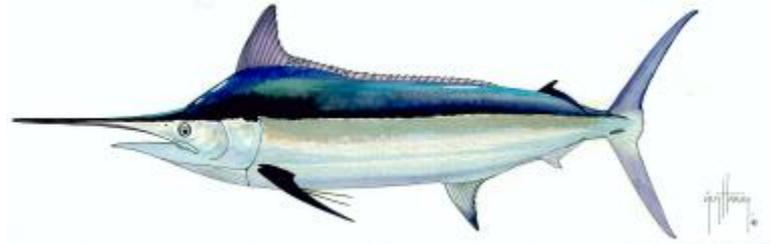


# BLACK MARLIN BULLETIN

NUMBER 4

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Samuel Williams & Dr. Julian Pepperell



## Attention all Billfish

### Anglers

### Black marlin fin clips needed

Despite the runs of adult and juvenile black marlin along the east coast of Australia, there has been relatively poor tag conversion, which has also returned low numbers of clips across the past couple of months. Only small numbers of black marlin have continued to turn up off Australia's west coast, but off Weipa, a pulse of fish resulted in a number of valuable samples being taken. In this fourth edition of the Black Marlin Bulletin we will have a look at bill morphology in particular malformed bills following an array of photos which I have had sent in since the start of the project. And as usual, we'll give an all-important update on our latest finclip entries.

### The Biography of Bills

Since the first newsletter I have started receiving a few pictures of billfish which have bent bills, no bills, forked bills or broken bills. The chances of finding individuals with different bill formations are not uncommon with many individuals being documented to have broken bills. The writings from early mariner expeditions commonly report the finding of marlin or swordfish bills embedded in the hulls of their wooden vessels. The incidences funnily enough attributed a fearsome reputation to billfishes under the assumption that they were attacking the vessels, however it is now believed that these snapped-off bills were the result of misdirected attacks on baitfish aggregating around the slowly moving ships. No doubt collisions between billfish and floating objects have been happening for centuries, such as this blue marlin bill which was found penetrating through a floating load hose on the FPSO Girassol in Angola.



This individual obviously didn't survive its fate however in many of these cases of forked or missing bills, the fish do survive and from angler accounts, appeared to behave normally during capture. However, it is quite likely that billfish with deformed or missing bills are at a disadvantage since the bill is primarily needed for maximum streamlining and hence maximum burst speed. This would mean that even though billfish carrying such injuries are still able to feed, they might not be as well conditioned as fully intact fish.



## Taking a sword to a gunfight



This image of the small black marlin with a broken bill was taken by Chris Nisbet from Broome Billfish Charters who commonly encounters fish with malformed bills. In an email he mentions about sailfish where he saw firsthand both the damage that can be done to a bill as well as what they can inflict on predator species. As he recalled,

*“We like everyone are having a huge problem with sharks and last week I saw retribution at its finest. We brought in a 15 to 18kg Sailfish & a 2-3m whaler shark honed in on him so we threw the bail arm to give him some room to get away...So what does the Sailfish do but turn around on the shark and speared it just behind the gill rakers. It busted 40mm off the*

*tip of his bill, but you should have seen the shark take off.”*

Obviously this recount you could say would be less common than most, however it does bring about an interesting question of whether larger Sails may not be worried by sharks?



The photo's above show a bill which has grown malformed into a bent shape, as well as what it looks like when you catch a bill-less marlin.

The photo to the left is an extract from Dr. Julian Pepperell's article entitles "rough upbringing for fork-billed sailfish", with the photo supplied by Terence 'bomber' Farrel a keen angler of Groote Eylandt who has also been trying to take samples to assist with this project.

Leader Board	
Angler	Clips
Jeda Ellens	15
Mick Mieres	7
Ben Bright	7
Nick Hill	6
Chris Nisbet	5
Josh Bruynzeel	4
Eddy Lawler	4
Rob Smith	4
Bernie Vale	3
Scott Macgowan	3
Brent Higgins	4
Talish Cook	2
Paddy Diamond	2
Duane Singlet	2
Glen Radon	2

## Fin Clipping Progress

### West Coast

From my feedback the runs of little black marlin have started to dry up on the west coast in combination with some poor weather conditions, which has resulted in not a great deal to report. If anyone has received any fin clips in Western Australia I am currently processing those samples as I write and it would be great if you could get in contact so that we can arrange shipping details.

### Weipa

The value of sample sizes for research cannot be understated and a high rate of sampling from the anglers in Weipa will fortunately allow us to treat this area as an independent location in our study with 18 samples in total being taken (15 since the newsletter began). The anglers who have taken samples over the last two months are Duane Jay, Darryl French, Dayan Villa and Ben Bright all with 1 extra apiece. Along with these efforts if you missed it, Ben Bright also managed to put together a great educational video on how to take a fin clip unassisted, which everyone should check out below!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWtLHZXnNa4>

### East Coast

The sole sample to report on the east coast comes in from Brent Higgins who managed to take one while fishing off Mooloolaba early last week. However despite the lack of samples one of the more exciting finds occurred off the east coast recently. Greg McIlroy who is a full-time mackerel fisher and charter operator out of Rainbow Beach was dragging a mackerel bail 2 meters behind the boat while untangling the line when a school of 5 or so little blacks about 700mm in length attacked the baits. At first they weren't sure if what they saw were mackerel or longtoms, but once this little black pictured below was hooked it didn't take long. Greg sent the whole fish down to us in Brisbane and we are hoping to do a number of things with it including a daily otolith count to work out its age (in days). To give you an idea of this fish compared to past baby blacks which have been aged a 3.9kg and 4kg fish caught off Cairns were both previously aged at 142 days, dating them back to an early October spawn. While the smallest black marlin which Julian Pepperell has aged was a 45cm fish caught off Jervis bay estimated at just 80 days old.

**Remember** that all participants mentioned have gained entries into the draw to win a signed copy of Dr Julian Pepperell's award winning book "Fishes of the Open Ocean" (one for each coast), which will now be drawn in early March.



Anthony Tysor	1
Craige McCulloch	1
Chris Davidson	1
Duane Jay	1
Darryl French	1
Dayan Villa	1
Annie B	1
Talisha Cook	1
Darren Lee	1
Adrian Gibson	1
Joanne Tatham	1
Adam Galash	1
Pual Leijser	1
Harrison Weeding	1
Kim Anderson	1
Kim Dennis	1
Zuri	1
Chris Thurkettle	1
Graeme Fisher	1
Allan Jackson	1
Tim Richardson	1
Greg Milliken	1
Warren Tucker	1
West Coast Total	45
Weipa Total	15
East Coast Total	31
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>91</b>