to the 281 anglers and/or organizations that submitted comments to the **South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC)** regarding their preferred alternatives and actions for changes to Amendment 10 and the U.S. Atlantic Coast Dolphin/Wahoo fishery management plan. While the **SAFMC** introduces some key conservation measures to help alleviate the growing pressures on dolphin, within the draft amendment, there is no discussion of expanding size limits along the U.S. Atlantic coast to ensure more dolphinfish reach maximum reproductive output before being harvested or requiring the use of circle hooks while bailing for dolphin. Furthermore, there is no discussion of expanding conservation measures, including size, vessel, or bag limits, to the Gulf of Mexico, a location that feeds dolphin to the Florida Keys and U.S. Atlantic coast. The **SAFMC** has opened a new public comment period so NOW is your time to provide your comments to the **SAFMC**. [Click here](#) to read our letter to the **SAFMC** and to view an analysis of 235 comments submitted up to February 2nd. We provide this information for your reference to write your own letter or submit your own comments. The new comment period ends on 3.4.2021 at 9 am. [Voice your opinion!](#)

## Ethical Angling Practices



As individuals, there are a host of changes or decisions that we can make to improve sustainability of the natural world for the benefit of people and nature. Individuals can choose to use energy more efficiently, conserve water, decrease use of plastics, and source locally produced products. What about when it comes to offshore recreational fishing for dolphinfish? Aside from engaging in the practice of tagging and releasing small individuals for science, there is another less often contemplated decision and it relates to the following question: How many schools of dolphin do you interact with during your offshore fishing season while bailing (casting to dolphinfish with live or cut bait from a drifting or slowly moving boat)? Based off of this question, our decision as offshore anglers should be to minimize the incidence of negative interactions when encountering schools of dolphin while bailing by utilizing ethical angling methods such as the use of non-offset circle hooks and decreasing the use of drop-back methods that can result in fatal injuries to dolphin. In ongoing research to educate anglers about the opportunity we all have to minimize negative interactions with dolphin while bailing, we examined the last three years of tagging data associated with the *Killin' Time II* fishing team, a vessel in which we have also collected vessel tracking data for every offshore outing (n = 65)

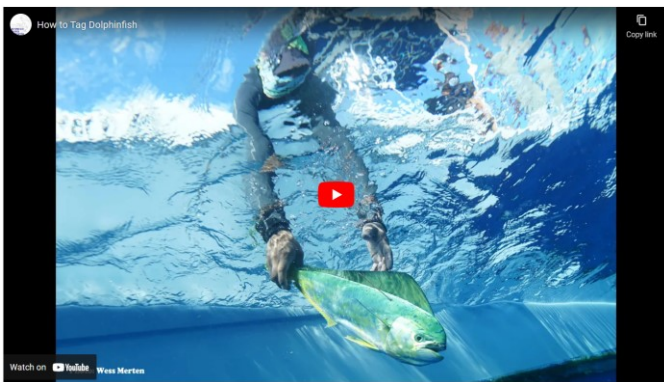


during that time period. Over that time period this fishing team tagged 3 or more fish in 98 separate schools while bailing. Above is the frequency of size in terms of fork length (FL) for all of those schools. Visually, you can see from the plot that it appears that the size composition of most of the schools encountered were fish less than 20" FL (white dashed line). Numerically, 38.7% of the schools had a size composition per school less than 20" fork-length but 53.9% of all individuals encountered across schools were less than 20" FL. On average, 4 size classes were present per school with a range from 1 to 8 size classes per school. What this means, if you assume your fishing style is similar to the *Killin' Time II* fishing team i.e., you start to fish when you see birds, something floating, or travel along a weedline, the likelihood is higher that you will encounter small dolphin so you should

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be prepared with an arsenal of tools e.g., non-offset circle hooks or non-offset circle hook jigs, a dipnet or sling, a towel and gloves, and an ethical angling mentality to ensure the smallest individuals you encounter are caught and released with the least amount of injuries. In doing so, you can also safely and effectively land the size classes that you prefer to bring home for table fare and release the size classes that you would like to continue to grow and spawn and contribute to a healthier dolphin fishery. For video tips on how to properly handle and tag and release small dolphin check out the video below.



### Support Mahi Tagging - Buy Gear in Our Shop!

### Thank You For Your Support!



A special thanks to **Uncle B's Outdoors** of Florence, SC (image left), for providing our tagging program with a big boost to start the year by raising \$5K through a series of outdoor events in December. We would also like to thank everyone who has

contributed to our tagging program to fund our 2021 tagging effort. With your support, we were able to start 2021 strong and, to date, we have already shipped out 141 tagging kits. Our goal is to distribute 400 kits and 5,000 tags in 2021. While we have an operational budget to begin the year, we still need support to help us increase our tagging



kit and education supplies to meet our growing demand for tagging kits. Our tagging program is at the forefront of educating anglers, advancing discussions and

actions surrounding conservation of the species, and gathering additional data to help inform data-driven decision making at the state, federal, and international levels. Help the **DRP** expand in 2021. Click the icons below to shop or donate to support our program.

[Click to Shop](#)

[Click to Donate](#)

To Donate by Check [click here](#), Make Checks out to:

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**Mail to:**  
 Wessley Merten  
 Dolphinfish Research Program  
 Beyond Our Shores, Inc.  
 PO BOX 3506  
 Newport, RI, 02840  
 Email: [wess@beyondourshores.org](mailto:wess@beyondourshores.org)



## 2021 Financial Supporters

### Financial Supporters Dolphinfish Research Program 2021

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