

LINE CLASS POINT SCORE
TAG & RELEASE
2010
SEASON REVIEW

A TIME FOR LEADERSHIP, COMMONSENSE
AND UNITY

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FORWARD

During the years leading up to the introduction of Line Class T&R Point score there has been an anti line class division from Southern Zone Clubs who believe that the system is not suitable for their members wishes. The new system was narrowly voted in at the 2009 AGM by club delegates. However the delegates voting for the resolution represented over 60% of the registered NSWGFA anglers and Clubs which collectively represent 73% of the marlin tagged in NSW waters since 2007 which could be considered a clear mandate. The anomalous voting system which favours smaller clubs resulted in the close vote and there still seems to be a desire by some individuals to continue to exploit the voting system anomaly. This situation has created unhealthy division in our sport. Post the introduction this season there was continuing criticism by some club individuals challenging their respective committees for voting for the new system, even before it got off the ground.

This document reviews the pros and cons of both sides of the argument and analysis the T&R trends evident from the first year of introduction of Line class T&R.

- The significant swing towards fishing 15kg line class for striped and black marlin
- The drop in the unnecessary use of 37kg line class to target striped and black marlin
- the eradication of the "no skill" juvenile Mahi Mahi tagging on inappropriate line class to create a "tournament tie- break" situation
- A healthy increase in the "marlin only" hook-up to tag ratios with 15kg ratios higher than 24kg. i.e Less fish are being lost during the fight.
- Encouraging evidence that striped and black marlin can be released quicker and in a healthier condition on 15kg line class with improved "angler skill" prevailing over heavier drag factors.

The aim of this document is to seek to remove the division from the argument and provide initiatives to NSWGFA Executive and club executives which could to take the heat out of the debate and restore harmony.

Our sport is under attack from well organised green environmentalist and Federal Government bodies who have an agenda to shut us down. If NSWGFA clubs and regions are seen as divided on a major initiative, which was designed to improve the sustainability and health of our marlin population, it would leave us highly vulnerable. The question that needs to be resolved is "how do we, as a sporting entity threatened by Government and Green pressures, restore unity".

It is a time for leadership from the NSWGFA President and Executive and respective club Presidents and Committees to ensure that we are a united team and our ability to survive is not hindered by different views on Rules and Systems which damage our sports credibility.

Tight Lines

Reub Hayes

President Broken Bay GFC

LINE CLASS TAG & RELEASE

2010 SEASON 1 REVIEW

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1 What were the perceived faults of the previous fixed points (non Line Class) point score system?

- it provided a means whereby anglers were encouraged to fish heavier than necessary (24kg & 37kg) to tag striped and black marlin resulting in unnecessary stress and damage to the fish. One of the prime reasons for a fixed point system was the contention that a quicker release on heavier tackle was better for the health of the fish.. It has now been demonstrated that this is dubious and most likely a higher drag rate meant that the fish has been subjected to unnecessary and damaging stress.
- It encouraged anglers to tag significant numbers of juvenile Mahi Mahi stock (average 2.2kg) from fish traps and FADS on 24kg and 37kg tackle to provide a tie break for tournament fishing. The mortality of this activity would have been very significant as putting a tag into a 2kg fish requires the fish to be put on the deck to remove the hooks and manhandled to insert the tag. Small Mahi Mahi are severely damaged when removed from the water in a "green" state and it is highly likely that the majority of these "tie-break" fish did not survive the trauma..
- The system did not recognise that the key to the survival of a tagged fish is the targeting of the species with a line class which does not apply undue stress. Fishing conditions and fish sizes are not constant as the fixed point system would infer. There are times when juvenile fish are more prevalent and these fish needed to be protected from being unnecessarily damaged on too heavier line class. The Juvenile Black Marlin (20kg – 30kg) runs of the late 1990's and early-mid 2000's were classic examples of the fixed line class system resulted in some thousands of fish being angled on an inappropriate line class (24kg & 37kg) with traumatic effects on the fish. It is highly likely that many of these fish did not survive..
- Competition is all about angler skill pitted against the fish. The system completely ignored recognizing "angler skill" on a fish which can fight effectively and substituted "drag factor" as the prime source retrieving a fish and earning points.
- GFAA Angling Rules and Regulations were formulated to promote ethical and sportsman-like angling practices.. These ethics apply to "capture" activity and have never been broadened to embrace Tag & Release. Game fishing in Australia has evolved to a position where 90-95%% of marlin angling activity is T&R and approx 5-10% capture. Hence only 5-10% of marlin angling activity was subject to a code of ethics and sportsman-like behaviour. The primary theme of the fixed point system was to encourage heavier than necessary tackle and tag as many fish as quickly as possible to avoid undue fish tress. Unfortunately, not only was it in conflict with the stated ethics of fishing it also has now been observed that the fighting of fish on unduly heavier tackle can significantly increased the stress on the fish.

