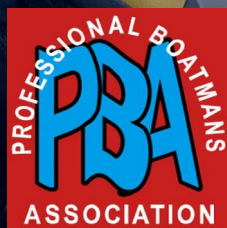


# BLUEFIN TUNA TRAINING MODULE THE GOOD ANGLER

PRODUCED BY THE UKBFTA  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE ANGLING TRUST AND THE PBA



## WHAT MAKES A GOOD BLUEFIN ANGLER

### INTRODUCTION

Everyone may have their own answers to this question, but on that list, you really should include a number of key metrics of fish welfare.

A truly 'good' angler should in addition to finding and hooking good numbers of fish, etc, etc, also aim to deliver great metrics in relation to fish welfare.

Double digit numbers of bluefin on spreader bars wound in from the gunwhale and backed down on is a dubious metric of a great bluefin fisherman.

Being so tough that you fought a fish for hours is NOT a badge of honour, it is (apart from exceptional, unforeseeable circumstances) something to be embarrassed about. You either have the wrong gear for your fitness levels/size of fish, or you have little/no understanding of good technique.

CHART gave us a series of numbers which give us some frame of reference for 'what 'good' looks like.'

The recreational catch and release fishery is NOT the same as CHART. It allows a wider range of techniques, has no mandatory gear requirements, no mandatory training and a wider range of experience amongst participants. All of these will in all likelihood combine to give us stats that fall a bit short of what we achieved in CHART.

However, we should still treat these results in CHART as 'aspirational', and strive to improve each trip, each month, each season

Here's a suggested list of metrics that you can be proud to excel at.



### HOOK UP TO BOATSIDE RATIO

A key objective should be to reduce the number of 'break-offs'. Why? Fish lost with fishing gear attached may be hindered in their swimming and feeding, plus we lose the ability to provide that valuable, assisted 'recovery' and reoxygenation process.

In CHART, this ratio rose from 76% in 2021 to 87% in 2022 and then 99% in 2023.



In year one, the majority of vessels had no experience of bluefin in UK waters. New gear and techniques required a steep learning curve. This was primarily a spreader bar caught fishery.

The use of at drift bait fishing techniques with in-line circle hooks should reduce fish lost to poor hookholds, but harder fighting fish may counter that via more line breaks.

Re popping, anecdotal evidence suggest a higher incidence of failed hook holds. You should monitor this and make a judgement call as to if the % of lost fish is a welfare issue. If lost in the first 10-15 minutes it may be less so, but high numbers of fish lost well into the fight should be seen as a potential problem.

\*A 'hook-up' was defined as a fish being on the hook for a minimum of 30 seconds.

How to achieve good results? Use and build strong gear. 'Get tight, stay tight' but don't go all popeye and try and drag the fish to boat, use drag sensibly. Use the boat to stay tight, as well as reduce 'cut-offs'.

## HOOK LOCATION

The location of the hookhold is an important factor in the damage to and future survival of the bluefin we catch. CHART showed that J-Hooks when used in trolled lures had a very high incidence of 'good' outcomes regarding hooking location. 87% hooked in the scissors, 95%+ hooked in either the scissors or outer jaw.

Other studies have shown that when used in bait fishing at drift or anchor, such hooks generate MUCH WORSE outcomes, and in-line circle hooks are a much better choice for such fishing techniques.

The use of 'double hook' rigs (including on poppers/stick-baits) have been shown to increase damage to bluefin and the use of treble hooks in particular has been shown to result in bad outcomes for significant % of bluefin. Neither have any place in the UK's bluefin fisheries.

How to ensure? Choose and use the appropriate hooks for the fishing techniques you are utilising.

## FISH CONDITION AND DAMAGE.

CHART recorded fish condition upon leadering including damage from end tackle, (including line marks), as well as any damage inflicted boatside by the vessel or restraint tools. After the recovery process this condition was recorded again.

Mitigating long fight times in CHART helped generate good 'condition' metrics when the fish came boatside, and good recovery/release techniques generated measurable improvements in condition by the point of release.

How to obtain good results? Minimal levels of damage were a function of the right tackle, good fishing and leadering/restraint techniques (and tools), and good communication between helmsman and crew avoiding hull impacts. Good recovery/release protocols led to consistent improvements.

