Tagging News

40 YEARS OF TAG & RELEASE

News from the ORI Cooperative Fish Tagging Project

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Helping people to care for our ocean

From the Tagging Officer...

Gareth Jordaan

Welcome to the 37th edition of the Tagging News! **For nearly four decades the Tagging News has been communicating the results of the ORI Cooperative Fish Tagging Project (ORI-CFTP)** to our members and has successfully promoted ethical angling while tracking the growth rates and movement patterns of many of the common linefish species caught along the southern African coast.

2024 is an exciting year and milestone for the ORI-CFTP as we celebrate our 40th anniversary! A truly incredible achievement! Over the past 40 years, the ORI-CFTP has evolved from what started off as a simple idea of tagging elf/shad to try and better understand their movements, into one of the longest ongoing operational and most successful citizen science projects of its kind in Africa, ranking with many other top volunteer tagging projects from around the world. With 387 382 fish tagged and released, 24 641 (6.4%) tagged fish recaptured and 7 371 individual tagging members, this project has not only allowed anglers to actively participate in collecting scientific data, but has provided collaboration between fishermen, managers and scientists, and has helped increase our knowledge and improved management of many of our important linefish species.

In August 2023, Bruce Mann and I were invited to participate in the first World Volunteer Fish Tagging Summit, now called the Global Fishtag Network (GFN), held online from Brisbane, Australia. Led by Bill Sawynok from Suntag, Australia, the Summit aimed to bring together volunteer fish tagging programs from around the world to discuss their projects, the data collected, how the data has been used, and ways to collaborate in the future to improve both fisheries management and fisher behaviour. We presented an overview of the ORI-CFTP, highlighting how we have used our tagging data alongside other information to enhance our understanding of South Africa's linefish resources and to promote better catch-and-release practices among recreational fishermen. It was heart-warming to see that our very own ORI-CFTP stands on a par with some of the most renowned and long-standing fish tagging projects globally, such as Suntag (Australia), Tag Louisiana (USA), and the DPI Gamefish Tagging Program (Australia). A significant highlight was that ORI-CFTP has already implemented a variety of data validation techniques, training materials, and effective communication methods, both with our taggers and members of the angling public — areas where some other programs are still facing challenges. Additionally, although the ORI-CFTP is not quite as old nor has tagged quite as many fish as some of the other programs (some have been running for over 50 years with over one million fish tagged), our tag recapture rate compares favourably. This success is largely due to our dedicated tagging members and our ongoing efforts to improve fish handling and tagging skills, as well as promoting active use of the tagging data to inform better management. We also gained valuable insights into various aspects of fish tagging and data collection that we can implement in the ORI-CFTP to further improve and refine the project.

2023 was another great year for the ORI-CFTP! We welcomed a comparable number of new members (n = 249) and saw a slight increase in tag releases (n = 11 768) compared to 2022, while maintaining a steady recapture rate of 8.6%. It's encouraging to see that our high tag release and recapture numbers remained consistent, despite the discontinuation of some long-term research tagging projects at the end of 2022 (see page 5).

In 2023 our top tagger was yet again Nic de Kock with 565 tag releases and 47 tag recaptures, followed by Kevin Humphreys with 366 tag releases (see table on page 8). Nic has written a lovely story in this edition about a massive dusky kob he landed on light tackle that you can read on page 28. Just a reminder to all taggers that it is not about the number of fish you tag, but rather the way you catch, handle, tag and release your fish (see some helpful tips here) that is far more important. This results in a greater chance of your fish's survival and ultimately being recaptured. Furthermore, ensuring that your tagging data is accurately recorded and sent back to the Tagging Officer is of equal importance. Over the past couple of years, the ORI-CFTP has also

been emphasising the importance of the welfare of fish tagged through our **new tagging video** on capturing, landing, handling and releasing large sharks caught from the shore, as well as requesting our members **not to tag ray species**.

In this year's Tagging News, you can look forward to reading some great articles including a brief history of the ORI-CFTP by Bruce Mann (**page 4**), an article by Dave Hall about Hallprint - who have been our tag manufacturers and suppliers for over 36 years (**page 7**), an article by Judy Mann-Lang on how, over the past 40-years, the ORI-CFTP has improved the attitudes and behaviour of South African marine anglers (**page 20**), as well as an article by our old friend and previous Tagging Officer of the ORI-CFTP, Stuart Dunlop (**page 26**). Our focus species this year is the iconic giant kingfish, where recent research has shown this species' incredible ability to undertake annual spawning migrations (to the exact same spot) hundreds of kilometres away and then return to their own home ranges (**page 31**).

For those of you on social media, please remember to give the **ORITag FB page** a 'like' and share it with your angling buddies. Please also like and share the new **@ori_tagging_project** Instagram page. We strongly encourage those of you who have not yet seen our **instructional tagging videos** to give them a watch and encourage other anglers to watch them, especially those who may need a bit of extra hands-on advice.

The ORI-CFTP wouldn't be where it is today - celebrating 40-years of fish tagging and conservation - without the dedication and commitment of you, our tagging members! We thank you for your ongoing support, which has elevated the project to global recognition. We sincerely hope you enjoy this online edition of Tagging News. Long live the ORI Tagging Project!

Tight-lines and happy reading!

Acknowledgements:
Financial and administrative support from the South African Association for Marine Biological Research and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs is gratefully acknowledged.
Thank you to all the anglers who donated funds to the ORI-CFTP in 2023.
We also thank Hallprint© Australia for their continued excellent service and on-going supply of high-quality tags and applicators.
Kerwin Randall is thanked for his assistance in fitting handles to the tag applicators in 2023.
A special thanks to Marius Els, Derrick Khumalo and Xolani Mselegu for their efforts in capturing and validating the tagging data, as well as for attaching the thousands of tags to tag cards.

Cover photo: *Ruan van der Westhuizen with his tagged garrick.*

A Fish App for Anglers!

By Bruce Mann

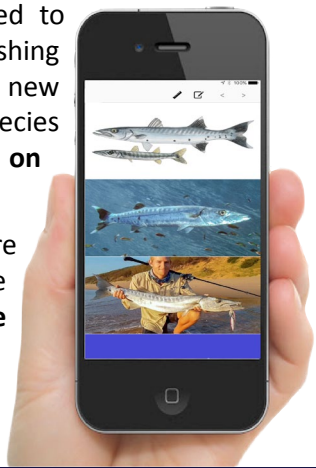
The **ORI Fish App** (Marine Fish Guide for Southern Africa) is available for download on cell phone (both Android and iPhone). This app was produced specifically for marine recreational anglers to help improve fish identification and to increase awareness about South Africa's marine linefish species. All profits from the sale of the App are split between the app developer (PDA Solutions) and ORI. Importantly, funds received by ORI go directly into helping to finance the **ORI-Cooperative Fish Tagging Project** (ORI-CFTP).

The Fish App includes detailed photographs and text of each species, a distribution map, a fish identification tool (smart search), identification guide using fish families, a length/weight calculator, the current fishing regulations for each species and a personal catch log.

The app contains detailed species profiles for **249 common linefish species** from 77 families using simple, easy to understand text. A useful compare function in the app allows you to compare photos (or text) of similar species.

Generalised line drawings of fish families can be used to identify fish in that family. Simple maps are available for the **southern African distribution** of each species. The fish identification smart search is simple to use and works well at narrowing down the species you are looking for. **The length/weight calculator** was compiled for each species using the most accurate information available and is very quick and easy to use. This is useful when you measure and release your fish but want to know what its weight was.

The app will be regularly updated to include any changes in the fishing regulations and to incorporate any new information on the individual species **(updates take place automatically on your phone with no added cost)**.



Please go to Google Play Store (Android phones) or App Store (iPhones) and search for **"Marine Fish Guide for Southern Africa"**.

A Brief History of the Oceanographic Research Institute's Cooperative Fish Tagging Project

By Bruce Mann

In celebration of the ORI-CFTP's 40th year, it's worth taking a moment to reflect on the rich history of this remarkable project. What began as a modest endeavour has blossomed into a cornerstone of marine conservation and citizen science in South Africa. Join us as we journey through the annals of time to uncover the origins and evolution of this remarkable initiative.

Rudy van der Elst, founder of the ORI-CFTP based at ORI from 1969-2012

The Genesis:

The roots of the ORI-CFTP can be traced back to the 1970s when Rudy van der Elst, a pioneering marine biologist based at ORI, recognized the need for a collaborative effort to study fish populations along the South African coast. With initial funding from Sedgwick's Old Brown Sherry, Rudy launched the tagging project in 1984, enlisting the help of recreational anglers to collect valuable data on fish movement patterns and growth rates. Elinor Bullen was the first Tagging Officer, a position she kept for a remarkable 28 years, running the project with great enthusiasm and discipline.

A Community of Contributors:

From its inception, the tagging project captured the imagination of marine anglers from all walks of life. Armed with simple tagging kits and a shared passion for angling, volunteers set out to tag fish and record vital information such as species, size, and location. What started as a small group of enthusiasts soon grew into a vibrant community of contributors spanning the length and breadth of the South African coastline.

Milestones Along the Way:

Over the decades, the ORI-CFTP has achieved numerous milestones, thanks to the dedication and perseverance of its participants. From pioneering research on dusky shark movements to tracking the migration of iconic species like shad/elf and galjoen, the project has continually pushed the boundaries of scientific knowledge. Along the way, taggers have forged lasting friendships and memories that endure long after the tags are deployed. Furthermore, they have greatly improved knowledge of their quarry and how to handle fish to ensure their greatest chance of survival.

Adapting to Change:

From a handheld HP computer and a slow postal system to WhatsApp and a modern web-based SQL database, the ORI-CFTP has kept pace with changing times and technology. Thanks to our suppliers Hallprint© in Australia, tags and tagging equipment has also improved ensuring reduced tagging stress and better tag retention. As the marine environment faces unprecedented challenges from climate change, pollution, and overfishing, the role of the ORI-CFTP has never been more vital. In response to changing circumstances, the project has embraced innovation, leveraging technology to enhance data collection and analysis. Today, taggers have access to cutting-edge tools and resources, empowering them to make meaningful contributions to marine conservation efforts.

A Legacy of Conservation:

As we look to the future, it's clear that the ORI-CFTP has left an indelible mark on South Africa's marine landscape. Beyond its scientific achievements, the project has fostered a culture of stewardship and responsibility among

Elinor Bullen , first ORI Tagging Officer from 1984-2010

Bruce Mann, managed the ORI-CFTP from 2003 - 2023

Gareth Jordaan, third ORI Tagging Officer from 2018 - present

Stuart Dunlop , second ORI Tagging Officer from 2011-2018

anglers, inspiring a new generation to care for our oceans. Whether you're a seasoned tagger or a newcomer to the fold, know that your efforts are part of a legacy that will endure for generations to come.

In Conclusion:

As we prepare to embark on future tagging adventures, let us pause to honour the rich history and legacy of the ORI-CFTP. Together, we have weathered storms and celebrated triumphs, but our journey is far from over. With each tag deployed and each data point collected, we inch closer to a future where our marine fish populations thrive and flourish. Thank you for being part of this remarkable journey.

