

Background... Proposal for Amendment to the Fishing Rules of the Solitary Islands GFC

The SIGFC is receiving increasing attention as a successful, independent game fishing club, with membership and tournament numbers trending solidly upwards, and a growing positive profile in the game fishing community. Specifically, our tag and release record is exemplary, and our tournament scoring system is already regarded as highly innovative and progressive.

Given that as a club, our record demonstrates that our members already refrain from indiscriminately killing marlin or sharks, we could get out in front of current and future sustainability movements in terms of billfish and shark conservation.

This is easily accomplished by altering our pointscore system to no longer award points for the capture of billfish and sharks, and making minor changes to our by-laws and rules.

Game fishing is already regarded as an elitist sport that is a soft target. Despite the appalling numbers of billfish and sharks killed by longliners and illegal sharkfinning, the power of commercial groups will always be ignored by conservationists wanting to make headlines, and the sport of game fishing will be the first target for excessive regulation. For example, some areas of Europe have already imposed regulations on recreational anglers that would make game fishing almost impossible were they applied here. This simple change could put our club at the front of any future sustainability movement, and would focus the attention of conservation groups and state fishing regulators on the remaining clubs that routinely kill these fish, leaving us as an example of the way forward in big game fishing.

Adopting this small change to the way we encourage (not compel mind you...), we could seriously increase the club's influence and credibility when interacting with the likes of Recfish, ANSA, GFAA, etc.

The tag and release only practice would apply just to billfish and sharks, not all other gamefish.

Skippers and crews would still have the option of weighing a billfish or shark; however, no points would accrue for a captured fish.

The inevitable “what if...” questions...

Q. What if a fish dies while being fought?

A. The fish could have its belly slit and be allowed to sink right there (beats having to tow it out 3 miles later anyway). A photo would probably be a very good idea. The boat can fill out the usual club billfish report sheet and annotate it as a fish that died during the fight, and the pointscorer will award 50% (or whatever the committee decides is appropriate) of the usual score.

Q. What about the Heavy Tackle Challenge?

A. It would clearly be less hypocritical and have little impact on the HTC participants' enjoyment and tournament results if this policy applied across the board, including to our increasingly successful and popular tournament.

Q. Would the policy apply to all our fishing?

A. No...just to billfish and sharks only as already noted. Points and rules for capture and weighing of all other gamefish (mahimahi, tuna, wahoo, etc...) would remain unchanged.

Q. Capture and weighing of billfish and sharks has always been a part of game fishing, and should therefore remain the skipper's option, why change?

A. See above. If you and your crew have ever discussed just what you'd do if you ever hooked up a potential grander and the discussion has revealed ambivalence about killing the fish, then maybe this policy is for you. On the other hand, if you have already decided that you'd kill any potential grander of big marlin that you got alongside, then you're probably not ready to vote for this small change yet... But just because we've always done it this way is no justification for continuing to act like Ernest Hemingway did and kill these noble adversaries when worldwide marlin and shark numbers are declining alarmingly. All the anecdotal evidence indicates a need

to do everything within our power to be high visibility advocates of sustainable game fishing practices and allow fish free to breed and fight another day. Studies conclude that breeding female blue marlin release between 7 million and 100 million eggs each time they spawn, and every time a large (and therefore female by definition) marlin is killed and hung, the marlin biomass is deprived of that breeding machine forever. This club can lead, or it can follow, and this is another way of showing that we're looking to the future, not back at the past...

Q. ANSA still advocates capture and record chasing of fish, what will they say?

A. Although ANSA has a history of weighing sport fish and maintains an extensive weighed fish records register, ANSA now heavily promotes its All-Tackle Length record register, and has an All Tackle Masters Length Only Award category, both of which are better suited to T&R angling where peak predators are involved. When our club was first established and sought ANSA affiliation, there was a short statement buried on ANSA's website history page written by one of ANSA's early office bearers that said it all... he basically noted that when it came to the satisfaction and reward of releasing a trophy fish versus killing the fish and hanging a piece of paper on the wall of his study, the choice was remarkably simple for him. ANSA has been very supportive throughout our history of this club's unique governance as a big game club in what is essentially a sportfishing association. During a recent discussion with ANSA's John Burgess, he made it clear that they'll support this proposal given that the primary focus of ANSA affiliated clubs is protection of game and sportfishing from multiple assaults and overregulation sponsored by misguided environmental activist groups. Also, as a single club initiative, the SIGFC can basically do as it wishes provided this does not violate any ANSA rules, which going to T&R (for billfish and shark fishing) clearly does not.

Q. What about a potential record billfish or shark?

A. See above. Existing national and international angling records are based on killing and weighing fish, and that is unlikely to change for some time yet. Skippers and crews could still capture and weigh a billfish if they believed it would be a record fish, and good luck to them... but it would not accrue any club points once killed and removed from the water.

Q. What are the IGFA's thoughts on this?

A. Jack Vitek, the IGFA outreach and education director, and Mike Myatt, the IGFA COO have both discussed this T&R proposal in a recent email exchange, and noted that while the IGFA record register is capture based and will not change in the foreseeable future, the IGFA has instituted a Trophy Fish Club program that recognises record fish based on measurement and release. This program is likely to be expanded to include billfish in the near future and would thus recognise trophy sized billfish that were properly measured before release.