

Dolphinfish Research Program

How to Tag Dolphinfish

THE VALUE, INTEGRITY, AND CREDIBILITY OF THIS STUDY DEPEND ON THE RECORDING OF QUALITY FIELD DATA. THE QUALITY OF THE INFORMATION THAT YOU PROVIDE WILL DECIDE THE VALUE OF THE RECOVERY OF YOUR TAGGED FISH.

Helpful Tagging Equipment and Supplies List:

1. A standard size towel in a dark color
2. GPS or Loran (hand-held or boat-based)
3. Circle hooks (not required but increases likelihood of healthier lip-hooked fish)
4. Measuring device (not required but enhances the quality of tagging data)
5. Medium or large-sized dipnet (not required but aids in properly landing fish to be tagged)

Best Practices for Tagging Dolphinfish:

- Volunteers should never try to tag a small dolphin while the fish is in the water or dangling from the hook. This is not good practice. Attempting to implant the nylon dart tag into small fish not fully under control could result in poor tag placement or injury to the angler. Tags are easily lost out of the applicator when using the hand applicator on fish in the water.
- Proper insertion of the tag into the fish's back muscle requires the fish to be against a solid surface and immobilized.
- The first step toward correctly tagging dolphin is to have the tag in the applicator, a wet towel, and a measuring device ready before the fish is brought into the boat. Place the wet towel over the fish's eyes while it is still hanging from the hook. Lay the fish on a wet, smooth, flat surface with the measuring device under it or immediately adjacent. Such a surface reduces slime loss while the measuring device allows for a quick, accurate length assessment before the fish is returned gently to the water.
- The final step in tagging a dolphin is to complete the pertinent information requested on the field data card or field log:
 - Date
 - Fish's fork length
 - Fish's sex
 - Latitude and longitude
 - Distance from shore at tagging site
 - Whether *sargassum*, birds, or a FAD were present where the fish was caught
 - The name of the angler and captain
 - Outing catch composition (the number of individual species caught)

Dolphinfish Research Program

We are also interested in collecting your catch composition from your outing. To do this, just list the individual species you caught and the number on the data card or field log. For example, if you tagged and released 1 dolphinfish and caught 2 wahoo put “2” next to wahoo on the data card and on the field log put “wahoo, 2” in the designated column. If you catch some dolphinfish that you keep make note of this in the notes section on the data card or put “dolphinfish, 2” on the field log.

- To tag a fish, place a tag in the applicator prior to catching a fish that you may wish to tag. Keep the tag’s corresponding card in a secure spot where it will not blow overboard or otherwise get lost. Leave the plastic point guard on the applicator’s point to protect it from damage and prevent personal injury. The correct way to load the tag into the applicator is to insert the tag’s streamer into the needle opening and slide the tag into the needle until the barb rests against the back edge of the needle’s point.
- Place the tag in the back musculature from 1/4 to 1/2 the fish’s body length behind its head. The applicator should be inserted at a 45° angle toward the head of the fish with the plastic tag barb facing down toward the fish and its trailing tip pointing toward the fish’s tail. Insert the applicator point deep enough to allow the barb to pass between the spines that radiate off the top of the backbone at the midline of the back. This permits the barb to lock around one of the spines ensuring that the tag will not be shed. Try not to hit the fish’s spine, which will cause paralysis. Typically, 3/4 to 1 1/2 inches of the tag head should be buried in the fish. As a final step give a light tug on the tag to make sure that it is securely implanted.



Figure 1 The ideal tagging location is in the upper dorsal musculature as shown in this image. Do not over constrain your fish during the handling and tagging process as this could cause internal injuries. Wrap a wet towel around the fish or use it to cover its eyes to help prevent injuries and calm it down.