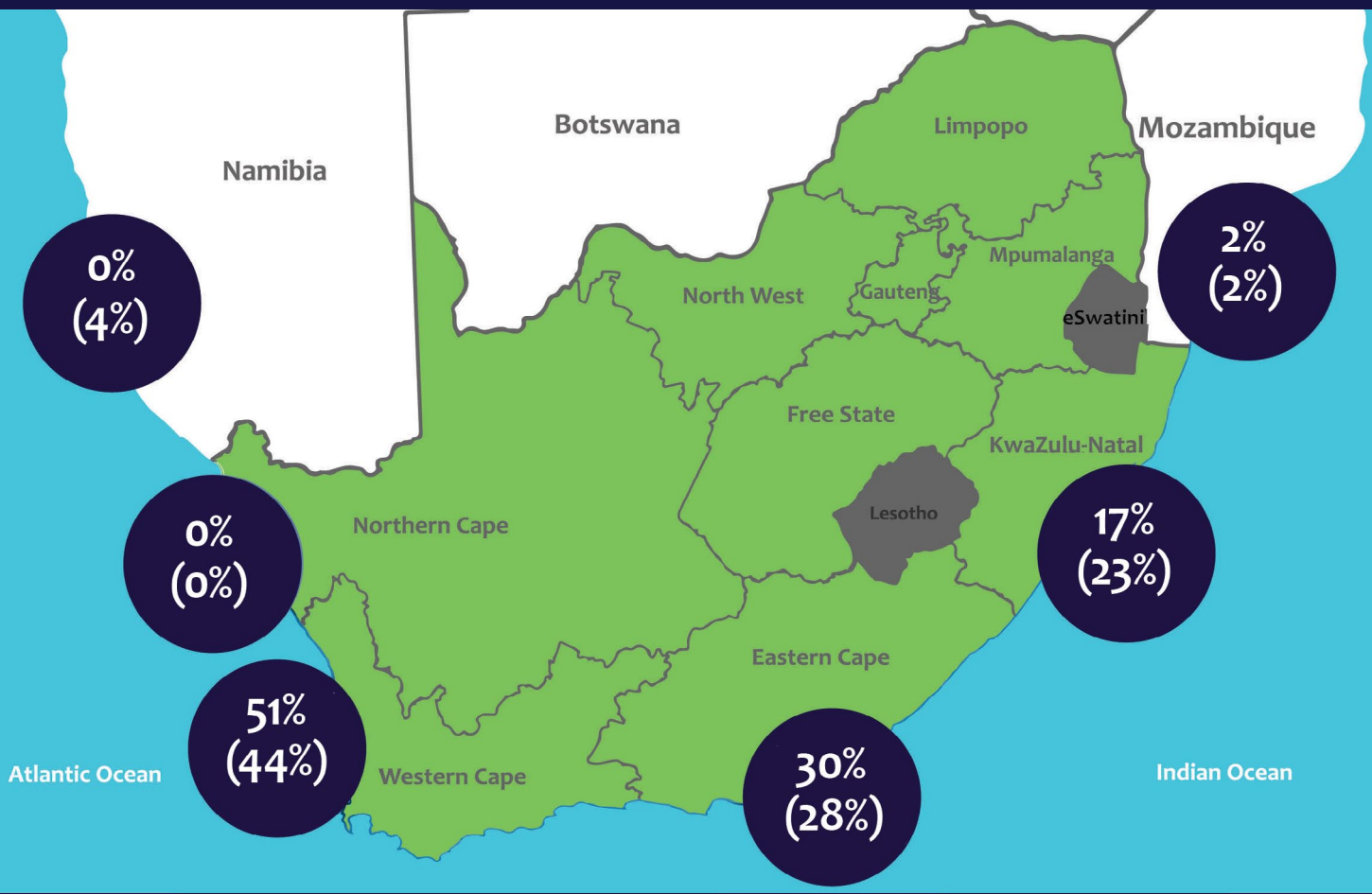
Happy tagging!

Research Tagging in Marine Protected Areas

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)	Period	2023		Overall	
		Total	# Recapt.	Total	# Recapt.
De Hoop MPA (Western Cape)	1985 - current	1 441	178	66 019	5 086
Dwesa-Cwebe MPA (Eastern Cape)	2009 - current	247	14	5 581	193
Goukamma MPA (Western Cape)	2001 - current	37	0	1 209	40
Helderberg MPA (Western Cape)	2021 - current	106	6	688	22

Percentage of fish tagged along the Southern African coast in 2023

(Percentages in brackets indicate overall distribution of tagging since 1984)



Top 10 species tagged in 2023

(Percentages in brackets indicate overall composition of tagging since 1984)

1 Galjoen 18% (19%)

2 Dusky kob 10% (7%)

3 Spotted grunter 9% (5%)

4 White steenbras 6% (3%)

5 Leervis / Garrick 6% (5%)

6 Dusky shark 4% (4%)

7 Roman 3% (2%)

8 Bronze bream 3% (2%)

9 Spotted gullyshark 3% (3%)

10 Elf / Shad 2% (3%)

Hallprint and ORI - a 40-year partnership

By David Hall, Managing Director, Hallprint

As a young fisheries scientist starting out with the South Australian Fisheries Department in the early 1980s, I was in need of external fish tags that would not fall apart or become unreadable after a short time. My predecessor told me back then that tagging fish was a waste of time as the tags would fall apart within a year - and he showed me a pile of broken returned tags to prove it.

A strong relationship with my late father Michael, already an established producer of self-adhesive labels through his company Hallprint since 1972, led to the development of Hallprint fish tags after several years of intensive research and development. I was the first and original fish tag customer of the company that I now own and direct some 40 years later! Soon after this time in 1984 an innovative scientist in South Africa called Rudy van der Elst had the vision to engage with anglers and start the ORI Cooperative Fish Tagging Project (ORI-CFTP) to collect scientific information on a large suite of data poor species. Along with Bruce Mann who has remained with the program throughout as the principal scientific director until very recently, Rudy strongly supported the continuation of the program that is now acknowledged as one of the largest and most successful volunteer tagging programs in the world.

In around 1987 my father Michael made the decision to focus 100% on fish tags and drop the self-adhesive label business to someone else.

Over the decades our staff including my late father Michael and late mother Wendy, General Manager Darren Evans, Production Manager Julie Langmead, Finance and Administration Manager Leanne Berich and I have enjoyed a productive relationship with a succession of Program Managers including Elinor Bullen, Stuart Dunlop and currently Gareth Jordaan.

Over the last 40 years since the inception of both Hallprint fish tags and the ORI Tagging Program there have been many new developments on each side. The ORI-CFTP has provided critically important information on the movement patterns of a range of species relevant to management controls such as MPAs and is a world class example of the benefits that can flow form a world class citizen science program that is directed by scientists.

Hallprint has progressively expanded its product range over this period of time and now supplies about 70% of the major volunteer tagging programs around the world while exporting to well over 100 countries from the Antarctic to the Arctic and everywhere in between that has water including Mongolia. Just as the ORI and the participant taggers are rightly proud of the 40-year milestone and the contribution that has been made to angler behaviour and the understanding of species biology and stock status, Hallprint is proud of the proven performance of our tags across many environments and species.

Testimony to the quality of our tags and the early pioneering work of Michael Hall are the large number of recaptures from around the world that represent very long periods at liberty. This includes a South African record 26.2 years for a raggedtooth shark recaptured in 2020 and a red steenbras originally tagged by Bruce Mann as a young scientist in 1989 that was recaptured over 22 years later in 2011 – something that I understand nearly brought Bruce to tears at the time. I find it incredible that there have been over 41 recaptures of southern bluefin tuna from the tagging program run by CSIRO in the Great Australian Bight that have represented over 20 years (7300 days) at liberty up to a current world record of 29.5 years for external tags. We are still waiting for that magic 30-year recapture and in many ways, it would be a fitting achievement if the ORI-CFTP provided it.

From a Hallprint perspective I am delighted to say that these tags were all intact and readable on recapture after so many years in the briny – something that Michael who passed away in 2003 would be super proud of given my original challenge to him.

Just like the ORI, Hallprint strives to keep a good thing going while constantly looking to evolve and find new innovative ways to achieve outcomes. We developed a range of external fish tags 40 years ago that has stood the test of time and helped enable programs like ORI to achieve their goals. That doesn't mean that we will hold back from researching novel ways of improving tag detection and reporting but it does mean that we will not compromise on the quality and value that our tags have represented for over four decades now.

The staff and management of Hallprint wish to sincerely thank the Oceanographic Research Institute for their long-term partnership and warmly congratulate them on their 40-year milestone which sees them as a global leader in terms of demonstrating the value that can be gained through a long term cooperative tagging program that relies on a partnership approach between scientists, committed anglers and professional tag manufacturers to excel.

Top Taggers: 16 or more fish tagged in 2023

Member name	2023 tag releases	Total taggings	2023 tag recaptures	Total tag recaptures	% Recapt.
NIC DE KOCK	565	3 202	47	225	7%
KEVIN HUMPHREYS	366	3 009	7	129	4%
MARK GALPIN	355	1 680	42	167	10%
NIKKI-LOUISE SMIT	265	498	7	14	3%
JACQUES DE LA HARPE	253	1 738	25	125	7%
GUY BALME	193	203	3	4	2%
KOOS SMITH	187	978	5	39	4%
NELIUS SPIES	182	256	6	8	3%
DIVAN COETZER	179	484	6	20	4%
BRADLEY SPARG	165	2 891	2	160	6%
MATHEW WEEDMAN	165	768	31	114	15%
MIKHAIL DANIELS	154	219	22	28	13%
DWAYNE BOSHOFF	151	490	7	24	5%
RALDU POTGIETER	147	875	10	47	5%
JEFF ASHER-WOOD	142	1 055	18	105	10%
GRAHAM POLLARD	141	644	2	16	2%
REAN RADEMEYER	121	273	3	10	4%
DURAN PILLAY	105	105	1	1	1%
NIEL MALAN	98	801	4	43	5%
CHARLES LILFORD	94	3 493	5	156	4%
WARREN KNEZOVICH	94	140	0	1	1%
STRINIVASEN (ROLAND) NAICKER	89	481	23	46	10%
JOHN LUEF	88	1 037	18	110	11%
CHRISTOPHER PIKE	88	433	7	30	7%
REINER VON DER MARWITZ	81	227	5	13	6%
FRANCOIS KEMP	71	287	5	24	8%
JACQUES-PIERRE GELDENHUYS	70	601	4	50	8%
EDUARD STEYLS	65	365	1	10	3%
MATTHEW REDINGER	64	81	0	0	-
EUGENE VAN DER ELST	62	88	3	4	5%
TIAAN SWART	60	71	0	0	-

Member name	2023 tag releases	Total taggings	2023 tag recaptures	Total tag recaptures	% Recapt.
JANNIE VAN BLERK	58	212	4	9	4%
LYLE TAYLOR	52	442	15	48	11%
MATTHEW AND SHANNEN KETHRO	52	119	1	1	1%
RUSSELL HAND	49	882	7	101	11%
RIAAN LA GRANGE	48	93	2	2	2%
ANDREW WOOD	48	98	2	4	4%
RYAN TAYLOR	47	571	5	56	10%
DONAVAN COLE	47	1 321	4	41	3%
MARCO WILDEMANN	47	320	2	8	3%
STEFAN OOSTHUIZEN	45	673	2	59	9%
DEAN IMPSON	45	65	1	1	2%
GARY DU RANDT	44	56	0	0	-
ANDREW PARSONS	41	1 700	1	72	4%
ALEX TYLDESLEY	41	65	1	3	5%
RUAN VAN DER WALT	39	443	3	25	6%
MATTHEW DE WET	39	64	1	1	2%
HERMI SPANGENBERG	37	40	0	0	-
CORNE ERASMUS	37	260	0	12	5%
RUAN VAN DEN HEEVER	37	101	3	6	6%
ROBERT KYLE	35	1 879	5	208	11%
CHENELLE MORAN	35	235	1	13	6%
LOUIS LOOCK	35	109	0	0	-
KELLY JANSE VAN RENSBURG	34	34	0	0	-
GERRIT CLOETE	34	34	2	2	6%
WALLIE STROEBEL	33	54	0	1	2%
WILLEM LOUW	33	37	0	0	-
NIKOS NICOLAIDIS	33	159	4	14	9%
MAARTEN MOLENAAR	33	781	2	47	6%
JANDRE HORN	31	31	0	0	-
STEPHEN MARX	31	34	3	3	9%
TINUS VAN STADEN	31	75	2	7	9%
JAYSON JOOSTE	31	208	1	5	2%

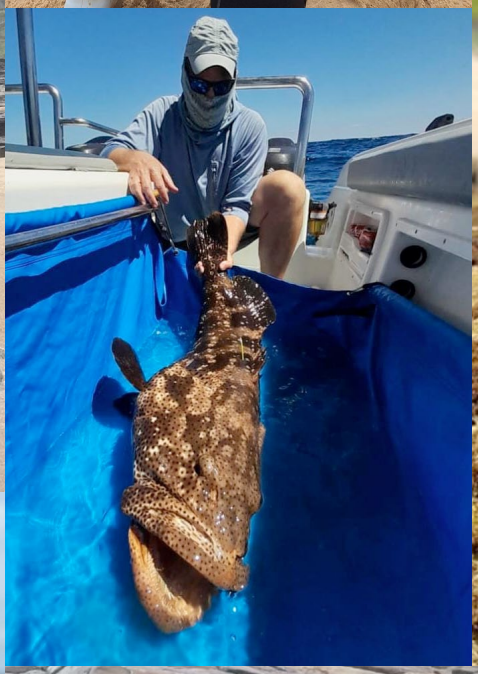
Well done to our top taggers! **If you would like to view this year's leaderboard so far, please follow this link: www.oritag.org.za/Leaderboard**

