

Tagged Snapper Tell Tales

By Dr Patrick Coutin (MAFRI)

Snapper that have been caught, tagged, released and subsequently re-caught by fishers, are starting to give researchers an indication of the movements and migration patterns of the species.

During January and February this year, there was an increase in the number of tagged snapper recaptures, with 28 fish being reported to a tagging hotline. Many of these fish were recaptured within the region of their release, particularly in Corio Bay and Portland Bay. This indicates either very little movement, or fish returning to the same area.

- Nineteen tagged snapper that were recaptured in Portland Bay were all released in the same location between 1997 and February 2000, suggesting very little movement of small snapper 19-31 cm in fork length. Three of these fish have been caught and released several times during January and February 2000.
- Tagged snapper recently recaptured in Port Phillip Bay were released between 1995 and 1999. One was at liberty for 1755 days, and had grown 21 cm, and had swum from Apollo Bay in March 1995, to Mornington in January 2000, where it was recaptured at a size of 50 cm (total length). It was 1.4 kg in weight.
- One internally tagged snapper released in Queenscliff Harbour in November 1998 had moved west to Portland Bay after a period of 476 days at liberty.
- Another snapper released off St Kilda at a size of 18 cm in March 1996 was recaptured off Portarlington in January 2000 at a size of 28 cm, having grown 10 cm in 1410 days. The third snapper released off Carrum in April 1999 at a size of 29 cm was recaptured off Patterson Lakes in March 2000 at a size of 32 cm, having grown 4 cm.
- In Westernport Bay, a 37 cm snapper tagged off Cowes in November 1999 was recaptured in March 2000, in the same location, having grown 2 cm.
- Snapper tagged in Mallacoota Inlet on the other hand, are moving northwards up the coast of NSW, with recaptures off Eden and Jervis Bay over a period of 371 days. Much smaller movements have been recorded for tagged snapper released outside Corner Inlet, with recaptures reported off Lakes Entrance, Woodside and Reeves Beach. These fish were at liberty for 1-2 years.

Fisheries Victoria and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation are funding the snapper tagging program. Tag recaptures can be reported to scientists at MAFRI on freecall 1800 677 620 or to the VICTAG co-ordinator on 1800 677 620.