You can avail yourself of the condition assessment form used in CHART and keep your own records to compare over time.



## INCIDENTAL MORTALITY

One of the most positive results achieved in the 3 years of CHART was the very low level of incidental mortalities recorded. 1.4% in 2021, 0.5% in 2022 and 0.6% in 2023. This was below many comparable research programs or 'science fisheries' and reflected well on a range of aspects of CHART.

The CRRF is not CHART, as pointed out earlier. BUT, we should still be able to keep IM into the low single digits consistent with, or better than other, similar fisheries and research programs.

How? Use adequate tackle and fishing/fighting techniques, as well as well executed restraint, recovery and release protocols. Seek out expertise and knowledge from experienced participants.



## POST RELEASE MORTALITY.

A PSAT\*\* based study of Post Release Mortality was undertaken as part of the CHART program. Whilst the full report into the results has yet to be published, it showed that overall PRM percentage levels were in the low single digits and all occurred in just the first year of CHART. More analysis is required but if this data is confirmed it would be one of the lowest rates of PRM achieved in any similar PRM studies into recreationally caught bluefin anywhere in the world.]

\*\*Pop-up SATellite tag.

Unless there is a continuation of the PRM study, you will not be able to measure your success or otherwise in this metric. The key to ensuring low PRM levels is set out above. Achieve good hook-up/boatside ratios, mitigate unnecessarily long fight times, use the right hooks, and get the recovery/release process right, don't cut corners. Get these right and your PRM rates are likely to be close to or as good as those seen in the CHART and ThunnusUK programs.

# FIGHT TIMES

## FIGHT TIMES

The widespread use of large spreader bars in CHART led to subdued fights and 'short' fight times. Average fight times over several years were around 20-25 minutes, with some very short encounters of 10-15 minutes.

Some anglers expressed disappointment at the experience, having heard so much about how bluefin fight. CHART was a science program, and large numbers of fish coupled with 'short fight times' were seen as metrics of success.

In a recreational fishery, the metrics of success are different. Anglers may want to focus on the 'experience' of 1-2 harder fighting fish, rather than large numbers 'wound in'. Where does this leave us re the 'appropriate' fight times in a catch and release recreational fishery?



Experience of CHART fish caught on single lures, skirted deadbaits etc, as well as pre CHART bycatch, do provide some reference points.

Each fish is different, and we have a wide range of expertise in the fishery, but we also did amongst skippers in the first two years of CHART, and anglers throughout the three years.

It is difficult to pin down what 'the right' fight times should be, but we think some frame of reference for what is possible, is worth putting out there.

Fishing stand-up, (the majority of fights), on adequate rods/reels, ('50-80' or '80 class' rods, 50W or 80W reels), with the right harness/pad setup correctly, good angler technique and a good skipper on the helm), we would suggest you should be aiming to achieve the following.

Sub 200lb fish, less than 30 minutes  
200-350lb fish, less than 45 minutes  
350-500lb fish, less than 60 minutes  
500-600lb fish, less than 90 minutes.

These are a very rough, aspirational guide. The key point is that if you are consistently spending an hour on 200-250lb fish, or 90mins+ on 350-400lb fish, something needs to be addressed.

## SUMMARY POINTS

1. Hook up: You aim for a hook-up to boatside ratio in excess of 90% at the minimum. This is achievable as illustrated in three years of the CHART programme.
2. Hook Location: Use the right hook design, and size and you will mitigate deep hooking which could compromise fish welfare.
3. Fish condition: Using the right gear and techniques will bring fish boatside in a better condition and effective recovery protocols will improve it further.
4. Incidental mortality: CHART achieved world class low incidental mortality rates. Our fishery should aspire to maintain these in the 2-3% territory or better.
5. Post release mortality: CHART and ThunnusUK showed that the gear and techniques set out in this training material led to very low post release mortality rates. We must aspire to maintain this record.
6. Fight times.: The correct gear and techniques can avoid unnecessarily long and damaging fight times. Multi-hour fights are a sign of failure somewhere in the process, not a badge of honour.

Produced by the UK Bluefin Tuna Association in partnership with The Angling Trust and the Professional Boatman's Association



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