The 'Flat" or "Fixed" point score system became outdated, lacked a code of ethics and was based on the now questionable premise that quick fights on heavier tackle (drag) were in the best interests of a fish's survival

2. What were the main objections to the introduction of Line Class T&R?

This is a confusing question to answer. Despite substantial scientific evidence and research supporting the proposals, no meaningful argument was ever been documented or tabled to argue a case for non-adoption. For over a decade Southern Zone Clubs has used a voting block against the introduction without any documented data supporting their objections

Most objections appeared to be based on the contention that Southern Zone was different to the rest of the State because the fish are "bigger". Hence they need heavier tackle to target their marlin and would be disadvantaged if a point score which encouraged lighter line was introduced. The disadvantage of lower points being received for blue marlin tags on heavy tackle was also raised as an issue.

The other argument was that fishing lighter line would result in a substantial increase in busted off fish and severely damaged fish due to longer fighting times. The premise was that fish caught quickly on heavier tackle can be released quicker in better condition (The main basis for a flat point score which encouraged anglers to fish substantially heavier than necessary).

Immediately post the introduction of line class T&R there was some criticism from a small, but vocal group of individuals taking to task their Club committees for voting for the proposal. Again the dialogue was loud – and predicted disaster with damaged fish and longer fights the main objections.

Most of these objections assumed that the average club and tournament skippers and anglers would rush off and start fishing light tackle to maximise points with disastrous consequences for the fish and our sport's reputation.

Summary

- Southern Zone is "different" Our fish are bigger We target Blue Marlin and need to use heavy tackle.
- Larger Blue Marlin T&R are not adequately rewarded under Line Class T&R as heavier tackle is required to target them
- Heavier tackle on fish will result in quicker releases and is more humane.
- Line class T&R will result in less tags through lost fish and greater damage to the fish from prolonged fights.

3. How these objections have stacked-up now that Line class T&R is a reality and has a "Benchmark" to measure

- i) Southern Zone is "different". The fish are bigger and they need to fish heavier to be competitive.

Work done by NSW DPI fisheries report on NSW Gamefish monitoring, released in 2007, showed that the black, striped and blue marlin along the NSW coast are basically the same source stock and average weights of species may differ from year to year between Northern, Central & Southern Zones. Using data from tag card estimated weights the following data was provided:

Average size of marlin tagged by Zone 1993-2005

	Northern Zone	Central Zone	Southern
Striped Marlin	74.8kg	84.1 kg	89.1kg
Black Marlin	41.3kg	50.3kg	87.0kg
Blue Marlin	No trend or difference between Zones		

This data could be interpreted that Southern Zone does tag heavier fish. The major distortion between Zone weights is black marlin. It is acknowledged that the massive influx of Juvenile Black marlin (15-30kg) do not generally migrate to Southern Zone waters. There is not a lot of merit in opposing Line Class T&R and discouraging Central and Northern Zone anglers from angling more humanely on these juvenile fish when, Southern Zone anglers don't have access to them.

The question is "Does it make a scrap of difference if the fish are bigger?". Southern Zone Clubs generally only fish in their own waters. The presence of Southern Zone boats at the NSW Interclub was less than 3% of the fleet and Southern Zone fishing activities in Central and Northern Zones tournaments is small. Hence there is no disadvantage because the point score is only relevant to their waters. Consequently, their members can individually decide which line class they wish to target their fish on relevant to what is available in their waters, just the same as anglers in other Zones. It's a level playing field. If Southern Zone anglers wish to fish heavier – so be it. It's their competition and their judgement. Regardless, it can be seen that the average weight of striped and black marlin was less than 100 kg across the board, which hardly justifies the use of heavy tackle.

- ii) Larger Blue Marlin are not adequately rewarded under Line Class T&R as heavier tackle is necessary to target them.

