

The 2024 English Bluefin Tuna Catch and Release Recreational Fishery

Code of Conduct for
Recreational Fishery Permit Holders and
Participants



Introduction

The establishment of an English bluefin tuna Catch and Release Recreational Fishery presents a fantastic opportunity for recreational anglers, charter skippers and the tourism and hospitality sectors in the coastal ports associated with the fishery.

The Catch And Release Tagging (CHART) programmes that have operated across the UK since 2021 have shown the high standards that can be achieved in terms of angler safety, bluefin tuna welfare, socio-economic benefits, and furthering the scientific understanding of this iconic fish. The English bluefin tuna catch and release recreational fishery is an evolution of the CHART programmes, with a number of key differences in terms of scale, experience of participants and techniques permitted.

This Code of Conduct sets appropriate standards for permitted anglers to conduct legal, safe, professional levels of recreational angling, whilst contributing to the future management of Atlantic bluefin tuna thereby ensuring these iconic species have a sustainable future.

A recreational fishery, whilst not entirely new in England, will be new to most anglers and therefore it is important to set out the key principles that are critical to the operation of a responsible, conservation focused fishery. This puts the best interest of bluefin tuna first, whilst at the same time ensuring the fishery is open and available to responsible anglers with the same considerations.

The regulatory framework sets out the mandatory obligations of participants in this fishery.

This Code of Conduct has been developed by Recreational Sea Angling stakeholder bodies UK Bluefin Tuna Association (UKBFTA), Professional Boatman's Association (PBA) and Angling Trust (AT), including experienced charter skippers, crew and anglers, in collaboration with the Department for the Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and Natural England (NE).

Failure to meet the standards set out in this document risks the future of this fledgling fishery, which will be subject to regular evaluation and review.



Code of Conduct

For permit holders and participants

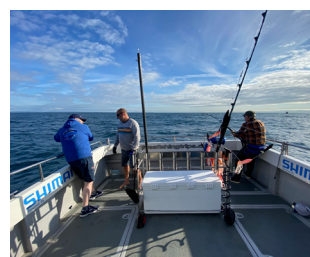
Know the regulations

Participants in the fishery must know the regulations before heading out to fish. The requirements are set out in your bluefin tuna recreational fishing permit available on the link at the end of the document.

Breaking the regulations and or permit conditions is a criminal offence.

Summary

- **Know the bluefin tuna recreational fishing regulations before heading out to fish**
- **Ensure you have the right skills and knowledge**
- **Use appropriate fishing gear/equipment**
- **Ensure you have appropriate safety kit on board**
- **Plan the trip to suit your anglers**
- **At the start of each trip, make sure all anglers are fully briefed before you set out**
- **Be aware of and considerate towards other vessels**
- **Adapt your fishing to minimise bycatch and handle bycatch responsibly**
- **Upon hook-up remove all other tackle immediately**
- **Keep fight time to a minimum to optimise fish welfare**
- **Handle the fish safely and responsibly**
- **Allow the right amount of recovery time before release**
- **Record all required data including fish measurement before release**
- **Record details of any mortalities in your trip report**
- **Report each trip within 24 hours**



Code of Conduct in detail

Know the bluefin tuna catch and release recreational fishery regulations, before heading out to fish

The relevant regulations will be listed in your English bluefin tuna recreational fishing permit. Breaking the regulations and/or permit conditions is a criminal offence.

Ensure you have the right skills and knowledge

- Read and comply with this code of conduct.
- Sign up for the pre-season training provided by the experienced CHART skipper group working with the UKBFTA, Professional Boatmans Association and the Angling Trust
- Access and use the additional online guidance, available on the links provided at the end of this document
- Seek support and advice from experienced CHART Skippers before and during the season, these can also be found at www.ukbfta.co.uk

Failure to secure the right skills and knowledge risks the safety of you and others, the survival of the fish and therefore the future operation of the fishery itself.

