

To: Margo Schulze Haugen NOAA  
From: Molly Lutcavage UNH  
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Hi Margo,

The new regulation prohibiting retention of medium sized bluefin (sizes we expect to see in numbers here this year) creates new science opportunities and also concerns about the viability of fish released without proper handling.

We should get out in front of this as many fish will be released over the side. Their condition, and whether scientific information is collected from them, depends on how much information and training and tagging advocacy can be done. Many new fishermen have not dealt with fish this large, and need training on appropriate tackle, and safe handling and release practices.

Given that these size classes are the ones we really need to know more about- natal grounds, and maturity status- it would be foolish to not ramp up to a more comprehensive tag and release program. In the past 4 days, since the regulation, tens of Tag a Tiny tagging kit orders have come in to our UNH website. If we had known about this regulation we would have begun organizing and preparing for it sooner. An expanded program will require funding.

Ramping up the US angling category tag and release program needs to be done ASAP. We propose the following steps:

1. Organize logistics and EFPs for priority biological samples (e.g., gonads, genetics, pesticides, micro constituents, otolith, dorsal spines, etc). Some of these require lethal sampling, so sample numbers need to be determined and sharing organized. Given our location and network, LPRC could help collect, coordinate and distribute samples.
2. Organize and schedule training and outreach for safe handling and tag and release- We (LPRC) could work with NMFS, MDMF and other orgs such as state agencies, CCA NH, Billfish Foundation, and with local experts, conduct training, and distribute tags and data collection cards. Key training locations could be where fisheries activities are highest (NH through MD).
3. Keep SCRS posted on these activities, determine whether tagging program could be augmented via additional platforms targeting specific size classes where available (e.g., develop pole and line tagging, purse seine releases?).

Whether we are prepared or not, the fish are here, and they will be intercepted. Brad Chase and Greg Skomal's post release physiology/mortality study in the 1990's shows that survivorship depends on how the fish are handled.

I'd be happy to discuss this with you at your convenience, and welcome ideas from other experts. Mobile 603 767 2129

Best wishes,  
Molly

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