The question of needing heavier tackle to target Blue marlin is common to all Zones and is a valid issue for consideration. However, blue marlin is not a prolific species in NSW. Blue marlin represent around 6% of total tagged billfish. So the decision that needs to be made by the individual is "do you want to fish heavier to ensure you are more adequately equipped in the event that you encounter a

blue marlin. If that is the view, the statistical odds demonstrate that you will likely go a full season and not see a blue marlin. The odds of encountering a blue marlin for tagging are around one in twenty. Hence the odds show that you will tag an average of twenty 70 – 100kg black and striped marlin on tackle heavier than necessary, with substantially less angler skill and a huge amount of “drag factor” damage, before you encounter one blue marlin. Also when large blue marlin are around the word quickly spreads and anglers gear up accordingly.

The other philosophical issue is one which only the individual can judge. If you, as a T&R Boat, catch a decent blue marlin are you going to “Capture” it or “Tag” it. Usually such a fish is a once a season event and will take out the prestigious heaviest marlin award for your club or tournament. NSW fishing records show that around 40% of blue marlin angled are captured and only 60% tagged, compared with less than 5% captured for black and striped marlin.

So basically blue marlin are being fished for under the guise of a T&R specie, but four out of ten T&R boats would capture a decent blue if it came their way in T&R fishing.

This is the dilemma. The T&R point score system is designed for T&R anglers – not capture anglers. Most capture boats who target marlin angle 15kg and some 24kg. So if we have a flat point score we can fish heavier than necessary without penalty on smaller fish, and if we, by luck, just happen to pick up a nice blue we can win a capture prize.

There is nothing wrong with having the option to take a fish if you wish. It’s your call – But ethically, should you expect a T&R point score system to be structured to encourage the option to kill a blue marlin while you are placing unnecessary “drag stress” on the 20 or so smaller striped or black marlin which are the predominant marlin specie in NSW waters. That is what has happened under the old flat points T&R system. There clearly has been a problem, and in this environment of increased scrutiny from environmental and Government agencies, the killing around 40% of Blue marlin angled on T&R boats leaves our sport vulnerable to attack.. This is not a good look for our sport and hard to defend.

If a boat is targeting Blue Marlin and fishing heavy for the full season, they are probably not doing themselves a favour. Successful fishing strategies tend focus on targeting what is out there which is usually gleaned from the reliable “grapevine”. If there is a dominant presence of blue marlin, then gear up for it and enjoy the experience. But don’t criticise the Line Class point score system on an event which has a 1:20 chance of succeeding.

The tagging of a larger blue marlin on heavier line class will earn lower points than a striped or black on lighter line. This is a an anomaly and if members or clubs feel strongly enough they can propose a resolution to alter the line class tag points for Blue marlin to say, 13,500 on 15kg, 12,500 points on 24kg and 11500 points on 37kg could be put to the next NSWGFA AGM. This would remove the anomaly and hopefully be a greater incentive to tag, rather than capture, blue marlin.

iii) Heavier tackle on fish will result in quicker releases and is more humane.

This contention was the main plank of the underlying structure of a flat T&R point score system. It seems logical enough but only took one season of line class T&R to demonstrate that it is highly questionable. Basically the contention was dubious to start with but now considered, highly unlikely,

The NSW DPI review (2007) on tournament monitoring study provide, the following conclusions in comparing the then line class capture point score with the then fixed point T&R system were made.

“Points awarded for weighed fish (Captured) increase with decreasing line strength. This incentive is to encourage anglers to use lighter lines and with the purpose of improving the ‘sport’ by increasing the fish’s chance of escape.

The fixed-point system for tagged fish encourages heavier lines to be used by anglers intending to tag fish as it reduces the fight time and increases the opportunity for more captures. Hence fight times are often short for tagged fish in tournaments.”

That has been the official view for the past 25 years from the time T&R was a small part of game fishing. Today it is over 90% and with many anglers now seasoned in T&R with over 20 years of observation, there is emerging evidence that there is a major flaw in the contention that quicker fights on heavier tackle results is beneficial to the fish. The reality is that heavier tackle than necessary on a lighter fish places a substantially more lethal strain on the fish and the angler is having a “free kick” as the fish is severely restricted in its ability to fight. The reason should have been obvious and, for 20 years or more, our sport supported a point score system which encourages using heavier tackle on light fish “for the good of the fish!”

The heavier the drag placed on a fish the more difficult it is for the fish to fight effectively. It is subdued quicker because it has been ‘smashed” by the heavier the tackle the greater distress placed on the fish. It’s like matching a light or middle weight boxer with a heavy weight. It’s all over quick – but the damage can be immense. The first real evidence of this was in the 1998 interclub when over 852 juvenile black marlin averaging 20 – 30kg were tagged on mainly on 24kg and 37kg line class. Numerous dead marlin were tagged and released at the boat. Many died because they were unable to fight and were keel-hauled often being lost because the exhausted fish’s abrasive bill was wedged across the leader.

