

# Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program: Bi-monthly Update – March 2004.

## 1. Overview

The Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program (NRCTP) has progressed into 2004 smoothly. All tagging organizations are gearing up for the new season, with some tagging trips already having been undertaken.

All Year 1 data has been both entered and approved in the online database; thus all Year 1 tagging data is now visible on the mapping site, accessible through [www.codresearch.org](http://www.codresearch.org). Not all recaptures have been entered online yet, (see GMRI's update for detail), however, a synopsis of the tag returns is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Tag returns reported to date for both Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program tags (NRCTP) and DFO tags associated with this program. Of these, 629 tags have been physically received by GMRI; recaptured double-tagged fish amount to n=109; and recaptures which were re-released total n=59.**

	NRCTP Tags			DFO Tags			Total
	F*	P**	O***	F	P	O	
<b>DFO</b>	36	105	1	11	45	0	<b>198</b>
<b>Isl. Inst.</b>	11	1	1	0	0	0	<b>13</b>
<b>DMR</b>	160	22	14	17	2	0	<b>215</b>
<b>CCCHFA</b>	273	21	20	0	0	0	<b>314</b>
<b>SMAST</b>	124	63	7	0	0	0	<b>194</b>
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>604</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>Total</b>		<b>859</b>			<b>75</b>		<b>934</b>

\* F=Fishermen \*\* P=Processors \*\*\*O=Observers

## 2. GMRI's priority tasks for the next two months

- GMRI will focusing on entering recaptures into the database, once the modified recapture tab is available.
- GMRI will be ready to act quickly to order high-reward tags and datasheets, should the high-reward program be approved.
- Shelly will be working on various presentations for upcoming conferences/meetings during April and May.
- GMRI will train two new field technicians for DMR.
- GMRI will be assisting with tagging trips and the training of new participants – to date these commitments are all with Ben Neal; Cobscook Bay Resource Center, FV Bigger n Better and a new charter vessel, Special J.

### 3. Program Update Overall – Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI)

Date	Progress
Feb - 04	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• GMRI coordinated a Data Management Committee conference call (2<sup>nd</sup> Feb) which discussed, the program needs with regard to high-reward tagging, tagging mortality, the collection of bycatch data and associated datasheet needs. Overall, it was decided that a <b>high-reward tagging scheme</b> should be a high priority, and the collection of bycatch information will be limited to non-tagged cod only.</li><li>• GMRI hosted DMR’s end of year 1 vessel owners meeting (4<sup>th</sup> Feb) – see DMR’s update for greater detail (4.3).</li><li>• Shelly assisted with GMRI’s education personnel by introducing cod tagging and the cod tagging program to two school classes (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders); this was part of a prototype testing session for an upcoming LabVenture Station within GMRI’s planned education center, the Public Interface. This experience apparently went down very well with some of the students (see Annex 1)!</li><li>• <b>CCCHFA:</b> Shelly joined Tom Rudolph and Jim Fair during two training sessions at the CCCHFA (12<sup>th</sup> &amp; 13<sup>th</sup> Feb); new participants were introduced to the program and tagging techniques, while returning participants refreshed their tagging skills for the new season.</li><li>• <b>SMAST:</b> Shelly joined SMAST (Ross Kessler and Darin Jones) on their first tagging trip of the season (20-24<sup>th</sup> Feb); a long-awaited trip, which turned out to be highly interesting all round! (See 4.4 for more detail).</li></ul> <p><b>Database:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pat and Tamsin persevered with data approval, and a good number of recaptures were entered into the database. Further entry of recaptures is on hold while the recapture entry tool is modified.</li><li>• GMRI worked with Nothern Geomatics to execute the Year 2 enhancements to the database.</li></ul> <p><b>Outreach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More fishing vessels have been added to the website.</li><li>• Five new winners were drawn for February 2004’s lottery. The list of winners thus far can be seen online at <a href="http://www.codresearch.org/Winners_to_date.htm">http://www.codresearch.org/Winners_to_date.htm</a>.</li></ul> <p><b>Tagging:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tagging was carried out by CCCHFA and SMAST.</li></ul>
Mar - 04	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The <b>Maine Fishermen’s Forum</b> (4-6<sup>th</sup> Mar) was the first key event of the month. GMRI hosted a booth with poster displays and outreach materials on a variety of our ongoing and upcoming projects. The Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program was well represented both at the booth, and during the session “<b>Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program: The First Year’s Results, What We Have Learned, and How Will it Affect the 2<sup>nd</sup> Year?</b>”. The panel session was well attended by program partners; thank you for traveling to Rockland to present your area’s work Don, Rodney, Darin, Kevin, Susan, Ben, Earl and John! And thank you also to Allyson Jordan for coordinating the session.</li></ul>