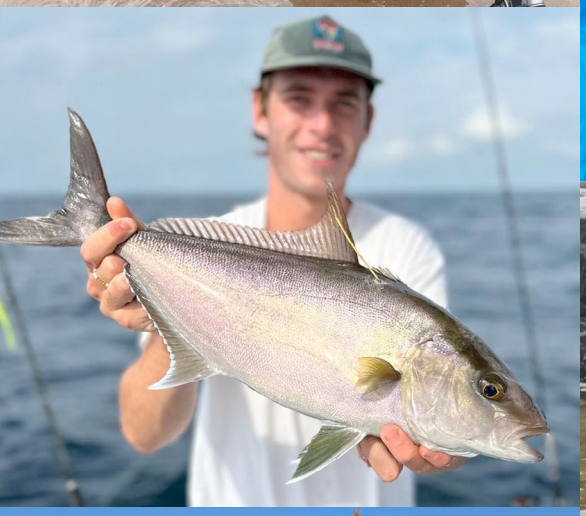
Member name	2023 tag releases	Total taggings	2023 tag recaptures	Total tag recaptures	% Recapt.
SHAUN VAN ZYL	31	451	3	24	5%
ANNA PUTTER	30	39	2	2	5%
WALTER MATHEE	30	382	5	22	6%
BRENDEN GRAVENOR	30	44	0	0	-
DUVAN VAN BREDA	29	147	2	11	7%
PAUL KNIGHT	29	93	0	2	2%
STEVE SUTHERLAND	29	80	0	3	4%
BRUCE QUINTIN MANN	28	534	0	43	8%
TREMAYNE ANGELO HAMMOND	28	94	10	23	24%
STEVEN HUMPHREYS	28	342	0	5	1%
WESLEY RAPSON	28	342	1	13	4%
RAY THOMPSON	28	790	7	57	7%
SIMON BURTON	27	410	1	20	5%
CHRISTO BARNARDO	27	39	0	1	3%
BRADLEY GOUVERIS	26	49	0	0	-
FRANCOIS KLEYN	25	132	2	8	6%
DONSIE VOLSCHENK	25	25	1	1	4%
CHRISTIAAN ZWIEGELAAR	24	44	0	0	-
JACQUES HAASBROEK	24	79	0	2	3%
CHARL MARAIS	24	876	3	58	7%
KEGAN MATTHEYS	24	38	2	4	11%
CHRIS OVENS	23	57	3	4	7%
ANDRE BRINK	23	81	0	4	5%
NOAH KLOPPER	22	126	2	7	6%
DONOVAN SOLOMON	22	316	3	56	18%
BERTUS VAN ZYL	21	28	0	0	-
TARRECK BYRNE	21	160	0	1	1%
VAUGHN REILLY	21	283	1	36	13%
DEVAN VAN ZYL	21	26	0	0	-
BRENDEN NAICKER	21	27	1	1	4%
BERRIE FERREIRA	21	986	4	38	4%
URSULA OTTO	21	187	3	9	5%
HERMI VAN ZYL	21	97	1	1	1%

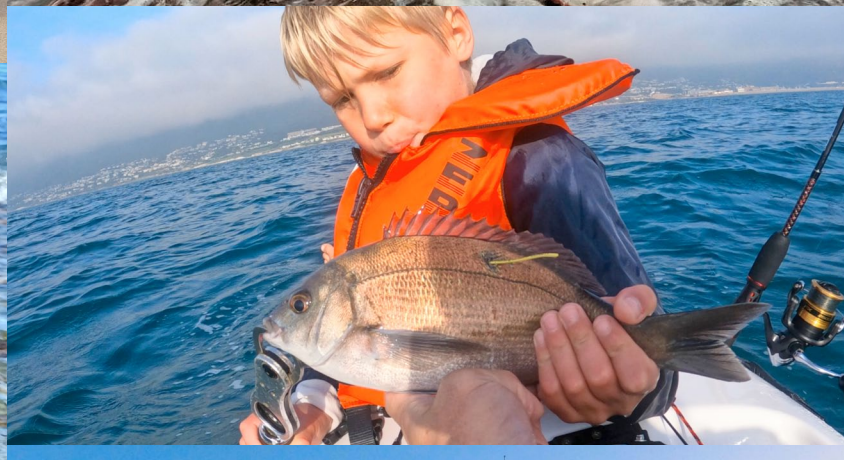
Member name	2023 tag releases	Total taggings	2023 tag recaptures	Total tag recaptures	% Recapt.
WALDO KLEYN	21	68	3	4	6%
JJ STRYDOM	21	279	1	16	6%
RIAN RAUBENHEIMER	20	367	1	14	4%
GARY VORSTER	20	32	0	0	-
SIMON WALKER	20	5 222	0	398	8%
RIEKERT VAN HEERDEN	20	611	0	20	3%
BRYSON CHUNDER	20	102	6	21	21%
MONTAGU B. DU TOIT	20	27	0	0	-
CHRISTIAN COETZEE	20	20	0	0	-
MATTHEW MCIVER	20	197	2	20	10%
ANTHONY NEL	20	53	4	5	9%
VICTOR DA SILVA	19	23	1	2	9%
RYAN PELLEW	19	19	4	4	21%
TOM HECHT	19	65	0	0	-
DP VAN HUYSSTEEN	19	186	1	16	9%
BRENDAN O'CONNELL	18	551	3	85	15%
GUSTAV KAMFER	18	26	0	0	-
DEON VAN EMMENIS	18	143	0	4	3%
DAVID SCHENCK	18	349	1	22	6%
PIETER MULLER	17	824	6	45	5%
HENK VAN ROOYEN	17	244	4	24	10%
JOHN WILLIAM RANCE JNR.	17	46	1	3	7%
WILCO BOTHA	17	17	0	0	-
JUSTIN MCCARTHY	17	601	0	38	6%
GREGORY MULLER	17	219	1	7	3%
CLINTON DUNK	17	100	3	6	6%
EDUAN MOSTERT	17	54	0	2	4%
JOHANNES ENGELBRECHT	17	54	1	5	9%
BOB SHEPHERD	16	845	2	32	4%
BRETT HARRIS	16	323	0	12	4%
AMITH LACHMAN	16	42	0	1	2%
DON MARX	16	258	1	19	7%
DYLAN LEES	16	177	6	13	7%
BERNARD VAN WYK	16	520	0	26	5%