The 1998 Interclub was the “extreme” case of damage inflicted under the flat point score system. However, the line class used should be based on what can be demonstrated as the optimum line class drag which is sufficiently heavy to subdue the targeted fish specie in a reasonable fight time without damaging it.

We know we are mainly targeting on average black or striped marlin with an average weight of 70 – 100kg and, for a point score benchmark we should be focusing on what impact the line class and subsequent drag has on the fight time of such a fish.

From the analysis of data obtained from the 2010 Interclub (see table below) 258 marlin were tagged on 15kg and 24kg line class, it is apparent that the fighting time on 24kg is no different to 15kg.

This result is despite the fact that the drag exerted on 24 kg is 60% greater than 15kg (5kg vs 8kg). What does this mean? It means that the 15kg fish is most likely fresher and has had substantially less punishment than the 24kg angled fish.:

2010 Interclub Marlin Tagged "All Boats " vs "Top 3 teams" Line Class Fight Time Analysis

	Fish Tagged 15kg	Fight Time mean	Fish Tagged 24kg	Fight Time mean	Fish Tagged total	Fight Time mean
Total All boats 15/24kg line	75	28.6	183	29.1	258	28.93
Total Top 3 teams	32	15.3	55	19.6	87	18
NPSGFC Top team Born free, Billistic, Gunrunner, Diversion, Seaka	19	15.7	23	15.6	42	15.7
BROKEN BAY 2nd place In a Meeting, Black Pete, Aluhra Gorilla, Frosty	13	14.6	10	16.4	23	15.4
LMGFC 3rd Place Running Bear, Weapon, Amokura			22	25.1	22	25.1

This analysis puts in question that fishing heavier does not necessarily reduce the fight time, it most likely increases the "Drag Kill" as extra drag makes the fish fight harder

The major points of this analysis are:

- From the 191 boats fishing 75 marlin were tagged on 15kg line class and 183 marlin on 24kg line class. The average fight time for 15kg was 28.6 minutes and the average fight time for 24kg was 29.1minutes
- Thus from the entire angler range from novice to skilled, there was no meaningful difference in average angling time between 15kg and 24kg despite a 60% greater "drag kill" inflicted on 24kg fight
- When this sample is broken down to the 87 marlin tagged by the top three champion teams, where it would be expected that angling skills are superior, the outcome is even more dramatic. The angling time on 15kg line class was 15.3 minutes vs 19.6 minutes on 24kg line class
- Thus despite almost 40% less drag applied to the twenty three 15kg fish, the fighting time was 22% less than the 24kg line class sample.

Another smaller sample (87 Marlin) from three Broken Bay GFC T&R boats marlin fishing both 24kg and 15kg line class shows a similar trend:

Broken Bay GFC - 3 years 2008/10 Marlin Fighting Times - 15kg vs 24kg

	15kg Fish	Fight Time mins Ave	24kg Fish	Fight Time mins Ave.
In a Meeting	21	23.8	26	33
Murrifin	14	26.1	11	20.6
Black Pete	4	7.5	11	24.1
Average Fght Time	39	22.9	48	28.2

These three T&R boats fished the last three seasons on both 15kg and 24kg with basically the same skipper and crew, The mean fighting time on 24kg was 23% greater than on 15kg

From this data it is evident that for the marlin source we are targeting in NSW waters, there appears to be a "sweet spot" at 15kg line class where "angler skill" exceeds 'drag factor" . The fight time is less and from angler observations, the fish released healthier having been subjected to less drag strain.

iv.) Line class T&R will result in less tags through lost fish and greater damage to the fish from prolonged fights

Clearly, from the information we have on 15kg fish that have been successfully caught are being released in the same, or better, time span as 24kg, then the prospect of meaningful damage from a prolonged fight should be obviously less.

The objection appears to be related the experience of capture anglers where the line class fished can be taken to the limit on light tackle to gain the maximum points. This is an intentional strategy and is basically fishing "on the edge" . Line class T&R is not designed for "on the edge" angling. It is designed to reduce unnecessary drag on the fish which provides harmony between angling skill and "drag factor stress" . During the first season of Line class T&R there has been no evidence whatsoever of anglers seeking to fish" on the edge" of line class limits.

