



Tautog Tagging Program Update: Technical Committee Report



Tautog Management Board
October 16, 2023

Background



Move to task the Technical Committee with evaluating the feasibility of using the smaller tag and any tag that has not been previously tested that may meet the goals and objectives of the tagging program.

The Technical Committee (TC) met on August 11th in response to a task from the Management Board to evaluate the feasibility of using the smaller version of the current commercial tag and any tag that has not been previously tested that may meet the goals and objectives of the tagging program.

TC Discussion



Tag Types

- Smaller NBT tag
- T-bar
- Petersen disc
- Additional: Dart

Study format

- Live market testing
- 50 tags per dealer/harvester
- Daily survey reports and photos every two weeks



Questions?



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

ASMFC Commercial Tautog Tagging Program

Issues and Next Steps

ASMFC Annual Meeting Tautog Management Board
October 16, 2023

Commercial Tautog Tagging Program

- Required by Amendment 1 to the FMP to address:
 - Poor Coastwide stock status.
 - The illegal, unreported, and undocumented fishery.
- Ultimately implemented in most states for the 2020 fishing year.
 - New York delayed implementation until 2021 due to the COVID pandemic.

Tagging Program Objectives (Section 4.4.1)

- Implement a system that can aid enforcement and help identify illegal unreported and unregulated fish.
- Use tags of a consistent type and style among all states.
- Employ tags that are single-use, difficult to replicate with full accounting for tags at season end.
- Implement a tagging program that will accommodate both the live and dead commercial fish markets. The tags used must be easy to attach, secure and have minimal to no impact on the appearance or condition of live fish for the amount of time that live, tagged fish are maintained until consumption.



2022 Commercial Tautog by the Numbers

STATE	NO. PARTICIPANTS	PERC. PARTICIPANTS	NO. TAGS ISSUED	NO. TAGS USED	PERC. TAG USE
MA	145	14%	33,850	21,527	13%
RI	285	28%	29,136	12,886	8%
CT	79	8%	6,850	3,680	2%
NY	481	47%	182,950	122,411	76%
NJ	9	1%	1,275	529	0%
DE	2	0%	C	C	-
MD	2	0%	C	C	-
VA	30	3%	2,675	759	0%



Tagging Program Results To Date

- Participating States are in their 3rd and 4th years of the program.
- LEC feels that the tautog tagging requirement is effective in reducing the illegal sale of unreported fish.
 - This is subjective and not quantified.
 - Visible sign of legally harvested fish.
 - Tags can make fish traceable
- There is support for the Tagging Program among fishermen.
 - The Program helps to maintain demand because market is not as easily flooded by illegal fish.



Spring 2023 Tagging Program Survey Results

General comments included tags falling out, deteriorating applicators, excess damage, lesions and mortality in fish.

- Live market participants from MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, MD, and VA all reported mortality, damage, and/or lesions.
 - 10-25% most commonly
 - As much as 75-100% in some responses
- Ethnic live markets often want “pristine” fish.
 - Fish with lesions are rejected and/or returned in some cases.



Summary

- Law enforcement and many fishermen support a tagging program in some form.
- The current tag results in high levels of mortality and damage to live market fish.
- This has a negative economic impact on fishermen, especially in New York, where 76% of tags are utilized and where the live market is strongest.
- Objective 4 of Amendment 1 states the Tagging Program must:
 - “... have minimal to no impact on the appearance or condition of live fish for the amount of time that live, tagged fish are maintained until consumption”
- Live markets and extended fish holding existed prior to the Tagging Program.
- New York is in the 3rd year of the Tagging Program.



Next Steps

The last assessment (data through 2020) showed stock improvement across all Regions with no overfishing occurring and the New Jersey-New York Bight just under the SSB threshold.

New York, in cooperation with the TC, has been and will continue to test alternative tag types and locations.



Next Steps (continued)

New York feels that the impacts to live market participants are not acceptable in addition to being contrary to the Tagging Program Objectives.

New York proposes that the Tagging Program be suspended for 2024 while viable tag alternatives are identified and tested with industry cooperators. The ASMFC would have to revisit the Tagging Program and this suspension once an alternative has been chosen or if no tag proves suitable.