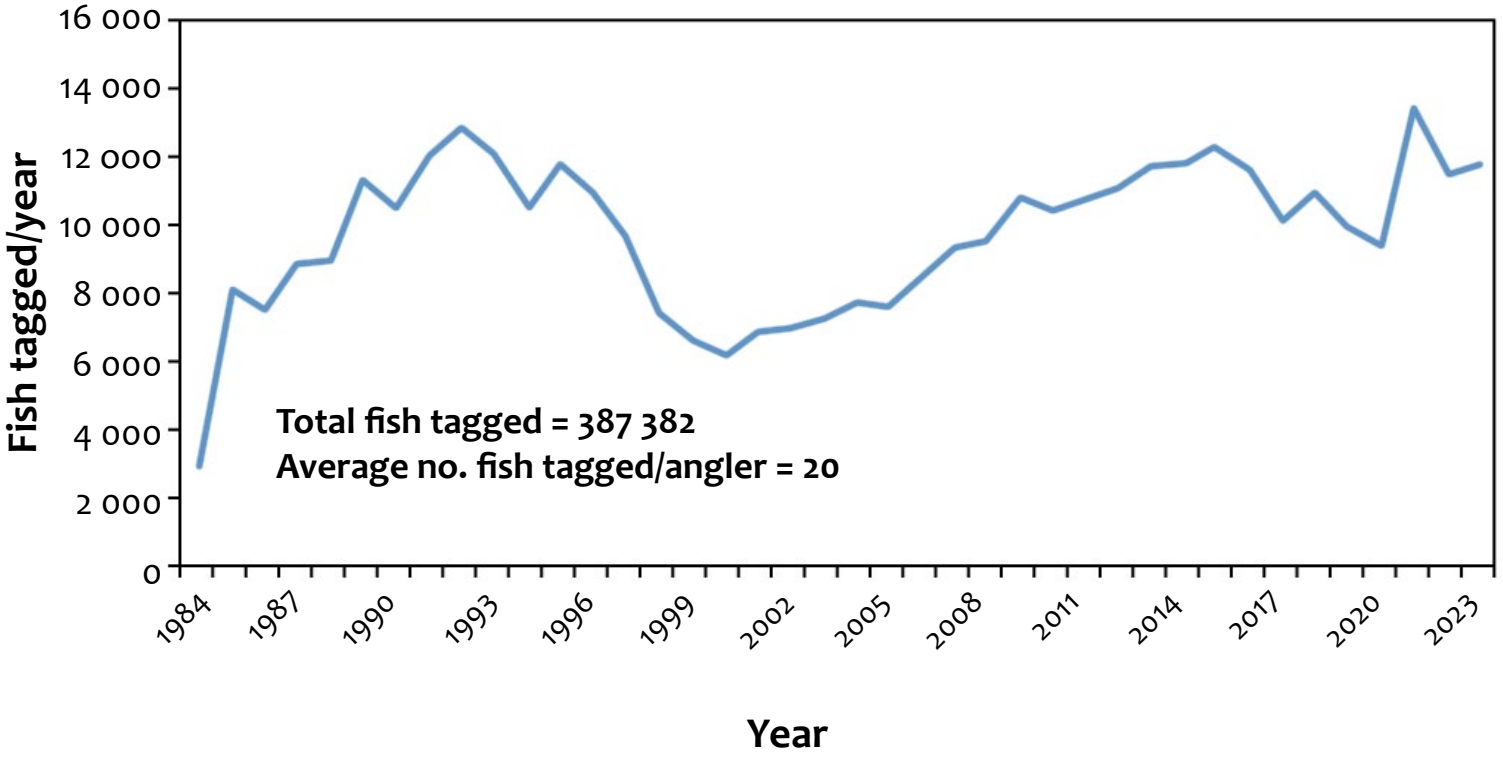




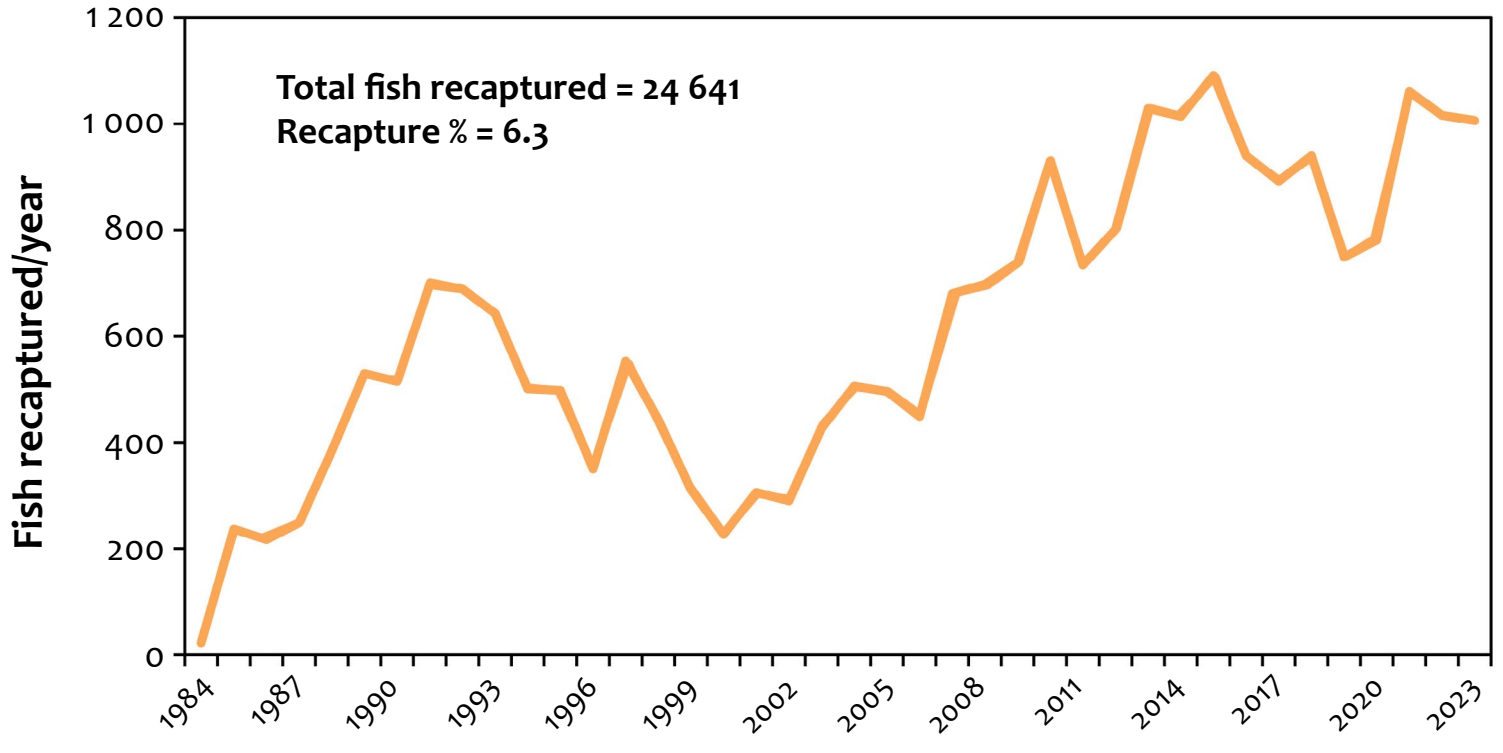



ORI Cooperative Fish Tagging Project Statistics

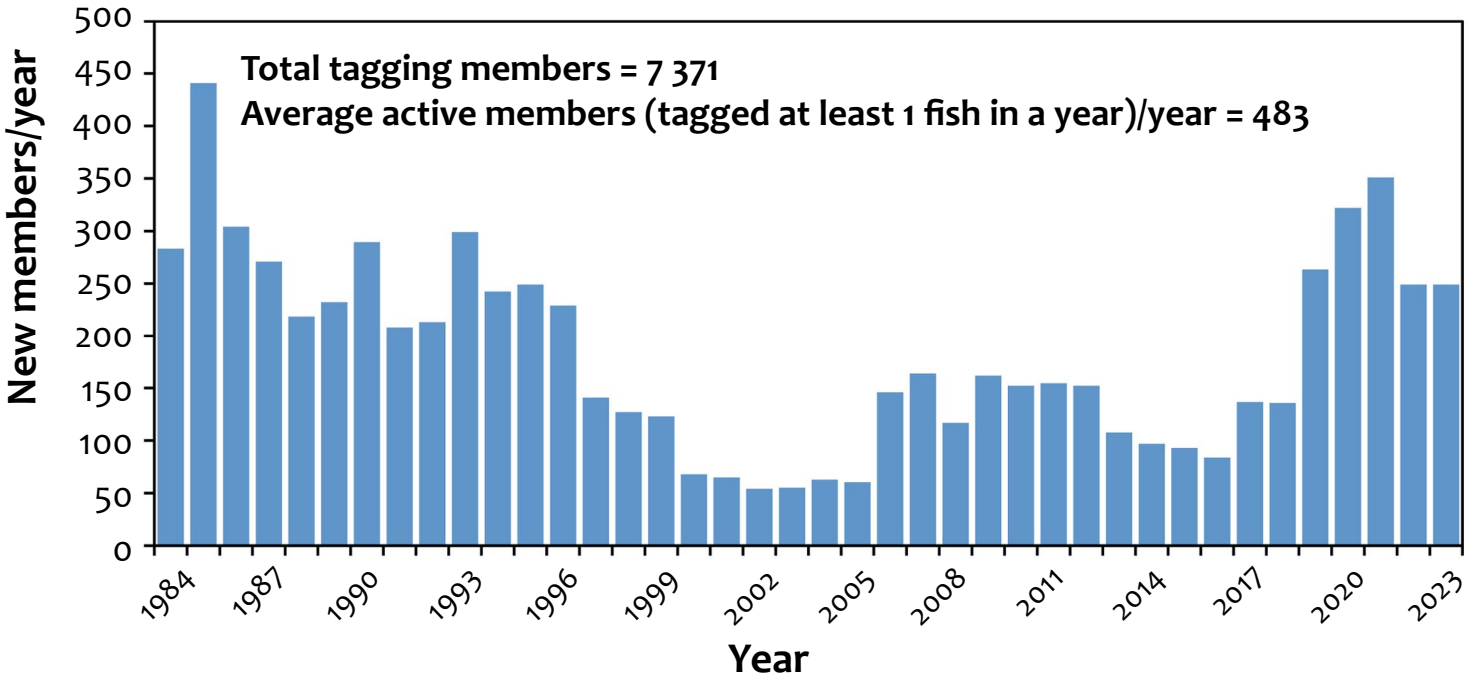
Fish tagged per year



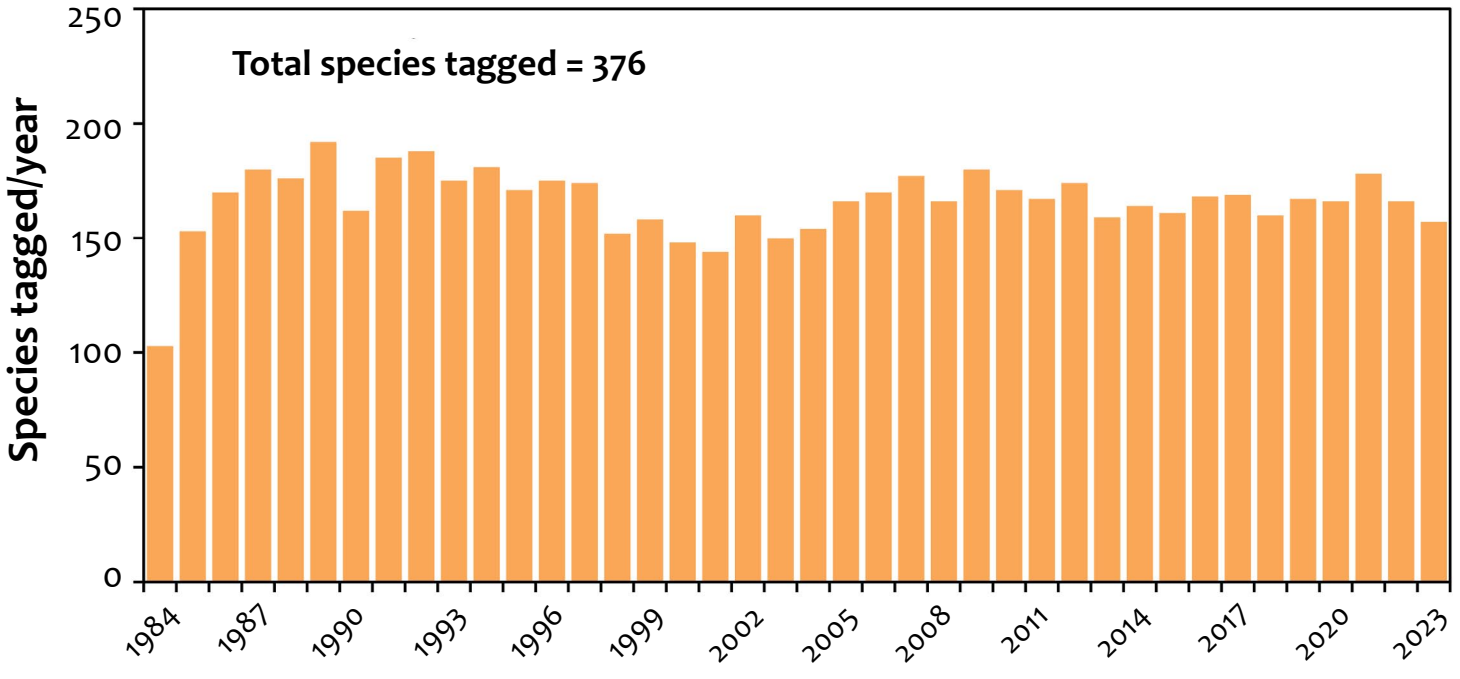
Fish recaptured per year



New members per year



Total species tagged per year



Main Fish Species Tagged up to 31 December 2023

Prohibited tagging species are highlighted in red

Species	No. Tagged since 1984	Recaptured since 1984		Km travelled		Days free	
		No.	%	Avg.	Max.	Avg.	Max.
Galjoen	74 471	5 260	7%	43	1 892	438	7 356
Dusky kob	26 626	1 903	7%	29	1 625	355	5 997
Leervis / Garrick	20 363	1 485	7%	214	2 060	321	3 208
Spotted grunter	17 759	450	3%	13	823	297	2 950
Dusky shark/ Grey shark	16 994	1 618	10%	58	1 374	110	2 928
Copper/ Bronze whaler shark	11 368	375	3%	164	1 790	434	3 981
Spotted gullyshark	11 026	827	8%	31	911	551	6 761
Elf/Shad	10 365	405	4%	278	1 676	178	1 437
White steenbras	10 193	520	5%	32	804	270	2 262
Blacktail / Dassie	9 422	224	2%	6	358	279	2 715
Common smoothhound shark	8 633	251	3%	42	582	583	4 405
Raggedtooth shark	7 549	1 217	16%	183	2 966	729	9 591
Lesser guitarfish/ Sandshark	6 657	76	1%	42	726	332	2 572
Bronze bream	6 037	183	3%	18	799	189	1 465
Roman	5 956	391	7%	4	294	393	8 134
Giant guitarfish/ Sandshark	5 920	514	9%	32	360	383	2 816
Slinger	5 256	209	4%	36	1 110	221	2 814
Black musselcracker/ Poenskop	4 954	347	7%	32	791	600	6 809
Yellowbelly rockcod	4 647	771	17%	6	425	376	3 309
Largespotted pompano	4 525	79	2%	12	270	260	1 374
Giant kingfish	4 362	172	4%	16	419	372	2 226
Diamond/ Butterfly ray	4 207	44	1%	167	1 756	628	4 889
Catface rockcod	4 114	1 003	24%	6	525	166	2 867
Broadnose sevengill shark	4 016	262	7%	65	597	504	4 332
Zebra/Wildeperd	3 760	83	2%	2	52	249	1 399
Blue stingray	3 641	13	0%	30	234	362	1 217
Sailfish	3 610	29	1%	61	1 060	150	727
White musselcracker/ Brusher	3 395	102	3%	54	843	579	3 499
Baardman/Belman/ Tasslefish	3 087	53	2%	2	17	402	4 870
Speckled snapper	2 817	1 017	36%	3	200	293	2 662
Santer/Soldier	2 733	189	7%	18	490	253	1 828
Carpenter/ Silverfish	2 608	24	1%	46	290	932	4 766
Striped catshark	2 520	238	9%	6	381	383	3 545
Red / Copper steen-bras	2 201	230	10%	118	923	889	9 257
Sharpnose stingray	1 986	6	0%	6	24	198	465
Natal stumpnose/ Yellowfin bream	1 891	53	3%	14	230	233	1 451
Smooth hammerhead shark	1 890	22	1%	133	384	555	3 075
Ladyfish/Springer	1 845	38	2%	20	412	379	1 426
Silver kob	1 784	81	5%	49	548	313	1 535
Perch/River bream	1 721	246	14%	1	105	351	1 583
Cavebass/Lampfish	1 690	256	15%	10	514	350	3 116
Scotsman	1 639	423	26%	25	1 211	462	2 839
Dageraad	1 608	130	8%	26	592	412	2 624
River snapper/ Rock salmon	1 601	294	18%	3	391	324	2 403