The most visible data to judge whether there is a trend to greater "edge" fishing is the Hook-up to release success. This data from a published DPI report (Park 2007) was collected from tournament Skeds since 1997 and can measured from the "Hook-up" rate vs the "catch" rate.

Hook-up to capture/release data 1997 – 2005 Measured hook-ups and Capture/release per boat

	Hook-up rate	Catch rate	%
Billfish /Tuna & Sportfish Trolling	1.13	0.74	66%
Black Marlin Charter boats (1990's)	1.89	0.90	48%

Using this data as the benchmark and comparing it with the three most recent tournaments post the introduction of Line Class T&R point score, there are no trends which would indicate that more fish are

being lost during fighting.

	Hook-ups	Releases	% Tagged
AIBT 2010 (Marlin only)	77	59	77%
Top 3 T&R Teams 2010 Interclub (Marlin only)	115	87	76%
Broken Bay Invitational (marlin only)	217	168	77%
Top 10 T&R Marlin boats Broken Bay Invitational 2010	91	82	90%

This data shows that there is a significant improvement in the “marlin only” data which is more representative of where there would be an impact if line class T&R point score system was creating riskier and more damaging angling practices.

Preliminary data from the I & I NSW Gamefish Tournament Monitoring Program are shown in the table below. These data provide the proportion of fish that were hooked up and successfully caught in the NSW Interclub Tournament from 1998 to 2010. Boats included in these figures were those who had tagged at least one billfish during each annual event. There are no significant differences in these trends in recent years, including the 2010 post line class T&R point score introduction.

Port Stephens Interclub 1998 - 2010 Marlin "Catch to Hook-up" Trends

	1998 -2003 %	2004 - 2009 %	1998 - 2009 %	2010 %
Mean Catch / Hook-up Ratios	62	70	67	75

It can be seen from these data that there is no perceivable trend that would suggest that the introduction of line class T&R has had a negative impact on tag rates as a consequence of a higher rate of “bust-offs”. There is likely to be other factors such as bait types used that are influencing these trends. The 2010 catch to hook-up ratio post Line Class T&R was 10% higher than 2009, 5% higher than the average of the previous 6 years and 9% higher than the average of the past 12 years.

There has been no evidence of “fringe line class angling” for striped and black marlin in T&R competitions or increased “bust-offs” reflected in hook-up to catch ratios for billfish tag and release boats. Only a greater swing towards 15kg line class at the expense of 37kg.

4. What have been the trends and outcomes of the first season of line class T&R? .

The main aim of the Line Class T&R was to provide a system which provided a more humane method of tagging Marlin whereby the unnecessary drag stress factor is reduced, or eliminated and the fish have been released in quicker time with less stress during the fight and less damage on release. This by definition means that the aim is to encourage fishing lighter where appropriate and focus more on "angler Skill" than "Drag stress factor".

A secondary aim was to remove the unnecessary and undesirable activity of tagging Juvenile Mahi Mahi on 24 kg and 37kg line class to provide a tie break in competitions.

On any measure the first year has been a resounding success. The Interclub, AIBT and Broken Bay invitational Tournaments collectively tagged 621 marlin and provided a substantial data base to provide a meaningful sample of statistical outcomes.

1. Line Class Selection

There has been a very significant reduction in the use of 37kg line class and a major surge in 15kg line class in the targeting of striped and black marlin. The tables below shows the difference in data collected from Broken Bay GFC records over the past 5 years on a sample of 505 marlin tagged and compares it with the 2010 data from the three major Tournaments (Interclub, AIBT and Broken Bay Invitational) plus Broken Bay Point score data to date

LINE CLASS PREFERENCE TRENDS - MARLIN 2005 -2010

2005 2009 PRE T&R POINT SCORE CHANGE

BBGFC DATA	15KG OR LESS	24KG	37KG OR MORE	TOTAL
MARLIN TAGGED	55	397	53	505
% Tagged by Line class	11%	79%	10%	

2010 POST T&R POINT SCORE CHANGE Interclub AIBT & Broken Bay Data

	15KG OR LESS	24KG	37KG OR MORE	TOTAL
MARLIN TAGGED	201	407	13	621
% Tagged by Line class	32%	66%	2%	

The main highlights are :

A threefold increase in the preference for 15kg line class from 11% to 32%

An 80% reduction in the use of 37kg line class from 10% to 2%

A 16% reduction in 24kg line class from 79% to 66%

2. Improved marlin Hook-up to Tag Outcomes

One of the major objections to the introduction on a line class point score was the claims by opponents that there would less fish tagged due to the increased loss fish during fighting. The data from the 2010 season is emphatic that this has not happened. Indeed, in the first year hook-up to capture rates have increased, in some cases significantly.

