



International Game Fish Association

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The International Game Fish Association (IGFA) is a non-profit organization that represents recreational anglers throughout the world. IGFA was established in 1939, has active members in 162 countries, is the governing body for international recreational fishing, and provides rules for ethical angling practices. Many of IGFA's members target the highly migratory species managed by IATTC, especially marlin, sailfish and spearfish (i.e. billfish) which are primarily caught and released.

IGFA has great concern about how highly migratory species are being managed on a global level for recreational anglers. The lack of data and accurate reporting on billfish catch is of particular concern. As an organization that is committed to the conservation of game fishes, the IGFA, in partnership with Stanford University, has deployed over 600 pop-up satellite archival tags in marlin around the world in the last twelve years, many of which have been in waters under this organization's purview. The information gained from this tagging program known as The IGFA Great Marlin Race is freely available to your scientific committee.

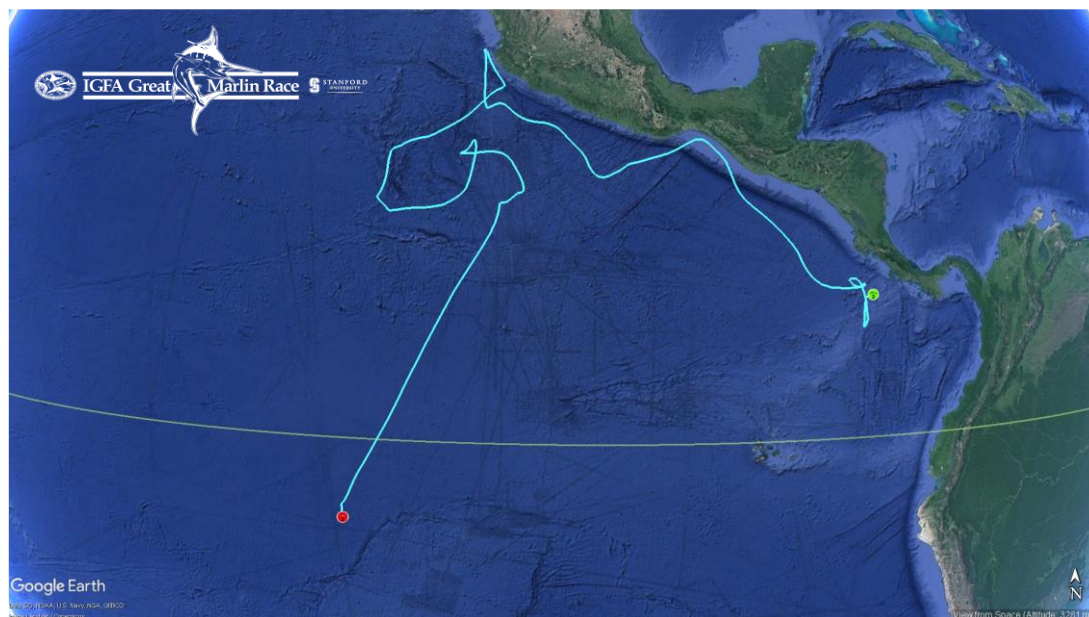
Additionally, the IGFA and Wild Oceans are hosting the 7th International Billfish Symposium in an effort to advance our scientific understanding of billfish species. The Symposium is scheduled for October 8-10, 2024 at Hubbs SeaWorld Research Institute in San Diego, California and we hope members of IATTC's scientific staff will participate.

The following are IGFA's recommendations for the 102nd Meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission:

Billfish

- The health of the sailfish stock in the EPO remains unknown. The level of sailfish catch is unreliable and the likelihood of accurately determining historical catch is low. Reported annual average catch has decreased in the 2020-2022 estimate (543t) compared to 1993-2007 (2,057t); however, these catches may not fully represent the future expectation of catch or could be a result of decreased availability of sailfish to fisheries for a variety of reasons. As sailfish are predominantly caught as bycatch, this decreased catch level is concerning given that abundance is thought to be constant or increasing since 2009. The IGFA recommends something be done to better estimate historical catch or determine an alternative approach to better assess the stock. This should begin with the quantification of current effort off Central America from all fleets including local artisanal longlines where total catch is made up of a disproportionate number of sailfish. Once there is an accurate understanding of fishing mortality for each year, it becomes more likely that backcalculating catch will reveal trends associated with historical sailfish catch and effort. The IGFA would like to see more being done to properly assess this species that generates tremendous economic impacts through recreational fishing tourism across Central America
- The most recent assessment (2021) for blue marlin indicated that the stock is neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The 2020-2022 catch estimate of 2,088t is nearly half the average annual catch from 2017-2019. Assuming a healthy stock based on the 2021 assessment, the IGFA would be interested to learn why catch has declined so significantly. As such, the IGFA urges the commission to maintain or reduce the harvest of blue marlin so that the stock maintains a healthy condition. The

prevalence of anchored FAD fishing off Central America has greatly increased recreational blue marlin catch rates over the last decade and more work should be done to explore the impact of these FADs on the blue marlin population. Research conducted by the University of Miami found blue marlin migrations may be impacted by the availability of prey at FADs off Costa Rica, potentially having a larger impact on the population dynamics of the species locally. Additionally, a recent result from the IGFA Great Marlin Race revealed a single blue marlin tagged on July 15, 2023 travelled from Costa Rica, where it was tagged on a FAD, to the region offshore of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico before moving southward across the equator and popping up ~1300nm west of the Galapagos and ~1300nm north of Easter Island after just 240 days. Of the many tags deployed off Central America on blue marlin by our research program, this was the first to exhibit such a migratory pattern.