Species	No. Tagged since 1984	Recaptured since 1984		Km travelled		Days free	
		No.	%	Avg.	Max.	Avg.	Max.
Brassy kingfish	1 575	81	5%	11	757	285	1 441
Albacore/Longfin tuna	1 569	36	2%	304	1 008	412	2 585
Grey grunter	1 510	89	6%	1	21	250	1 292
Cape stumpnose	1 460	11	1%	7	56	194	732
King mackerel/Cuda	1 448	62	4%	360	1 552	542	2 604
Westcoast steenbras	1 311	78	6%	61	280	253	1 449
Duckbill ray	1 280	14	1%	42	402	648	1 427
Dark shyshark	1 277	302	24%	3	86	142	2 015
Leopard catshark	1 253	239	19%	7	722	344	4 431
Blacktip shark	1 247	43	3%	84	1 288	201	1 148
Soupfin shark/ Vaalhaai	1 230	32	3%	132	1 034	719	3 586
Scalloped hammerhead shark	1 219	18	1%	121	629	329	2 943
Giant yellowtail	1 122	50	4%	167	1 746	306	1 380
Stonebream	1 104	9	1%	75	524	242	563
Skipjack tuna	1 044	2	0%	536	1 061	1 046	1 628
Milkshark	1 037	26	3%	87	363	181	772
Yellowfin tuna	1 012	14	1%	804	5 645	319	1 314
Bigeye kingfish	1 008	39	4%	12	163	246	2 751
Geelbek/Cape salmon	996	12	1%	102	904	332	2 569
Blacktip kingfish	967	30	3%	3	54	147	545
Squaretail kob	950	68	7%	30	1 444	172	2 043
Honeycomb stingray	927	18	2%	1	8	313	2 543
Black marlin	859	3	0%	1 382	3 633	163	240
Spinner/Longnosed blacktip shark	839	27	3%	87	1 055	194	1 295
Eagleray	816	8	1%	8	49	442	1 582
Seventy-four	805	31	4%	57	521	526	2 845
Potato bass	691	32	5%	2	22	358	2 639
Tiger shark	631	29	5%	267	4 067	379	1 823
Brown shyshark	624	60	10%	7	102	238	997
Janbruin/John Brown	617	19	3%	1	15	127	502
Hardnosed smooth-hound shark	611	9	1%	87	340	344	870
Natal seacatfish	597	233	39%	0	22	378	2 586
Bonefish	579	4	1%	10	34	122	354
Halfmoon rockcod	567	100	18%	1	49	513	3 189
Striped marlin	565	2	0%	805	848	202	379
Bull/Zambezi shark	540	33	6%	77	539	368	2 599
Great white shark	528	17	3%	290	1 543	346	959
Queen mackerel/ Natal snoek	470	3	1%	4	12	376	1 044
Puffadder shyshark	465	46	10%	1	20	235	1 363
Blue marlin	459	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Red stumpnose	456	11	2%	11	107	894	1 998
Hottentot	456	16	4%	1	10	251	1 078
Southern pompano	445	26	6%	62	464	151	848

Main Fish Species Tagged up to 31 December 2023

Prohibited tagging species are highlighted in red

Species	No. Tagged since 1984	Recaptured since 1984		Km travelled		Days free	
		No.	%	Avg.	Max.	Avg.	Max.
Lemonfish	432	17	4%	4	64	230	749
Talang/Largemouth queenfish	414	16	4%	1	10	193	630
Pickhandle barracuda	407	57	14%	2	44	273	1 856
White stumpnose	397	6	2%	2	7	238	463
Bluefin kingfish	379	15	4%	11	94	172	386
Flapnose houndshark	354	50	14%	1	43	747	3 013
Banded galjoen	345	9	3%	63	562	223	507
Bartail flathead	343	9	3%	2	18	449	1 947
Sandbar shark	341	6	2%	166	345	250	536
Eastern little tuna/ Kawakawa	329	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Blackspot shark	318	8	3%	34	192	331	945
St. Joseph/ Elephant fish	300	1	0%	1 342	1 342	218	218
Spearnose skate	299	12	4%	0	3	261	676
Blue emperor	291	19	7%	30	307	325	975
Blue hottentot	282	7	2%	0	0	108	199
Snapper kob	281	11	4%	18	132	187	378
Bluntnose spiny dogfish	274	4	1%	189	669	615	1 476
Malabar rockcod	260	41	16%	1	8	183	1 540
Englishman	244	9	4%	1	6	281	640
Green jobfish	244	7	3%	0	0	209	373
Whitespotted smoothhound shark	211	5	2%	6	15	678	1 627
White seacatfish	207	4	2%	14	21	595	1 895
Grey reef shark	203	4	2%	83	166	357	697
Greyspot guitarfish/ Sandshark	189	1	1%	6	6	51	51
Javelin grunter	187	16	9%	9	70	378	2 940
Shorttail stingray	184	5	3%	48	231	508	2 412
Snoek	181	1	1%	136	136	491	491
Dorado / Dolphinfish	164	2	1%	55	64	39	66
Greater yellowtail/ Amberjack	161	4	2%	61	162	113	322
Yellowspotted kingfish	157	1	1%	7	7	164	164
Spotted eagleray	154	3	2%	205	597	518	850
Striped threadfin	145	2	1%	5	9	51	63
Moustache rockcod	138	43	31%	34	1 200	442	2 990
Tomato rockcod	138	23	17%	1	22	216	598
Longfin/ Tropical yellowtail	137	3	2%	22	67	218	417
Smallspotted pompano	129	4	3%	3	13	211	439
Cock grunter	116	5	4%	14	65	144	490
Thorntail stingray	114	2	2%	0	0	295	357
Atlantic bonito	113	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Great barracuda	110	23	21%	0	1	170	467
Whitebarred rubberlip	109	1	1%	1	1	176	176
Flathead mullet	104	1	1%	738	738	738	738
Cape gurnard	98	3	3%	0	0	456	953
Russell's snapper	107	3	3%	0	1	328	896

Species	No. Tagged since 1984	Recaptured since 1984		Km travelled		Days free	
		No.	%	Avg.	Max.	Avg.	Max.
Eel catfish	97	1	1%	1	1	47	47
Longfin kingfish	91	1	1%	12	12	453	453
Sliteye shark	89	2	2%	291	565	1 334	2 652
Bigeye stumpnose	89	5	6%	5	21	185	598
Maasbanker	88	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Oxeye tarpon	83	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Spotted spiny dogfish	82	1	1%	36	36	120	120
Swordfish	79	1	1%	9	9	1 263	1 263
Banded catshark	75	8	11%	16	55	423	1 155
Round ribbontailray	71	3	4%	3	8	47	74
Java shark	70	2	3%	14	18	67	76
Blue kingfish	69	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Striped mullet	66	1	2%	1	1	230	230
Sand steenbras	64	2	3%	0	0	40	79
Minstrel rubberlip	61	2	3%	19	37	484	679
Dusky rubberlip	59	2	3%	92	183	1 495	2 345
Cape moony	59	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Sailfin rubberlip	59	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Spadefish	57	1	2%	118	118	2 724	2 724
False thornback skate	57	2	4%	0	0	194	340
Doublespotted queenfish	57	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Prodigal son/Cobia	55	1	2%	36	36	479	479
Needlescaled queenfish	55	1	2%	0	0	227	227
Yellowtail scad	51	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Shortfin mako shark	49	5	10%	24	69	253	786
Marbled electric ray	49	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Thintail thresher shark	49	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Concertina-fish	48	0	0%	0	0	0	0
German	48	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Swallowtail rockcod	47	4	9%	0	0	7	11
Panga	46	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Yellowfin emperor	45	4	9%	0	0	441	1 187
Koester	44	1	2%	0	0	1 176	1 176
Bludger kingfish	44	0	0%	0	0	0	0
White-edged rockcod	42	1	2%	0	0	6	6
Shortbill spearfish	42	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Wreckfish	39	2	5%	4	7	231	388
Blue shark	38	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Indian goatfish	38	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Steentjie	37	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Indian mirrorfish	36	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Manta	35	1	3%	6	6	39	39
Threadfin mirrorfish	35	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Surge wrasse	34	1	3%	0	0	34	34
Tripletail	34	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Twinspot snapper	32	5	16%	2	4	139	363
Wahoo	32	1	3%	0	0	18	18
Milkfish	31	0	0%	0	0	0	0
Mackerel	30	0	0%	0	0	0	0

Understanding the Impact of the ORI Cooperative Fish Tagging Project on Angler Attitudes and Behaviour

By Judy Mann-Lang

We know that the ORI-CFTP has provided valuable information for biological and fisheries research, with more than 150 scientific papers that have used data from the ORI-CFTP. But what about the effect of the programme on the taggers themselves – the anglers who make the programme possible. To investigate this question, we designed a study to review the ORI-CFTP from the perspective of the participating anglers. Understanding how angler attitudes and behaviours are influenced by conservation initiatives such as the Tagging Project is crucial for the long-term sustainability of the project.

We are very grateful to the 267 members of the ORI-CFTP who responded to our online survey. The survey gathered information on the profile of taggers, their preferred methods of communication, attitudes towards fish tagging and fish conservation in general, changes in angling behaviour since becoming a member of the Project and support for the continuation of the ORI-CFTP.

A little about the taggers:

Most respondents were shore anglers (89%), followed by offshore ski-boat anglers (40%) and light-tackle boat anglers (38%). Just over 29% participated in all three facets. Most taggers were experienced with 84% having fished for over 10 years. Just over half (55%) had been a member of the ORI-CFTP for more than five years and 71% had tagged at least one fish in the past 12 months.

Anglers like to chat:

The most common way members had heard about the ORI-CFTP was from fellow anglers (68%), and most found out about fishing in general from other anglers (55%). About 17% learnt about the project from social media and 22% used social media to find out about fishing in general. Surprisingly, only 1% had heard about the project from a local fishing tackle shop and very few respondents considered their local bait and tackle shops to be a good source of information about fishing in general! Many respondents suggested that better use could be made of Tackle Shops to communicate with taggers and non-taggers. Given the amount of time anglers spend purchasing tackle and

Carefully remove a scale before inserting the tag

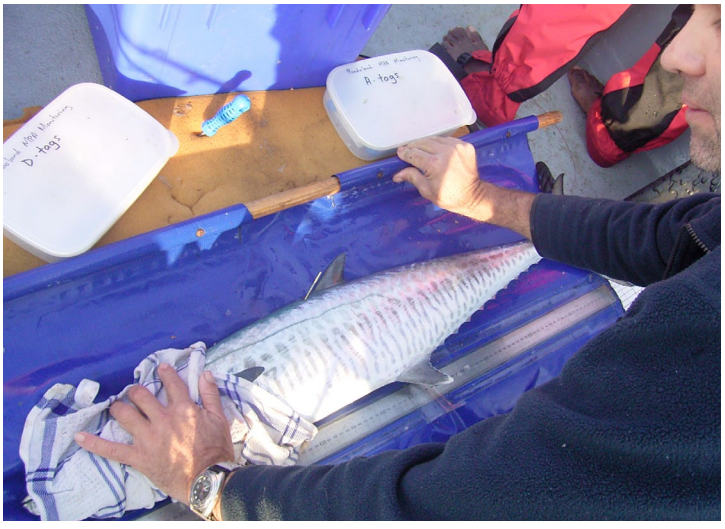

Circle hooks with a crimped barb are best when releasing fish


Photograph your fish near or in the water (keep it wet)!

bait, this clearly presents an opportunity for the ORI-CFTP to communicate more directly with anglers, both active taggers and those anglers who may recapture a tagged fish.

Use a bucket to keep your fish in water before and after tagging.

Use a fish mat or stretcher to correctly measure your fish.



Use a wet cloth to cover the head of a fish when tagging.

Luckily for Bruce and Gareth we found that the Tagging News was very popular and widely read and that over 90% had watched at least one of the tagging videos on YouTube, while 82% had used the Tagging website. Some useful comments on how to improve communication with taggers included hosting angling clinics and webinars at fishing competitions and through more direct involvement with fishing clubs.

For research:

The main reason why taggers joined the ORI-CFTP was to contribute to marine research, to contribute to the conservation of fish and to learn more about fish. The following quotes help to illustrate some of the attitudes expressed towards the ORI-CFTP: 'This project is a win/win/win – great data, involved and informed recreational anglers, and more released fish.'; 'It has definitely changed the perceptions of the people I fish with regarding C&R.'; 'For the most part, the project does improve anglers' handling of the fish they catch and increases their survival rates.'; and 'It continues to yield valuable information and it is a very powerful tool for creating awareness amongst anglers.'

Taggers are active:

Over half (65%) of the respondents had caught a tagged fish and, of these, 92% had reported the tag number to ORI – and fortunately almost all had received interesting feedback on the recapture! Almost half of the respondents had tagged between 1 and 50 fish (47%) and 39% reported that 1 to 10 of their fish had been recaptured.

Behaviour when tagging:

Many respondents said that they now keep the fish in water before and after tagging, while about half regularly use circle hooks and a wet cloth to handle fish. Unfortunately, fewer anglers regularly crimp the barbs of their hooks or use a measuring stretcher. These simple behaviours should be encouraged to increase fish survival post tagging. A good example of one of the beneficial effects of the ORI-CFTP has been the incorporation of C&R into competitive shore angling and light tackle boat angling in South Africa. This change to fishing practise in a competitive environment has shifted angler behaviour and greatly improved fish handling. Not surprisingly, most taggers said that they go fishing for the fun of catching fish, to spend time outdoors and for the adventure and excitement associated with recreational fishing.

Support for Continuation:

All respondents felt that the ORI-CFTP should continue because of the project's excellent contribution to fish research (67%), its role in fish conservation (32%) and angler education (30%). These quotes illustrate some of the depth of commitment taggers feel about the project:

'The project plays an integral part in the conservation of our fish species by providing irreplaceable research and raising interest and awareness in the promotion of sustainable fishing.'