The data from all three tournaments show increased hook-up to tag outcomes compared with historical data. This data is shown of Page 12. This shows that the marlin hook-up /Tag ratio for the season was around 75% – 77%. Data extracted from Broken Bay Invitational Tournament Sked sheets broke this data down further into line class outcomes. This is shown below:

Line Class Hook-up ratio 2010 Analysis

BROKEN BAY INVITATIONAL 2010

Tagged Marlin by Species	Striped 146	Black 15	Blue 7	Total 168
Line Class	37kg	24kg	15kg and Less	
Hooked marlin by Line Class	12	143	62	217
Tagged Marlin by Line Class	5	110	53	168
Hook-up to Tag rate%	42%	77%	85%	77%

This data shows that there was an 85% hook-up to Tag on 15kg compared with 77% for 24kg and 42% on 37kg. These are exceptional figures and although taken from a small sample, certainly is sufficient to question the theory that lighter line angling under this point Score will result in less tags. The data from the top 10 Boats is even more impressive as seem below:

Broken Bay Invitational 2010 Top 10 T&R Boats "Hook-up to Tag" Data

Marlin Tagged	24kg	15kg	Total	Fish lost	Fish hooked	Tag rate%
Bite Me		11	11	0	11	100%
Born free	2	9	11	0	11	100%
Rivenge	11		11	0	11	100%
Smart Bill	9	1	10	2	12	83%
Black Pete	/	2	9	1	10	90%
Adrenalin	7		7	0	7	100%
In a Meeting	1	5	6	2	8	75%
Murfin		6	6	0	6	100%
Amokura	6		6	2	8	75%
Aluhra	2	3	5	2	7	71%
Total Fish	45	37	82	9	91	90%
15kg / 24kg Split	55%	45%				

It can be seen from this data that the top boat, "Bite Me", fished exclusively on 15kg line and achieved a 100% hit rate. "Born Free" came second also with a 100% rate with nine on their eleven fish tagged on 15kg. With 55% angled on 24kg and 45% on 15kg, in this sample of 91 hook-ups, there clearly was no impediment by fishing 15kg line. The top three boats all tagged 11 marlin with the line class "skill factor" differentiating the places, rather than a count-back or Juvenile Mahi Mahi tags.

3 Quicker Fight times on Lighter tackle

The main arguments against the new system was that lighter tackle would lead to longer battles and greater stress placed on the fish. This subject has been covered in Section 3 iii. The data is irrefutable that this does not happen. The lighter line enables the fish to fight without the Impediment of unnecessary drag. The data shows that there was no difference in striped and black marlin fight times between 15kg and 24kg in the 2010 interclub, but more importantly at the top end of the field, the boats fishing 15kg line class angled on average 22% quicker than 24kg anglers. This trend has been confirmed in Broken Bay Club Boats during the past three years where the 15kg angled fish fight times were 19% less than those the angled on 24kg, See page 10

4 Elimination of Juvenile Mahi Mahi Tagging for Tournament Tie-Breaks

Juvenile Mahi Mahi for Tie-Breaks on medium and heavy tackle from FADS or fish traps, is now a thing of the past. The line class point score provides a points differentiation based on angling skill and no tournaments in 2010 have been decided on mahi mahi tags as the point of differentiation as has been common practice in previous years. Mahi Mahi that have been hooked as a natural by-catch whilst targeting marlin is a fact of life, as are Tuna, and are usually significantly larger mature stock.

5 Angling Skill is becoming a more important part of competition and fishing ethics are enhanced.

The almost disappearance of 37kg line class angling from our tournaments, where Striped and Black marlin were the predominant target species, and focus on 15kg and 24kg as the preferred line class, is important. It restores ethics to T&R angling and provides compliance with GFAA's aims to promote ethical and sportsman-like angling practices within our sport. It provides a uniform ethic code between both T&R and Capture angling and has increased our ability to release more fish in a more healthy state.

The eliminations of the mahi mahi tie-break activity also significantly enhances the ethical and sportsman-like image of our sport. Furthermore, the more recent trend to switch baiting has meant that many of these fish have been hooked on circle hooks (mandatory for live baits) which are proven to significantly enhance survival rates and reduce stress during the fight. Switch baiting will often allow the angler to choose the most appropriately weighted outfit for the fish sighted. This provides the opportunity to choose a lighter and more rewarding line class.

