

Reporting game fish catches of Pacific Bluefin Tuna and Southern bluefin tuna aboard charter vessels during 2007 and 2008.

Dear Charter boat Skipper/Operator

We need your help to review the recreational allowance for Pacific bluefin tuna and to make a viable and sustainable world class game fishery for this species in New Zealand waters.

The Marine Transport Association and the Ministry of Fisheries are proposing that charter boat operators/skippers report their catches (both landed and released) of bluefin tuna during the 2007 and 2008 West Coast fishing seasons. The proposal is that each charter vessel operator reports the number of fish and individual weights (including those released) after each fishing trip.

Reviewing the recreational allowance

This project is very important for bluefin tuna, particularly Pacific bluefin. With the development of a new fishery off the West Coast of the South Island the current recreational allowance for the stock may be inadequate. There is a need for better information in order to consider whether to review it. MFish, the NZ Marine Research Foundation along with Stanford University is committed to satellite tagging Pacific bluefin tuna caught by charter vessels fishing the West Coast. Successful tagging and data retrieval was carried out last season and again this year.

Commitment to bluefin

Reporting and satellite-tagging reinforces the charter boat industry, Game fisher, and Government interest in making a long term management commitment to bluefin tuna. Game fish catch records are important for documenting New Zealand's ability to monitor its bluefin fishery prior to more active international management controls. These assist in achieving an objective to develop a viable and sustainable world class game fishery for bluefin tuna in New Zealand waters.

Managing bluefin

Pacific bluefin tuna (*Thunnus orientalis*) and Southern bluefin tuna (*Thunnus maccoyii*) occur throughout Pacific waters. Under the Law of the Sea, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) are tasked with ensuring the conservation and management of tuna and other highly migratory species throughout areas of jurisdiction. RFMOs have set national catch limits for southern bluefin tuna, and requested member states such as New Zealand to exercise reasonable restraint of their fishing fleets when fishing Pacific bluefin tuna.

The New Zealand approach to implementing national catch limits or achieving reasonable restraint was to introduce both stocks into the Quota Management System in 2004. At that time the following catch limits and allowances were set for each species of bluefin tuna in tonnes:

	Pacific bluefin	Southern bluefin
Total Allowable Catch	120	420
Recreational allowance	1	4
Customary allowance	0.5	1
Fishing related incidental mortality	2.5	2
Total Allowable Commercial Catch	116	413

An expanding game fishery

However since that time catches of Pacific bluefin are likely to have increased substantially. The potential for an off season game fishery of world class status has not been lost on the New Zealand charter boat fleet. Recreational magazines articles and television programmes depict a rapidly developing charter based fishery off the West Coast South Island (base ports Greymouth/Westport) since 2005.

Anecdotal information suggests up to 100 bluefin were taken by game fishing and spear fishing on the west coast during winter 2006, however it is unknown how many of each species were landed or how many were released alive.

NZ's international obligations

International obligations are likely to require more active management of Pacific bluefin in the future. National catch limits have already been imposed on the Southern bluefin fishery. New Zealand will be required to monitor these fisheries during the next couple of seasons. The New Zealand game fishery is based on trophy sized fish, so there is considerable incentive in ensuring these fisheries are well managed.

How reporting will work

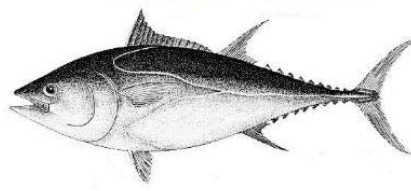
The Marine Transport Association and MFish are proposing a web based system for monitoring game fish catches of bluefin tuna. Discussions held with the South Island Recreational Forum during May and at the Recreational Fishing Conference during July recommended that any system be kept as simple as possible. Concern was expressed about using data for purposes other than for counting fish. To address these concerns this proposal is designed to record only the catch, and release of fish. No effort data will be collected.

Charter vessel operators are asked to email, phone or fax through the number of fish and individual weights (including estimated weights of those fish released) as soon as practical after each fishing trip to me (my contact details are listed below).

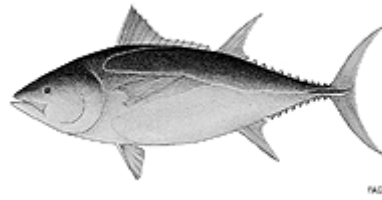
Summary results will be displayed in the following simple to read format on the MFish website (www.fish.govt.nz).

(Preliminary data as at 25 August for the 2007 season)

Pacific bluefin tuna



Southern bluefin tuna



	Landed	Released	Landed	Released
Number	8	34	2	?
Weight (kg)	1,916	?	240	?

If you have any questions, wish to discuss the matters outlined above, or provide data do not hesitate to contact me:

Graeme McGregor

Ministry of Fisheries

Phone 09 820 7689, fax 09 820 1980, or email graeme.mcgregor@fish.govt.nz