'1. It provides an opportunity for anglers to contribute data for research. 2. Tagging often generates discussions pertaining to fish amongst fellow anglers and members of the public. 3. Recaptures of tagged fish have often led to anglers who recaptured the fish joining the Tagging Project. 4. Recaptures provide fascinating information. 5. Taggers provide a connection and a conduit for research and information to reach fellow anglers.'

'Without any doubt, the concept of tag and release has encouraged the release of more fish.'

'The Tagging Project more than any other initiative has engendered a spirit of conservation in South Africa.'

'More and more people are starting to become aware of how depleted our fish stocks are because of ORI research.'

In summary:

The Tagging Project has significantly contributed to enhancing the conservation ethics and behaviour of marine recreational anglers in South Africa. And better communication with anglers—both taggers and non-taggers—through the project has the potential to disseminate crucial conservation information to the broader angling community, thereby increasing awareness of the need for responsible angling behaviour.

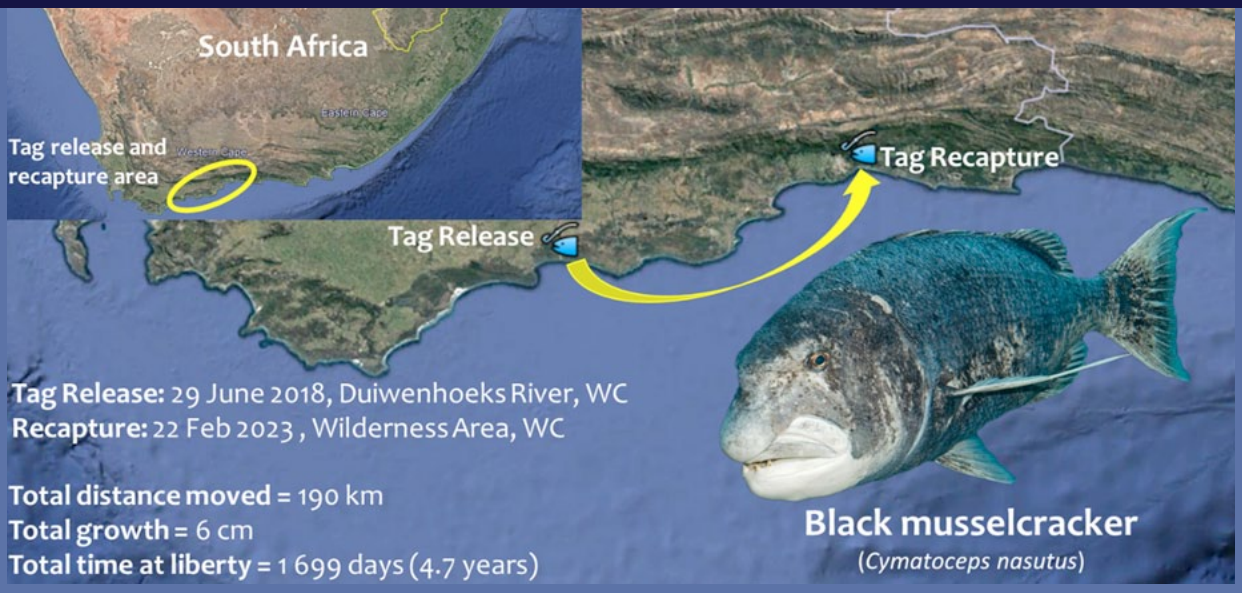
Most importantly, the Tagging Project has become an important part of the fishing experience for many taggers as these quotes highlight:

'Thank you for the amazing work that ORI does. It is of utmost importance that the longevity of the project is ensured. As a member of the angling public with a vested interest in the protection of our environment (including marine life) I cannot thank ORI enough for its service in this regard.

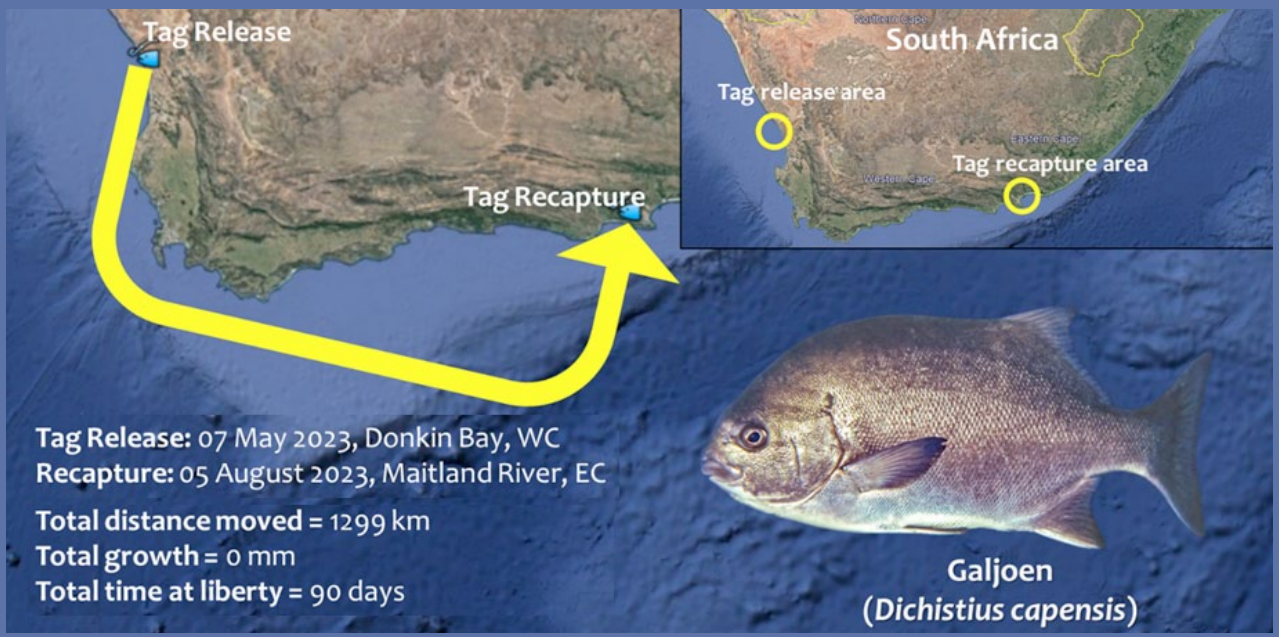
'I am encouraged that we still have an organization that tries to educate, assess and guide us for the future so that others can enjoy what we have now.'

Photo showing the use of a measuring mat and fresh sea water while tagging a galoen.

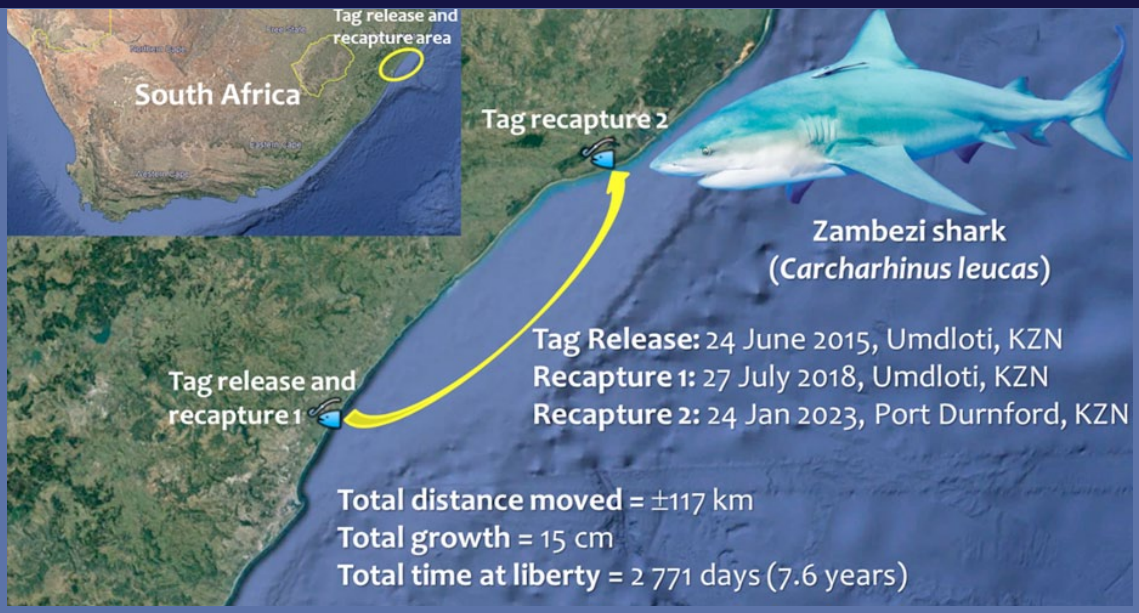
Exciting Recaptures from 2023



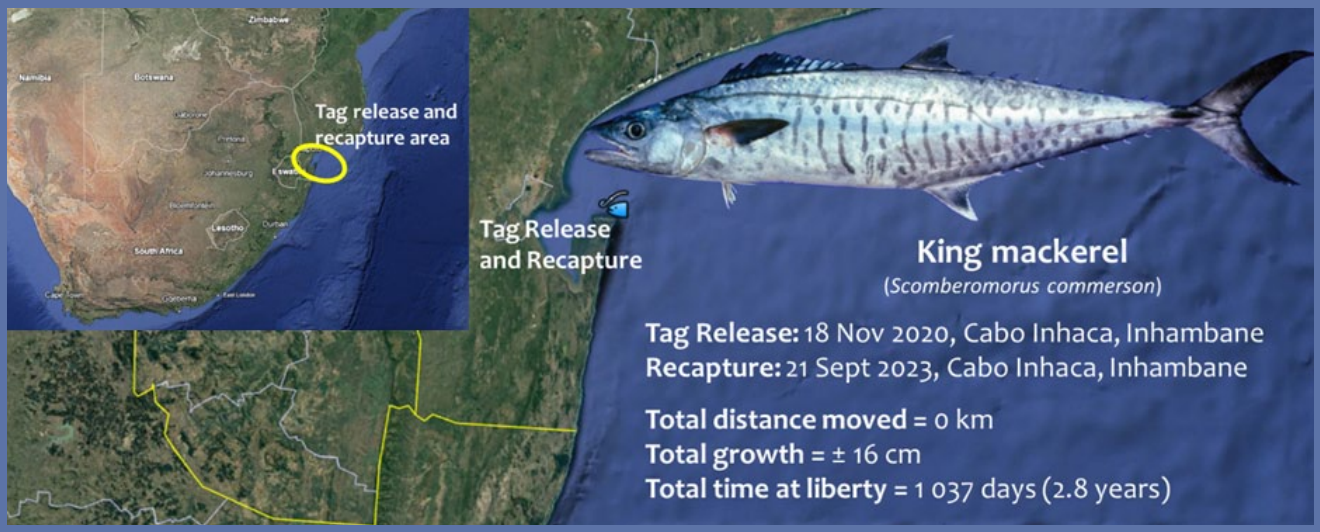
On the 22nd February 2023 we had our 343rd Black musselcracker/Poenskop tag recapture. This musselcracker was originally tagged on the 29th June 2018 by Rob Kyle in the surf near the Duiwenhoeks River in the WC, measuring 50 cm FL. It was recaptured 1 699 days (4.7 years) later by Richard Hartwell in the Wilderness area, WC, measuring 56 cm FL. This fish only grew 6 cm during its time at liberty and moved about 190 km up the coast. Black musselcracker are an endemic species found from Cape Agulhas in the WC, to Ponto do Ouro in southern Mozambique. This fish has an extremely slow growth rate and changes sex from female to male at about 70 cm or 18 years of age, with all fish greater than 95 cm FL being males. They have been evaluated as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and have a Red (DO NOT BUY) status on the SASSI List. Slow growth, late maturity and sex change make the black musselcracker extremely vulnerable to over-exploitation.