5 How do we get united leadership in NSWGFA to ensure the sustainability of our sport?

The division created by the Southern Zone anti tag & release stance has been long standing and deep-seated. This may still be the case but if a Southern Zone Block persist with their "anti" crusade with no scientific evidence to support their claims, the divisions within NSWGFA clubs and zones could soar to new levels. It most likely will provide divisions in many clubs who so far have been operating in reasonable harmony with their members. Thus, not only do they run the risk of further dividing the Zones, we could well be sowing the seeds of disharmony within our own clubs

If we are to survive the external challenges from environmentalist and Governments with agendas to ultimately shut us down, we need total commitment and unity amongst our leadership and membership. This can only be achieved by strong and bipartisan leadership from the NSWGFA .

To quell the division and get unity back into our sport, NSWGFA must take the leadership role. They need to ignore geographical partisan biases and focus on eliminating the division within NSW clubs and seek a solution to resolve it with dignity and diplomacy to all parties.

The line Class T&R system in its first year, from the data collected, has been successful and has become increasingly supported in competition by Central Zone and Lower Northern Zone clubs as the season progressed. It has achieved significant progress in providing a more sustainable and humane angling attitudes and provides us with further ammunition for us to fight the forces who wish to shut our sport down.

Basically, NSWGFA needs take full charge of the debate and defuse the innuendo, misinformation and non-scientific bias from well intended commentators who believe their theory, but have no meaningful proof or data to substantiate their claims.

The establishment of a point score Sub-Committee with scientific representation to analyse and review T&R point score submissions would be a significant step forward and focus all quality debate into a bipartisan forum free of anger, division and disharmony.

Such a Committee could include ideally two respected and experienced T&R Specialists from each Zone to work as a team under NSWGFA direction together with well respected scientific specialists from DPI or other organisations.

Another initiative to defuse the situation would be for NSWGFA to allow the Clubs who prefer the old system to use it in their local club competitions if they wish. It does appear that the main antipathy to the new system is coming from the more southern NSW clubs and the northern-most NSW club. Because of distance factors these clubs have minimal participation in the mainstream tournament scene and are of the view that their waters, and fishing conditions, are different and not conducive to a line class T&R system. These clubs collectively represent less than 40% of NSWGFA registered anglers and only 27% of the NSW Clubs collective marlin tagging activity

6 What can you do to help?

To remove the heat from the divisions created by the line class issue, we all need to reflect on what is important for our sport. What do we want out of our fishing experience?

- A quality club social environment is probably the first thing.
- Pit angler skills fairly against our quarry (As per Tuny club's root vision for our sport)
- We want to catch a lot of quality fish in the most humane manner possible.
- We want a spirit where we treat our activity as a competitive sport where honesty, ethics and camaraderie prevail. We also want to have fun free of conflict.

Whilst strong leadership in our respective Club Committees and NSW Executive can lay the foundation only you, as an individual, can have a significant impact by ensuring that you are on sound grounds if you wish to challenging the system. Some members will always have some opposing views on some aspect of fishing and healthy debate and discussion is a good thing and is usually respected if it is well thought out and credible.

As an angler, or skipper, you have the option to choose how you fish. Capture or T&R, Lures or live or dead baits, target marlin, tuna or shark, use light, medium or heavy tackle, Fish close, wide, north, south, on the shelf, off the shelf, drift or troll etc.... , All of these choices are yours and your skill or luck in getting the right formula for the day can rely on numerous factors. Most boats and anglers have a preferred formula which suits their boat and crew's style of fishing.

Much of the anti debate on line class T&R seems to be based on an individual's "preferred formula" perceived as not being conducive to the new points score system. I.e. it possibly won't necessarily suit the way they have preferred to fish. Most of the early "heat" was pre season before a line was wet. Now the season is coming to the close, compelling evidence is proving that striped and black marlin are being angled as competently on 15kg as they are on 24kg. Not only is the angling skill greater on 15kg, but also it leaves the released fish in better condition with no increase in fight times and less drag

inflicted on the fish. And importantly the angler is rewarded with additional points.

If you think that fishing lighter for greater points is wrong give it a try before slamming it. You may be surprised at the buzz in seeing a healthy 100kg marlin angled on 15kg and released in superior condition. During the 2010 Interclub seven of the top 13 scoring boats in the top three teams, fished primarily 15kg, or a mix of 15kg and 24kg. 6 only fished exclusively 24kg..