Use appropriate fishing gear/equipment

- An appropriate harness and pad or a fighting chair
- Leadering gloves
- Boga grips or specialised lip hooks
- For trolling and bait fishing a minimum 50 wide lever drag reels and a minimum 50lb class rods
- At least 700 yards of 100lb breaking strain mainline
- For popping use specialised heavy duty tuna rods and reels, with a minimum 80lb b/s main line
- 150lb breaking strain leader
- Single hooked rigged lures/baits only. Do not use double hooked rigs, treble hooks or wire traces under any circumstances. Circle hooks should be used when bait fishing at drift or anchor
- Safety straps to secure rods and reels to the vessel

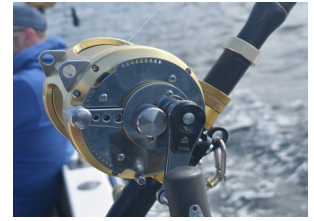
Using the right gear and equipment will enhance angler safety and improves fish welfare.



Straight and bent butt rods



Safety straps



A 50 wide lever drag reel

Ensure you have appropriate safety kit on board

Follow the Angling And Fishing Safety Advice From The RNLI: <https://rnli.org/safety/choose-your-activity/angling>

Plan the trip to suit your anglers

Assess the skill and fitness levels of anglers then make decisions on appropriate tackle and techniques. For example, large spreader bars and fighting chairs (where available) are more suitable for inexperienced/less fit anglers.

At the start of each trip, make sure all anglers are fully briefed

Everyone onboard should understand their roles and responsibilities on the trip, the core regulations governing the fishery and relevant aspects of this Code of Conduct.

A trip briefing checklist can be found www.ukbfta.co.uk or www.anglingtrust.net

Be aware of, and considerate towards, other boats

Very often bluefin tuna are aggregated in large groups which will attract many other authorised fishing boats. Consider and respect the needs of others. Follow the International Regulations for Preventing Collision at Sea (1972 COLREGs). Monitor Very High Frequency (VHF) channels (including Channel 16) and use these to communicate effectively with other vessel operators.

Report any suspicious marine activity, particularly in relation to the targeting of bluefin tuna to the MMO: [Reporting marine suspicious activity: GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-managed-object).

Adapt fishing to minimise bycatch and handle bycatch responsibly

When targeting bluefin tuna, there is a small risk of accidental bycatch of seabirds, marine mammals and shark species. "Chunking" with dead fish is permitted but **the use of live fish as an attractant it is NOT permitted**. In the event of bycatch, close in on the hooked specimen carefully and attempt unhooking and release with the least distress possible.

A bycatch protocol is available at www.ukbfta.co.uk or www.anglingtrust.net

Upon hookup, remove all other tackle immediately

Multiple hook-ups have been shown to risk an increase in mortality risks and unintended break offs.

Upon hookup, immediately remove other tackle from the water.

Keep fight time to a minimum

It is generally accepted that fight times of more than one hour may compromise the welfare and survival rates of bluefin tuna and may also increase the risk of crew/angler injuries.

With the correct gear, techniques, skills and knowledge (see above) extended fight times can be avoided in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

Bluefin tuna brought to the vessel very quickly, or even after extended periods if not adequately pressured, may be 'green' and at risk of damaging themselves, leadermen and anglers through unexpected bursts of activity boat-side.

Handle the fish safely and responsibly

Leadering and unhooking a powerful bluefin tuna requires skill and care to ensure the safety of both anglers and the fish. Only the designated person should handle the leader and control the fish when it comes to the vessel.

'Lip hooks' or Boga style grips are recommended as the most bluefin tuna friendly method of restraining the fish, once it is subdued. Conventional gaffs should not be used.