- Although the previous assessment, conducted 15 years ago, indicated the EPO striped marlin stock to be healthy, there are some concerning trends. First, data collected by the IGFA Great Marlin Race has shown the EPO and North Pacific stocks mix more than previously thought. Striped marlin tagged off Baja California Sur, especially those tagged during the Magdalena Bay aggregation in early late fall/early winter, have shown movements southward and westward toward Hawaii and beyond. Some individuals also indicated a return back from Hawaii toward the EPO, potentially revealing an annual migration among certain individuals. Second, the lack of an updated assessment and the unknown levels of local catch in the EPO is concerning, especially given the uncertainty in the WCNPO recent striped marlin assessment relative to catch accuracy and recruitment. Given this uncertainty in the North Pacific striped marlin assessment status and declining female SSB without increasing mortality, it is clear something is happening with this species stock determination, either in the assessment process or naturally, that is keeping SSB low regardless of fishing mortality levels. The precautionary approach is critical with this species, thus the IGFA recommends catch not be increased and efforts be made to better understand stock structure, spawning behavior, and age/growth as well as current and historical catch information from the EPO. The IGFA, in collaboration with CICIMAR-IPN in Mexico, is currently working on a new estimate of striped marlin size at first maturity from fish caught out of Cabo that we expect to publish in late 2025. We hope this estimate can be used to better inform assessment and work to potentially establish a minimum size for retention by the recreational fleet in Mexican waters.

- The IGFA recommends more effort be directed at exploring the status of black marlin in the EPO. The lack of assessment of black marlin in any ocean is problematic as the species is important to recreational fishing and catches are rapidly changing both spatially and temporally. Previously identified “hotspots” for the species are no longer relevant and there has been some indication from tagging studies that there may be some level of connectivity between Oceania and the EPO
- The IGFA further recommends implementing a prohibition on billfish entering into international trade. Similar legislation has been passed, at the request of IGFA, in the United States that now bans importation of marlin, sailfish, and spearfish into the continental United States
- The IGFA recommends all countries be required to report live and dead discards and use circle hooks in their longline fisheries

Tuna

- The IGFA is delighted to see the results of the 2024 benchmark stock assessment for Pacific bluefin tuna in the NPO. The IGFA recommends the maintenance of current catch limits within the IATTC Convention Area until the completion and adoption of the MSE in 2025
- The IGFA supports the extension, for three additional years with annual review, of the provisions under Resolution C-21-04

Electronic Monitoring and Observer Coverage

- In both the purse seine and longline fisheries, the IGFA supports significant increases in observer coverage as well as implementation of electronic monitoring in an effort to better quantify bycatch and obtain 100% combined coverage. In both fisheries, observer coverage must be increased to a minimum of mandatory 20% coverage along with increasing levels of electronic monitoring over the next three years. Ideally, within the first year, combined coverage should exceed 50% in both the purse seine and longline fisheries
- The IGFA supports the adoption of interim minimum standard for electronic monitoring based on the draft prepared by the working group with recommendations from staff and workshops

Sharks

- IGFA recommends that IATTC prohibit the removal of shark fins at sea to improve scientific data collection and compliance
- IGFA recommends banning wire traces on all longlines
- Similar to billfish bycatch, there is a need to better understand shark bycatch in artisanal fleets, especially those operating off the coast of Central America that have yet to be fully quantified
- The IGFA recommends IATTC seek to better understand the shark species caught within the management area as well as those fisheries with which they interact

FADs

- The IGFA recommends a requirement for CPCs to provide FAD buoy data on a per trip basis including electronically equipped FAD tracking and abundance data where possible

IUU

- IGFA recommends that IATTC strengthen the controls against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

General

- Recreational angling is an established and important economic entity in developed countries and a growing one in many developing nations. As such, IGFA wishes that IATTC recognize both its relevance and that it may necessitate alternate management objectives than those used in commercial fisheries. As it is the world's peak body regarding recreational fisheries, IGFA kindly offers its consultation to IATTC on recreational fisheries issues
- Managing fisheries on the basis of MSY is an excessively risk-prone approach. As such, the IGFA suggests that IATTC adopt a target biomass above BMSY to compensate for biological, environmental and data uncertainties. Many recreational fisheries are catch and release in nature, where anglers prefer to catch more and bigger fish than to necessarily harvest fish. Managing stocks on the level of MSY not only reduces the abundance of fish but also their average size. Maintaining stocks at higher abundances (i.e., optimum yield) also benefits recreational anglers that release their fish and also contributes to the substantial economic value of these fisheries. The IGFA feels this is especially true with bycatch species such as marlin and sailfish that have little commercial value but great economic value to recreational anglers

The International Game Fish Association is a nonprofit organization committed to the conservation of game fish and the promotion of responsible, ethical angling practices through science, education, rule making, record keeping and recognition of outstanding accomplishments in the field of angling.

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