**Mar – 04**  
**Continued**

- Shelly and Laura met with Earl Meredith and John Hoey for an update on the funding status for the **high-reward tagging program**; Earl is still waiting for budget finalization from Congress. GMRI has also presented Earl with a draft budget which estimates the costs of maintaining the program infrastructure through 2005.
- **Tagging inshore Western Gulf of Maine:** The maximum number of tags to be released in the new tagging area is **10,000**. This allocation will be shared between DMR and CCCHFA (5,000 each). This number is based on feedback from the Data Management Committee, Ralph Mayo (NEFSC) and Earl Meredith (CRPI, NOAA Fisheries).
- **Datasheets:** A new order has been placed for **Datasheet 1** and **Datasheet 4**. The latter is the new sheet on which **non-tagged cod will be recorded**. Examples of non-tagged cod include cod which are too small to tag, or cod which are in too poor condition. In the event that the high-reward tagging program proceeds, another datasheet order will be placed; this sheet will prompt for **double-tagging, high-reward tagging** and also for **tag number verification**.
- **DMR:** Shelly has been finalizing contracts for the vessels recruited on behalf of DMR. In addition, GMRI will be recruiting two more field technicians to ensure that Susan and Kerrie have a sufficient pool of taggers to work with. The training of the new recruits will likely happen in April 2004.
- **Island Institute:** Shelly has been assisting Ben Neal with the recruitment of a new charter vessel, *Special J*. The first trip with this vessel is scheduled for late April.
- **Benthic Ecology Meeting:** Shelly gave an oral presentation on the program at the BEM 2004 meeting in Mobile, Alabama (25-28<sup>th</sup> Mar).

**Database:**

- **Data entry:** Shelly has distributed the final list of **“standardized comments”** for data entry; all data entered in 2004 will use this system for recording comments on tagged cod.
- GMRI and Northern Geomatics have completed most of the Year 2 enhancements to the database, including specific advanced editing tools, and faster list population and search mechanisms. The final major change will be the recapture input tab (only used by GMRI). Since this aspect of the database will be needed beyond 2004, it is important to make this as versatile and efficient as possible. Once completed, Pat and Shelly will continue to enter reported tagged cod.
- **Data downloads:** Recent attention has focused on interpreting data downloaded from the tagging database; a synopsis of how the data is coded and counted on the mapping site will be drawn up in the near future. This need was detected when counts on the mapping site proved different to those calculated offline. Indeed, the current total number of cod tagged is **~47,000**, and not the ~50,000 reported during the Maine fishermen’s Forum. Whilst this means that we have tagged fewer cod than we thought, the recapture rate is consequently slightly higher, at **2.5%**. The mapping site now reflects the true count of individual fish tagged.

**Outreach:**

- Pat continues to collate data on recaptured tagged cod; these come in almost daily and the interesting factor during mid-March was that all recaptures were being reported from just south of Block Island and around Coxes Ledge.
- Five new winners were drawn for March 2004’s lottery.

**Tagging:**

- During March, tagging was undertaken by CCCHFA and SMAST.

## **4. Program Update by Tagging Organization**

### **4.1 Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)**

- No new tagging trips have taken place this winter; a trip is planned for May 2004.
- 226 tagged fish have been caught from the trip made off Digby N.S. in May 2003 (131 of these were DFO tags and 95 were the standard NRCTP tag). 30 of these tags have been double-tagged fish (18 of these were DFO tags and 12 were the standard NRCTP tag).
- 1 tag has been returned from the trip made off Digby NS in September 2003.