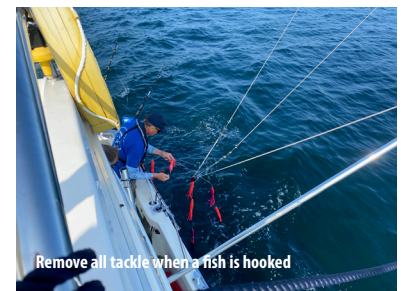
More information on the safe handling of fish can be found at www.ukbfta.co.uk

Allow the right amount of recovery time before release

Appropriate recovery techniques may be the single biggest factor in the survival of your successfully released bluefin tuna.

To help the fish overcome the stresses of capture and maximise the chances of the fish surviving once released, it is crucial that the fish is recovered for the appropriate amount of time. Recovery time will depend on the size and condition of the fish. Research on recreationally caught bluefin tuna has shown that it may take 15 minutes or more for the fish to recover.

Assess the condition of the fish and 'swim' it on a tether with the vessel in motion at slow speed (~3kts), for the appropriate amount of time, making sure the fish's head is under the surface of the water. More information on recovery and release protocols can be found at www.ukbfta.co.uk or www.anglingtrust.net



Measure the fish before release

Measure the bluefin tuna as soon as possible after it has been restrained, unless doing so would be significantly detrimental to its welfare.

Fish length should be recorded alongside other catch metrics, in preparation for routine trip reporting (see below).

Under no circumstances should the fish be removed from the water, to do so is a breach of the regulations governing the fishery.

Record details of any dead fish and discard at sea

In the event that the bluefin tuna comes to the vessel dead, expires boatside, or cannot be recovered after attempting to do so for more than 30 minutes, the fish should be discarded at sea. Details of dead bluefin tuna should be included in your MMO catch report. The catch and release recreational fishery operates a 'no-blame, learning through experience' culture. You will not be penalised for correctly reporting a fish mortality.

Report each trip within 24 hours

The conditions of an English bluefin tuna catch and release recreational fishery permit include a requirement to report various details of each fishing trip, electronically, within 24 hours. This information is essential for the short and longer term monitoring and evaluation of fishery operations and the real-time utilisation of quota. Use this form to report your trip information for the 2024 season. Opportunities may exist for additional, voluntary participation in supplementary data gathering and fish tagging. Such programmes would drive an improved understanding of bluefin tuna and the operation of the catch and release recreational fishery. We would encourage permit holders to participate in such programmes where they are operated by recognised scientific organisations and supported by stakeholder organisations.

Failure to report is a Criminal Offence.

Links

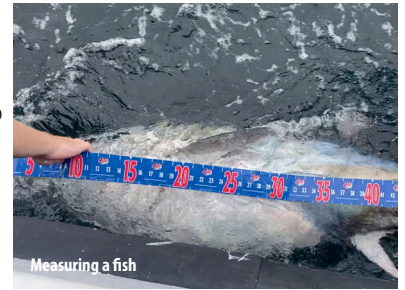
Permit conditions: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plans-for-the-2024-bluefin-tuna-bft-catch-and-release-recreational-fisheries>

Reporting suspicious marine activity: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reporting-marine-suspicious-activity>

UKBFTA: www.ukbfta.co.uk

Angling Trust: www.anglingtrust.net

RNLI: <https://rnli.org/safety/choose-your-activity/angling>



DATA RECORDING SHEET

Date	Gear	Time of hook up (HH:MM)	Fight time (mins)	Length (inches)	Condition (Green, Alert, Lethargic, Moribund (Dead))	Location (ICES rect.or lat, long)	Notes (e.g. recovery time, appearance)
e.g. 27/08/2024	e.g. Spreader bar (48")	e.g. 10:21:00	e.g. 55	e.g. 47	e.g. Alert	e.g. 29E8	e.g. Slight hook injury, otherwise in great condition

Please note that this is a memory aid and not your official reporting form. All catch reports must be submitted online via the MMO's 2024 Bluefin tuna (BFT) catch and release recreational fisheries (CRRF) trip reporting form. Paper returns will not be accepted.

