

# Sunshine Sails!



Continuing with the second part of F&B's Three Part Billfish Series highlighting the latest tag and release techniques. Most of this Series has been produced by Damon Olsen off Mooloolaba in southern Queensland, but the techniques, rigging, terminal tackle (etc) apply just as much to fishing the waters off Cape Bowling Green, Broome or Bermagui.

Report & Photography by Damon Olsen

## Sails Vs Slimies Vs Plastic - The Debate

**D**rifting and trolling live baits for billfish has long been a controversial issue. Many well respected game fishermen will not even consider the use of live baits in order to capture billfish.

There are several arguments against using live baits to target billfish, the most credible of which suggests this technique results in the fish being hooked deeply in the gut, and quite possibly kills the fish. While this scenario does undoubtedly happen from time to time, I believe that it is far from normal to have the billfish die after being caught on livies.

Most fish which are deeply hooked only have a small 4/0 or 5/0 hook inside them, and while this obviously causes some trauma to the fish, hard scientific evidence indicates billfish stomach acids eradicate the hook within days of it being lodged. Considerable evidence has been gathered to support this contention, especially from Kona, Hawaii, when the marlin fishery has been under intense scientific scrutiny for many years.

A lot of billfish caught on livies are hooked in the mouth, and of the fish hooked in the gut, it is generally accepted that a high majority of these fish do actually survive, as



attested by the tag return results.

The tag returns from the Mooloolaba fishery this year seems to indicate a 2-3% recapture rate of tagged fish, which is around the national average.

When it comes to trolling lures for billfish, your scribe believes towing plastic behind the boat is probably more enjoyable when the fish are in numbers and on the bite.

It is incredibly exciting to see a billfish materialise behind your lure or teaser and have it sit there all "lit up" as all onboard anticipate the strike. However, it is also my opinion that fishing is about having fun, which usually means catching a few fish - and quite often, live baiting is the best method of catching fish.

**Mathew and Aaron holding Aaron's first ever billfish, tagged and released to fight another day. Curiously, many of these Mooloolaba sails are repeatedly captured, re-tagged and re-released, reflecting a very high residency rating amongst these fish.**

I can't see the point of going fishing in the first place, if the angler is not going to use the most effective method on the day to catch the fish. I suspect there is more than a little hypocrisy when people suggest it is perfectly okay to catch billfish on a Pakula lure - but is somehow less sporting or "ethical" to catch them on live bait. As already stated, live baiting is commonly, but certainly not always, the most effective method for