### **4.2 Island Institute**

- With increased focus this coming summer on recreational, charter, and party boats, additional contacts are being made with vessels fishing in the nearshore area.
- Any vessels that release recreationally caught live cod, down to 14 inches in length, are encouraged to contact the program.
- Measuring boards are being made, gear is being checked, and we are looking forward to the summer's fishing!

### **4.3 Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR)**

- A meeting was held on February 4<sup>th</sup> for all of the fishermen participating in the cod tagging project. This meeting included a review of last year's tagging and was an opportunity to discuss the strategy for Year 2. Prior to the meeting, the fishermen were sent a questionnaire to get their opinions on how things went last year, as well as to solicit any suggestions or concerns on such topics as tagging areas and bycatch. The meeting was well attended, lively and very productive.
- Seven of the vessels used last year will be involved again this year. DMR and GMRI are now recruiting two new vessels to work in the more nearshore areas downeast.
- In early March, Kevin Kelly and Susan Haley attended the Maine Fishermen's Forum in Rockport to represent DMR's role in the cod tagging program. A presentation was given at the Friday afternoon session on the NRCTP. A DMR cod tagging poster was displayed and program pamphlets were also available at the Forum.
- DMR's first trip since December, scheduled for March 16, was postponed due to poor weather conditions. This trip was planned to scout for cod on the northern section of Jeffreys Ledge and possibly Platts Bank. This trip has been rescheduled for March 18.

### **4.4 School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST)**

- SMAST was finally able to put a trip together on February 20<sup>th</sup> aboard *FV Inheritance* following a long spell of frigid and otherwise harsh weather conditions during January and most of February. Even so, scheduling the voyage was a challenge due to difficulties in arranging crew (could not locate a cook) and the main trawl was damaged (parted the cable in the footrope) while winding it on the drum at the dock. Luckily, a replacement cook was found 2 days prior to departure, and a replacement trawl was borrowed from another vessel, thereby eliminating the need for time-consuming repairs. Shelly Tallack of GMRI was able to accompany Darin Jones and Ross Kessler for the expedition.
- Once on the grounds, significant time was lost from fishing after a hose to the keel cooler burst and rough weather forced the vessel to lay to for approximately 18 hrs. A spare hose was provided by another vessel at sea, allowing the trip to continue.

- The vessel finally found fish on the last two fishing days of the five day trip before having to steam back to port. This was SMAST's first trip in 2004 and the first trip in the permanent closed areas on Georges Bank. In total 214 fish were tagged and findings on the movement of this group of fish are being awaited with anticipation.
- The spring winds of March lived up to their reputation so far, but with the help of St. Patrick a spell of calm weather is expected on Georges Bank for the next 5 to 7 days. Darin and Dave will be tagging aboard the *FV Trident* for 5 days during the last week of March. They hope to make up for lost time and tag a significant number of cod to jumpstart the 2004 field season.
- April and May will be busy with two tagging trips scheduled per month.
- Rodney Rountree and Darin Jones attended the Maine Fishermen's Forum on March 5<sup>th</sup> and were participants on a panel discussion titled **Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program: The First Year's Results, What We Have Learned, and How Will it Affect the 2<sup>nd</sup> Year?** They presented a very interesting summary on the first years tagging activities on Georges Bank.

#### **4.5 Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association (CCCHFA)**

- The ice in the harbors lasted several weeks and was followed by poor weather and unremarkable fishing. CCCHFA sent out a fairly low number of dedicated trips in anticipation that the fishing would pick up. However, some good trips off Nauset Beach during a small window in February yielded 1,254 tagged cod. To date, 96 have been tagged in March.
- CCCHFA held two well attended classroom trainings in mid-February, during which Shelly helped out. These went very well, and a good mix of veteran captains and crew were present, as well as new participants to the program (both vessel owners and technicians).
- CCCHFA conducted on-board training for technicians in February, resulting in three fully trained individuals who are now up to speed and ready to fish when needed.
- CCCHFA took advantage of the slow start in the spring to attack the data entry from the summer and fall seasons. This was kick-started by being able to sit down with Shelly during her February site visit to iron out some tricky records. Most of the 2003 non-dedicated effort is now entered. Once again, thanks to GMRI and Tamsin for their help.

**Annex 1: Maine 5th and 6th graders learn to tag cod!**

