

Cooperative Science Services, LLC Dolphinfish Research Program

Made possible by a grant from the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation

July 2017



An Exciting Change

I have to say that I have never given thought to writing a newsletter like this one. Time has flown by. Do you realize that this study has completed 15 ½ years? Eleven and a half years have been as a private research program, funded solely by private donations, a concept that many scientific researchers said would never work. But it did work and it worked very well, as shown by the study's amazing achievements. It has roughed out the migration routes of dolphinfish in the western North Atlantic Ocean. It is the first research program to document the migration route of dolphinfish in any ocean.

The program's success was achieved only through the efforts of more than 1,300 privately owned vessels, and more than 2,700 fishermen who either tagged or recaptured fish, as well as several hundred fishermen, clubs, foundations, organizations, and businesses that provided the funding that allowed this program to operate. Their efforts resulted in more than 21,000 dolphin tagged and 550 tagged fish reported recovered. This is an outstanding accomplishment.

There were three primary goals originally set for this study: identify migration routes, begin documenting the natural behavior of the animal, and stimulate addition research on dolphinfish. I am proud to say that all of these goals have been met. The program continually found that once it answered one question, it often led to another question to be answered. There is always more research that is needed.

In today's world of science with its ever-evolving high technological tools, I find myself feeling dated, like a transistor radio. While I marvel at what these high tech tools can accomplish, I am lost at understanding how they operate. But, one of my colleagues who I have worked

with for six years has an insatiable appetite for technology and new methods of analyzing data, and that is Wessley Merten. I have been working with Wess since 2011 when he began work on his Ph.D. in marine sciences at the University of Puerto Rico. I have joined with him in publishing five papers about dolphinfish that appeared in peer reviewed scientific journals.

You have probably already guessed that I am announcing my retirement as director of the Dolphinfish Research Program. Dr. Merten will assume operation of the Dolphinfish Research Program beginning January 1, 2018. In preparation for becoming the lead on the program, he has founded a 501 (c) (3) organization, [*Beyond Our Shores, Inc.*](#) to provide financial, accounting, marketing, and scientific support for the Dolphinfish Research Program. I will be serving on the Board of Directors, along with 6 other individuals who have been integral in the success of the DRP through the years. In my role on the Board, I will be consulting on projects and providing advice and assistance where needed. I will also continue to conduct my local research on the recreational dolphin harvest at Ripley Light Marina and Yacht Club in 2018, as well as other site-specific research that may develop. Concurrently, Wess and I along with other scientists, plan to carry out more detailed analyses of the vast volumes of data that have already been collected; Results from this work will be included as articles in newsletters and other forms of communication that will be managed and produced by *Beyond Our Shores, Inc.*

All aspects of the Dolphinfish Research Program will remain under my supervision through December 31, 2017. Any tags that you have on hand at the end of 2017 will still be good to use in the future. Participating anglers should continue to contact Don Hammond using the same contact information as in the past.

Even with the recent increase in abundance of the young-of-the-year fish, I am concerned about the health of the western North Atlantic dolphinfish stock. I urge all of the anglers who are currently tagging fish and those

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individuals, clubs, businesses and foundations who have provided financial support to the DRP to continue their involvement with the program in the future. Now, the program is going to be supported by the direction of a Board of Directors, along with a team of scientists and anyone dedicated to the study and conservation of dolphinfish, associated species, and impacted economies.



It is time that I spent more time fishing for the species that I have devoted my life to studying, such as this nice dolphin that I caught and tagged off Isla Mujeres, Mexico, on Thomas McMurray's boat Makara during a tagging expedition in the Yucatan Strait.

The Future of the Dolphinfish Research Program

I vividly remember the first phone call I had with Don Hammond. It was August 2009 and I had just started my Ph.D. thesis research on dolphinfish at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez, working with Dr. Richard Appeldoorn. A quick search on the internet led me to the Dolphinfish Research Program (DRP) so I quickly made contacting Don my top priority. I called Don, and he was eager to learn my research plan. He said, "So, you want to study dolphinfish in Puerto Rico?" Have you met Manuel Botello yet?" At that time, I had not, but I quickly learned that if I was going to be a successful research fishery biologist, I needed to collaborate and work with fishermen, and I was very excited about the opportunity to do so. Over the course of the ensuing 5 years, I embarked on numerous fishing outings not only with Manuel but dozens

of other fishermen, all which helped me deploy a handful of satellite tags and numerous plastic dart tags, as well as collect hundreds of dolphinfish tissue samples that I used in my thesis. Without the collaboration of those hardworking and dedicated Captains and crews, my dream of becoming a research fishery biologist would not have been realized. Since then, outreach and education has been one of my top priorities as a scientist.