In the Broken Bay Tournament, only three of the top ten boats fished exclusively 24kg. Of the remaining seven boats, five fished primarily 15kg and the winning boat with 11 fish fished 100% 15kg with a 100% hook-up to tag ratio. 37kg did not rate.

45% of the fished tagged by the top ten boats were on 15kg. This compares with "zero" tagged on 15kg in the previous year's event. So clearly a lot of competent skippers and anglers have successfully embraced the concept of fishing with greater skill to release healthy fish.

Basically don't create waves because you think the system does not suit the way you have previously angled. The new point score system is all about what is better for the fish, and recognises the skill of the angler.

We need to ensure that we all work together and have a focus on fighting for the survival of our sport, and allow our executive and Club Committees to focus on the broad issues of survival rather than dividing ourselves over a Point score system and weakening our ability to defend our sport.

7 Possible Initiatives to Improve Line Class Point Score and Remove Divisions

With the first season almost behind us, and plenty of data on how anglers have responded, it is worthwhile looking at ways of possibly improving it further to suit angler preferences.

- Simplify the system to embrace three line class categories rather than five

One of the obvious outcomes is that anglers have significantly reduced the use of 37kg for targeting striped and black marlin, and 60kg is almost non-existent. At the other end of the spectrum, there has been very little marlin T&R angling activity below 15kg. Over 97% of marlin T&R activity in the three major NSW 2010 Tournaments analysed in this paper were on 15kg and 24kg. There has been no significant trend to fish lighter than 15kg in the first year of the new system.

Hence a simpler system may be to only have three points of differentiation, rather than five.

Current System:

	10kg & Below	15kg	24kg	37kg	60kg
Marlin points	12500	11500	10000	8500	7500

Possible Alternatives

	15kg and below	24kg	37kg and above
Marlin Points	11500	10000	8500

Other species can be similarly adjusted to reflect the concept.

This formula reflects the recommendations of the NSWGFA Committee formed to review the new point score a few years ago.

- **NSWGFA establish a Sub-Committee to Monitor Line Class T&R Data and Trends**

The establishment of a point score Sub-Committee with scientific representation (Julian Pepperell? DPI etc.) to analyse and review T&R point score submissions would be a significant step forward and focus all quality debate into a bipartisan forum free of emotion, division and disharmony. It would also remove "club politics" from the debate. The terms of reference for such a Committee could be:

To act as a focus point to review all aspects of the Line Class T&R Point Score to ensure that aims of providing a more humane system are sustained and improved.

To provide a forum for all submissions on T&R point score issues and focus the debate in a professional and informed and scientific environment and to report to members annually.

- **Reclassify base points for the Blue Marlin specie to remove the anomaly.**

Each billfish species has a points classification. Sailfish and short-billed spearfish are around half the size of striped and black marlin and are allocated half the points (5000 base vs 10000). Blue marlin are around 50% larger than Blacks and Striped but receive the same points.

Under the line class T&R point score a 250kg Blue marlin angled on 37kg line class will earn 8500 points. Whereas a 100kg striped marlin angled on 15kg will score 11500 points. Both are 6.7 times line class releases and would be regarded as a pretty good achievement.

By reclassifying the blue marlin species to a higher point level, to reflect the larger size, could remove this anomaly. Under a three line class category point score system the following amendments could be considered

	15kg and below	24kg	37kg and above
Blue Marlin Points	13500	12500	11500

In the example above both the 100kg striped marlin on 15kg, and the 250kg Blue marlin on 37kg are 6.7 times released and receive the same points (11500) thus removing the anomaly. Such a change may also provide a greater incentive not to kill the fish and hopefully work to significantly reduce the present 40% capture statistic. Increasing the minimum weight for blue marlin capture to say 150kg may also assist reducing this unhealthy trend.

- Provide the ability for dissenting clubs to fish the flat line class System for their Club competitions

Such an initiative, if successful could quickly defuse the situation.. If a club felt strongly enough, and had the majority support of their members, they could perhaps put such a resolution to the NSWGFA AGM to fish the old system within their own club environment. The pro line class clubs most likely would not be concerned if a minority group of clubs wanted to go down that route and probably would support such resolution as long as it did not impinge on the operation of the principles of existing line class system. Thus those Clubs who prefer the old system would be allowed to use it exclusively within their club competitions.

A simpler alternative would be for the club to reclassify its T&R trophy list to the most "number of fish" tagged by species (if they are not already doing this).