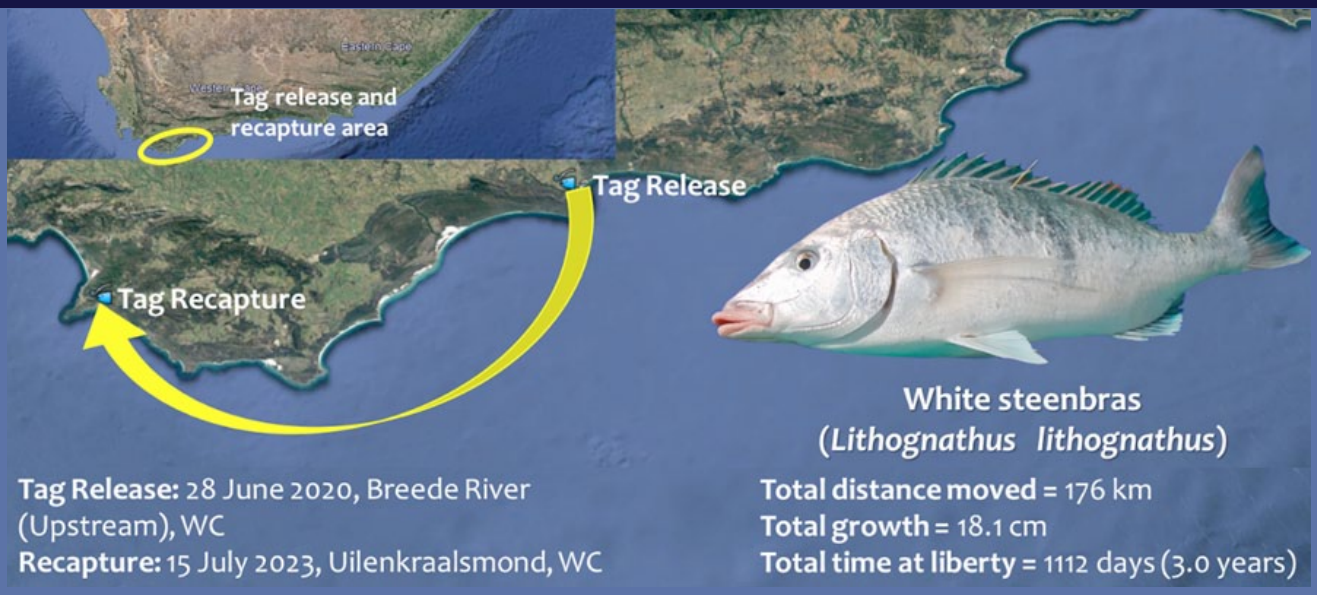
On the 5th August 2023 we had our 5 452nd galjoen tag recapture. This galjoen was originally tagged on the 7th May 2023 by Tinus van Staden at Donkin Bay, WC, measuring 330 mm FL. It was recaptured 90 days later by Dewald Hough at the Maitland River, EC, still measuring 330 mm FL. This little fish swam around Cape Point from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and moved an incredible 1 299 km in just three months (14 km per day)! This is the furthest distance moved by a galjoen over such a short time at liberty on the ORI-CFTP database. This recapture blew our minds and goes to show that even though we have had over 70 000 galjoen tagged, incredible recaptures like this are still helping us to better understand this species' movement patterns. Unfortunately, the galjoen stock is considered to have collapsed with the population estimated to be at less than 20% of its pristine level. It is likely that the current stock is only being sustained because of unfished, natural refuges and well enforced no-take Marine Protected Areas.



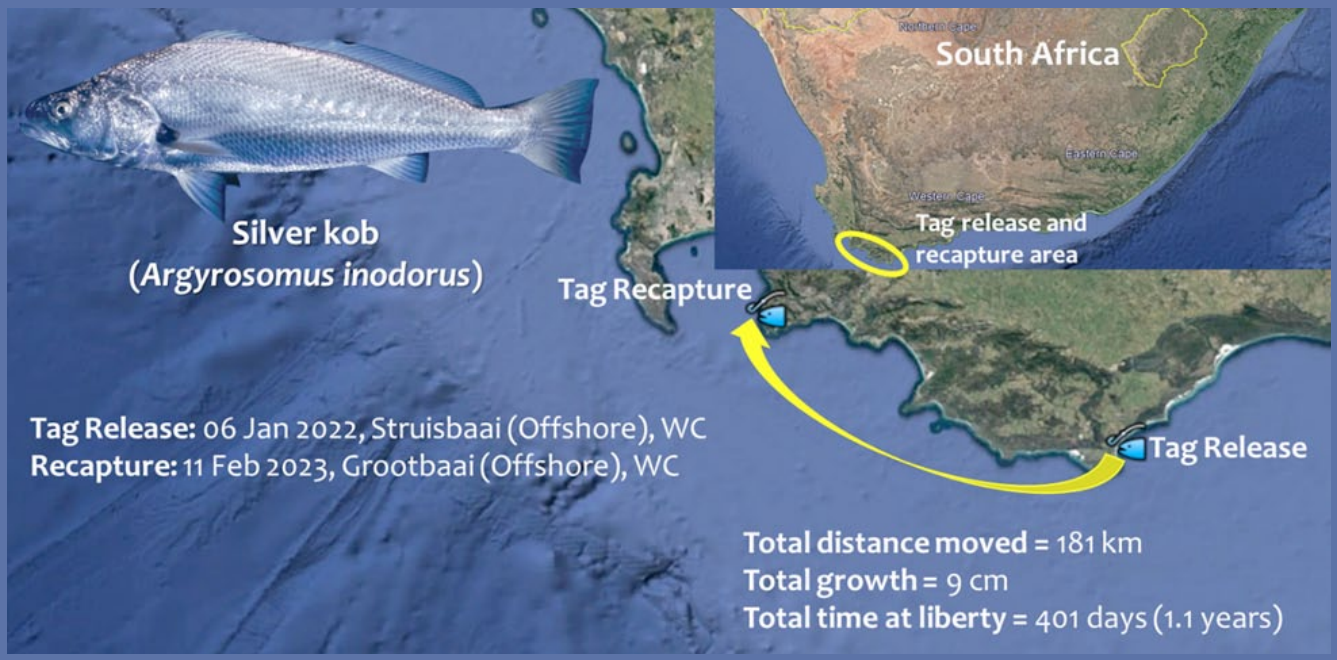
On the 24th January 2023 we had only our 36th Zambezi/bull shark (Zambies) tag recapture. This female Zambie was originally tagged by Justin Giai-Minietti on the 24th June 2016 at Umdloti, KZN, measuring 186 cm PCL. It was recaptured for the first time by an unknown angler 1 129 days (3.1 years) later also at Umdloti, measuring 193 cm PCL. It was then recaptured a second time by Craig Bashford 1 642 days (4.5 years) after that about 117 km north at Port Durnford, KZN, measuring 201 cm PCL. Overall, this shark was at liberty for a total of 2 771 days (7.6 years) and only grew 15 cm. Zambies are found worldwide in warm-temperate, subtropical and tropical seas. In southern African waters they are found from the Breede River, Western Cape (WC), northwards into Mozambique. Recent satellite and acoustic telemetry research has indicated that individuals can move distances of over 6 000 km. However, Zambies may be seasonally resident in some areas (e.g. on certain reef systems) and show repeated migration patterns. Recent long-term analysis (6+ years) have revealed that some individuals have been tracked repeatedly migrating from the Breede River to northern Mozambique and back again yearly, around the same time of year. *These truly are incredible animals!*



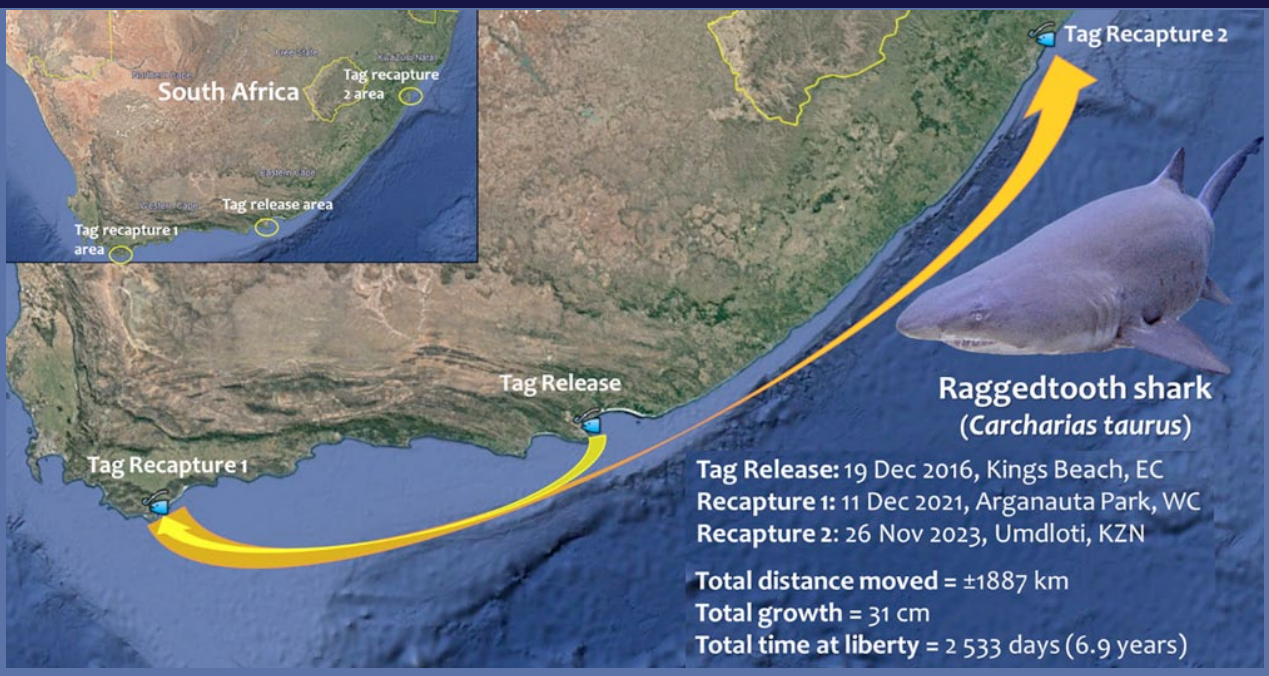
On the 21st September 2023 we had our 65th king mackerel/couta tag recapture. This couta was originally tagged on the 18th November 2020 by Graham Pollard offshore off Cabo Inhaca, Inhambane, Mozambique measuring 106 cm FL. It was recaptured 1 037 days (2.8 years) later by Tim Martin in the same area measuring 122 cm FL, having grown 16 cm during its 2.8 years at liberty! Although recaptured in the same area, it is likely that this fish undertook extensive migrations further south during the summer months as has been shown for other individuals of this species. The couta stock off South Africa has been assessed as being optimally exploited. However, catches are highly variable from year to year, and they face heavy commercial and artisanal fishing pressure in Mozambican waters, which is concerning. They are listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List globally and have a SASSI Listing of Orange for line-caught individuals in South Africa, but Red for couta caught in Mozambique and imported into South Africa. Marine Protected Areas probably offer little protection as they are a highly migratory species.



On the 15th July 2023 we had our 504th white steenbras tag recapture. This steenbras was originally tagged on the 28th June 2020 by Walter Mullins up stream in the Breede River Estuary, WC, measuring 31.9 cm FL. It was recaptured 1 112 days (3.0 years) later by Dehan Veldsman at Uilenkraalsmond, WC, measuring 50 cm FL. This fish grew 18.1 cm during its time at liberty and moved about 176 km west. Adults are found in the inshore marine environment to depths of 25 m, predominantly over sand or mixed sand and rock. Juveniles up to an age of at least one year are estuarine dependent, mainly using the lower reaches of estuaries as nursery areas and are resident within that estuary. After about 1 - 3 years, sub-adults (up to about 50 cm FL) leave the estuarine environment and become resident in the surf zone. Thereafter, sub-adults and adults greater than 50 cm FL may undertake large-scale movements (as seen with this recapture), however a large proportion of them remain resident. Well enforced no-take marine and estuarine protected areas with suitable habitat in the EC and WC provide protection for this species and play an important role in their conservation and management.



On the 11th February 2023 we had our 67th silver kob tag recapture. This kob was originally tagged on the 6th January 2023 by Guy Balme offshore of Struisbaai, WC, measuring 63 cm TL. It was recaptured 401 days (1.1 years) later by Andre Botha offshore of Grootbaai, WC, measuring 72 cm TL. This fish grew 9 cm during its time at liberty and moved about 181 km along the coast. Silver kob are endemic to southern Africa and are found from northern Namibia to southern Transkei. The Namibian stock has been shown to be genetically separated from the South African stock by the cool temperate Benguela region. This is a relatively mobile species which is found inshore in depths of less than 60 m in summer, but they disperse further offshore in winter in response to oceanographic patterns. Silver kob have been evaluated as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List (2020) and have a Red (DO NOT BUY) status on the SASSI List (for both line- and trawl-caught individuals).