As Founder and President of Beyond Our Shores, Inc., the organization I founded to support the DRP, the following are the top three programmatic themes I wish to emphasize with the Program:

1. **Expand the Program** – I will strive to involve more fishermen in the program and help those that are participating continue to make a big impact. To achieve this goal, the Board of Directors and I are doing an extensive 16 year review of the Dolphinfish Research Program. My goal with the review and this theme is simple: to learn from what did and did not work as well as strengthen the program by listening to those that have contributed to the program over the years.
2. **Outreach and Education**– I will work to educate the youth of America about dolphinfish and the importance of this species to U.S. recreational and commercial fisheries. Included in this theme is my goal to continue publishing the program's results in scientific journals, sport fishing magazines, and in films to showcase to the world the amazing power of collaborative science and dedicated Captains and crews.
3. **Computer and Data Science** – As a current graduate student in the University of Maryland's Department of Computer Science, I intend to emphasize data visualizations, processes, and analytics with DRP and associated datasets on our website. What this will mean is the development of new web based resources (such as an app) and animations showcasing the data collected by the program's fishermen. These resources will help us better understand dolphinfish and their seasonal migrations.

As I build momentum to assume the role as the Director of the DRP, I feel an enormous sense of gratitude to be in this position today but also a huge sense of responsibility. First and foremost, because it was newly created, Beyond Our Shores, Inc., has very limited funds at this time. The DRP also only has 600 tags remaining to be distributed by the end of the year. So, the hope of achieving the previously outlined goals will quickly fade without donor support. In helping the DRP continue to thrive and expand, we ask that you kindly offer your financial support. Fishing clubs, fishing industry representatives or individuals who are interested in

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supporting the Dolphinfish Research Program should contact wess@beyonourshores.org or mail checks to Beyond Our Shores PO Box 662, Rockville, MD, 20848. You can contact me directly at (787) 436-8300. Through your dedicated efforts and sacrifices, dolphinfish were tagged from Key West to Nantucket Island, in the Bahamas, throughout the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and off Southern California and Central America. Now the future of this program is in your hands.



We founded Beyond Our Shores, Inc., to support and expand the great work of the Dolphinfish Research Program. Beyond Our Shores, Inc., will compliment the Dolphinfish Research Program with other research initiatives that foster participation across fishing sectors (private recreational, for-hire charter, artisanal, and industrial fishermen) to gather more useful data. There is an urgent need to collect more fisheries data across sectors to better understand how fisheries respond to changes in exploitation and the environment. Because of that need, Beyond Our Shores, Inc., will focus on compiling information to report seasonal and interannual changes in abundance of dolphinfish. It will strategically collect information on related issues and topics that enhance our ability to conserve marine fisheries, protect ocean habitats, and quantify the importance of species such as dolphinfish to local businesses and regional economies. Dolphinfish is, after all, a critical species whose existence impacts many stakeholders throughout the fishing industry.

In the Caribbean Sea and throughout Latin America, dolphinfish is one of the most common types of seafood served at restaurants, frequent fish to fill recreational vessel fish boxes, and exciting species to catch during for-hire charters. In addition, dolphinfish is one of the top recreational blue water troll species targeted in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic and it is also caught in domestic and foreign industrial commercial fisheries. Despite the importance of the species, there is a lack of information

that's necessary to quantify seasonal and interannual trends as well as the status of the species. Beyond Our Shores, Inc., seeks to advance a multi-national effort in the Caribbean Sea and greater Western Central Atlantic Ocean to collect data across sectors to continually assess the status of dolphinfish. This effort will build momentum through the following linked and expanding research programs:

1. The Dolphinfish Research Program



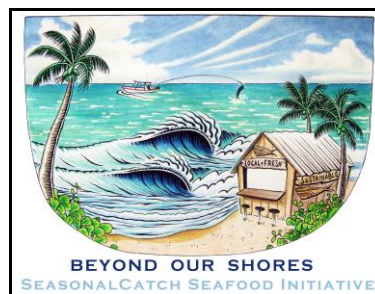
[Click here](#) or the image for an educational video

2. Collaborative FAD Research Program



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3. SeasonalCatch Seafood Initiative



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The purpose of these three programs is simple: to provide fishermen and the public the opportunity to engage in meaningful marine and fisheries science research to collect vital information on dolphinfish, associated species, and the coastal economies they support. If you are interested in participating or would like to provide financial support please contact me at wess@beyondourshores.org or send a check to the address below.

“The one thing we have learned, however, is that progress in this endeavor is not possible without the cooperation of the dedicated fishers that have tagged, recaptured, sampled dolphinfish or otherwise shared their valuable knowledge. Beyond Our Shores will foster our collaborative goal of conserving dolphinfish for the future.” – Dr. Richard Appeldoorn – Beyond Our Shores, Inc., Board Member

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Website: beyondourshores.org

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