On the 26th November 2023 we had our 1 257th raggedtooth shark tag recapture, and incredibly the 9th raggie recapture for November 2023! This female raggie was originally tagged by Gareth Wright on the 19th December 2016 at Kings Beach in Port Elizabeth, EC, measuring 171 cm PCL. It was recaptured for the first time 1810 days (4.9 years) later by Eduan Mostert at Arganauta Park in Struisbaai, WC, measuring 196 cm PCL. It was recaptured for a second time 715 days (2.9 years) later by Alistair Christie (a 79-year-old angler who is a member of the Old boys Angling Club) who was fishing at Umdloti, KZN during their postal competition. The raggie now measured 202 cm PCL. Overall, during its 6.9 years at liberty, this raggie moved about 1887 km and grew about 31 cm. Mating occurs in October to November, where after pregnant females move northward to spend the first part of their pregnancy in the warmer waters of KZN and southern Mozambique where they can often be seen in large packs around inshore reefs. From June onwards the near-term pregnant females begin to move southwards towards the cooler pupping grounds in bays along the EC and WC coast where they give birth from September-November.

Tag, You're it!

By Stuart Dunlop

I started my journey at the Oceanographic Research Institute (ORI) in 2009 where I was offered the opportunity to complete a Master of Science (MSc) degree within the Linefish Portfolio under the guidance of Dr Bruce Mann. It was a dream come true and an opportunity that I grabbed with both hands. Having grown up along the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) coast, the ocean had always fascinated me and understandably I spent most school holidays fishing, surfing and/or snorkeling. I first found out about the Tagging Project through a fishing friend, Alan Botha, who had tagged well over 500 sharks along the KZN and Eastern Cape coasts. I assisted him in tagging several sharks and was soon 'hooked'. While working on my MSc at ORI, I was invited on numerous tagging field trips and I was soon tagging fish both at work and in my spare time. This is when I first met the then Tagging Officer, Elinor Bullen, who had been managing the Project since 1984. With Elinor at the helm, the Tagging Project grew to great heights and experienced some of its best years. Elinor managed the Tagging Project

Stuart Dunlop and Elinor Bullin.

like an accounting firm and many a tagger will recall Elinor making sure data was submitted on time and in the correct way. Elinor did a superb job with record keeping and did so mostly without a computer, cellphone, WhatsApp, and/or email. Most communication in the early days was via "snail mail", and it is beyond me how she managed to keep it all together. To this day there are still numerous boxes of files, tag registers and used tagging cards in the ORI storeroom, a testament to her great work! Elinor decided to retire from ORI in 2010, after a marathon session of 26 years. It just so happened that I was finishing up my MSc at the time and I won't forget the meeting I had with Bruce where he suggested that I apply for the Tagging Officer job. As luck would have it, I landed my first job straight out of university as the new Tagging Officer. After a month of handover with Elinor, I was left to manage the Project and try and fill the shoes of a legendary Tagging Officer. Over the next 8 years we continued to grow the Tagging Project, embracing as many technological advancements as we could. Some of these included a dedicated cellphone number for reporting tags, putting the cellphone number and email address onto the actual tags, phasing out the

Bruce Mann and Stuart Dunlop.

postal service for reporting recaptures and submitting returns, starting social media accounts and many more. The project continued to grow in leaps and bounds and we also started to analyze the now enormous database and to publish some of the important findings in the scientific literature. The value of such long-term projects are often only realized many years later and ORI has done a great job at keeping the Tagging Project going for an incredible 40 years!

In 2018, my wife and I were offered an incredible opportunity in the Seychelles that we could simply not refuse. It was thus with much sadness that I had to move on from ORI and my Tagging family. Enter Gareth Jordaan… Gareth was a student at the time also completing his MSc at ORI. Gareth and I had met while he was studying and I soon realized he was a dedicated student with a passion

Stuart Dunlop with a big giant sandy that he caught and tagged.

for marine conservation, with a special interest in sharks. After the interview process, it was unanimously agreed that Gareth was the right fit for the Project. Gareth has now been the Tagging Officer since 2018 and has done a fantastic job growing this project further. He has certainly had his challenges with the new database (which I bomb-shelled on him before leaving- tag, you're it!), but he has always run the project in a professional manner and has strived to reach higher standards, introducing many more exciting initiatives along the way.

A special mention must also go out to Dr Bruce Mann who was a stalwart in the ORI Linefish Portfolio for a remarkable 31 years. His dedication to marine conservation and the Tagging Project in particular, is unrivaled and he single handedly fought for the continuation of this project for many years. Forty-years is no small feat.

Long live the Tagging Project!

A Huge Dusky Kob Caught on Very Light Tackle!

By Nic de Kock

I was fortunate to have a unique experience while fishing in the GouKou River at Stilbaai on Easter Monday, April 1st. Here's the story:

I launched our little 4m Viking Splash at about 7am and proceeded upriver. The river was thickly shrouded in low mist with about 30m visibility. I started fishing at one of my favorite spots for large spotted grunter just downriver of the MPA. My tackle consisted of a new set of reels – Okuma Inspira IXS 3000A s on Shimano Clarus 7ft light rods filled with various brands of 4-5kg nylon. Terminal tackle varied between 5 to 15g bullet sinkers, a soft bead, #10 power swivel and approximately 2m of 0.25mm trace, either fluorocarbon or brown camo nylon. Hooks were all tiny #10 Chinu type with flattened barbs. Baits were single, large, live mudprawns.

The tide turned to outgoing at about 8am and I was rewarded with two beautiful grunter in excellent condition, one of 71cm and the other 76cm FL, both tagged and released.

At about 9am after no further action for some time, I decided to re-locate to another favorite spot just upriver of the powerlines. The morning mist had burned off and it was now a beautiful morning, no wind, flat calm and sunny. I immediately hooked a reasonable grunter of about 55cm and upon netting it, I saw that it was tagged. I placed the fish still in the net into a fish bin with about 20L of fresh river water prior to measuring and tagging it. The tag had some weed growing on it and while cleaning this off I looked up to see one of my other rods in a rod holder start to bend. Believing that if it was a reasonable fish I would hear the drag go, I carried on with recording of the tagged grunter and then released it (it turned out to be one of my own fish, tagged in early January). Looking up I was puzzled to see that the line on the rod that had had the bite was now angling up current of the boat, but the fish had still not taken much line. Taking the rod out of the rod holder the fish now began a steady, powerful run diagonally across the river and up current. I immediately pull started the 15hp Yamaha and pulled up the anchor and started following the fish upriver. There was now only 10-20m of line left on the reel!

Pumping the line back onto the reel I worked back up to the fish which was now in the deepest part of the channel and only 2-3m from the bank which was rocky at this point. Staying perpendicular above the fish to try and prevent a cut-off, I exerted maximum pressure that I felt the tackle could handle. Occasionally the fish gave a heavy thump but at this stage I still believed that it was probably a large flatfish (ray) which are sometimes encountered in the river.

At this stage a boat came past us trolling downriver and notwithstanding my request to keep clear, his lure passed only 2-3m from my line. About 200m upriver there was another boat anchored with multiple lines in the water. My shouted request for them to pull in their lines if I came past was ignored. Fortunately, the fish now turned downriver before we got too close. Fighting time was now about 20 minutes. The fish then started to angle up towards the surface and I had my first glimpse of her, a huge dusky kob of 30-40kg!

Now I started to shake! It was obvious that I would be unable to handle a fish of this size on my own in the river from the boat, so I started looking for a place to go ashore. With rocks on the east bank and reeds on the west bank there was nowhere nearby. So, we started to work slowly downriver with the current back towards the powerlines and a mudbank on the east bank. After another 20 minutes of give and take I was able to beach the boat on the mudbank and started to ease the fish slowly into the shallows about 20-30cm deep. And there she lay!

After taking a quick photo I grabbed the measuring tape and tagging applicator. A quick total length measurement (146cm = 33kg. according to the ORI Fish App) and the tag was inserted. At this stage a local resident of 20+ years had noticed the action and joined me. He remarked that it was the largest fish he had ever seen in the river and that I should lift her up for a photo. I replied that this fish was not going to be lifted. There is now some significant scientific research that indicates how damaging this can be after a long battle when the fish is getting no oxygen.

I removed the tiny hook from the right hand corner of her mouth where it was embedded in the fleshy lip, turned her upright and headed out into deeper water with her cradled in my arms. Her huge tail began to scull, and she swam out of my arms and turned into the current heading upriver – upright, strong and majestic with her lateral line spots glowing like newly minted R5 coins. A sight I will never forget! It is difficult to describe my feelings and emotions at this point but I'm sure many of you fellow anglers have had similar experiences and can imagine what I was feeling.

I have called the fish 'she', not for any particular emotional reason, but because she was thickset and of wide girth which normally indicates a female of this species. At approximately 15-20 years of age, she still has many breeding seasons ahead of her and hopefully she will avoid recapture. Truly a bastion of our dusky kob population!

But for me the most humbling feeling is the realization that this fish may still be alive and breeding when I'm dead!

How to Report the Recapture of a Tagged Fish

This video below provides all the information that you need to correctly report tag recapture information. Tag recaptures are one of the most important and exciting aspects of the Oceanographic Research Institute's Cooperative Fish Tagging Project (ORI-CFTP). Recaptured fish allow us to investigate movement patterns, growth rates and population dynamics of the fish species tagged along the southern African coastline and ultimately contribute towards their conservation. What makes the ORI-CFTP so interesting and exciting is seeing where a recaptured fish was originally tagged; how far it has travelled; who originally tagged it and how much it has grown. As anyone who is fishing in the sea stands a chance of catching a tagged fish, it is very important to know exactly what information to record and how to send it to ORI.

ORI-CFTP Fish Measuring Stretcher

The ORI-CFTP is pleased to announce the availability of our purpose made Fish Carrying and Measuring Stretchers.

Made by the competent team at Dive Factory, these stretchers are durable, light, and easy to carry in your fishing bag. They have a measuring tape (150 cm) firmly stuck down the middle of the stretcher with the excess left hanging at the end (for big fish that are longer than the stretcher). They have an aluminium “headboard” used to keep the fish flat and straight which helps improve measuring accuracy. Most importantly these fish stretchers are a perfect tool to help anglers better handle their fish. By carrying and measuring the fish in the stretcher, contact with hot dry surfaces (such as sand, rock or a boat deck) is prevented. For an example of how these stretchers are used you can watch our tagging videos **here**.

If you haven’t done so already, you can purchase a fish measuring stretcher from the ORI Tagging Officer for R150.00 (excl. shipping) by sending your request through to oritag@ori.org.za or by WhatsApping 079 529 0711.

Focus Species
Giant Kingfish
(*Caranx ignobilis*)

Movement: Recent studies have indicated that this species is highly migratory with both conventional dart tagging and acoustic telemetry showing that adults in South African waters undertake an extensive annual spawning migration to southern Mozambique. Following spawning, adults move back to large individual home ranges along the east coast. Some adults have been recorded moving as far south as Port St Johns before returning to the same spawning site the following year, moving as far as 632 km in one direction travelling at speeds of up to 130 km/day.

Total number tagged: 4 362

Number recaptured: 172 (4%)

Longest time free: 2 226 days or 6.1 years (2004 – 2010).

Longest distance moved: 419 km (Splash Rock [Port Edward, KZN] to Vegetation South, [Cape Vidal, KZN]).

Growth: They mature at a length of 60 – 65 cm FL and an age of 3 – 4 years.

Max size: 165 cm FL; 68 kg.

Max age: >31 years.

Breeding season: Summer months (November to January over the full moon).

Breeding location: Southern Mozambique within the Maputo National Park Marine Protected Area.

Feeding: Their diet mainly consists of fish (70%), with the balance consisting of squid, mantis shrimps and other crustaceans. These predatory fish have even been documented feeding on terns in the Seychelles!

Distribution: Widespread in tropical areas of the Indian Ocean, West and Central Pacific. In South African waters they have been recorded as far south as Struisbaai, but are seldom seen south of the Wild Coast.

IUCN Red List status: Least Concern (2015).

SASSI List: Red, no-sale recreational species (don't buy).

Recent Publications:

Dixon RB, Murray TS, Mann BQ, Cowley PD, Daly R, Filmalter JD. 2024. Longshore movements and site fidelity of the iconic giant trevally *Caranx ignobilis* from southern Africa, determined using passive acoustic telemetry. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 729: 201-218.

Dixon RB, Murray TS, Mann BQ, Cowley PD, Jordaan GL. 2023. Movement patterns of the iconic giant trevally *Caranx ignobilis* from southern Africa, determined using tag-recapture data. *Fisheries Research* 263: 106693.

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The Tagging News is edited by Gareth Jordaan, Bruce Mann and Di Martin.

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