Tuna CHART 2025 Report

Iascach Intíre Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland

Foras na Mara
Marine Institute

AN t-ÚDARÁS UM
CHOSAINT
IASCAIGH MHARA

SEA-FISHERIES
PROTECTION
AUTHORITY

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Food and the Marine

Wögerbauer C, Maxwell H, Drumm A, Waters C, and Roche WK 2026. Report on Ireland's Atlantic bluefin tuna catch, tag and release data collection programme 2025. Ireland's Tuna CHART Programme Report. Inland Fisheries Ireland, Dublin. 23pp.

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Glossary

ABFT - Atlantic bluefin tuna

CFL - Curved fork length – measurement of bluefin tuna from snout to fork following the curve

CLS - Collecte Localisation Satellites – company that runs the vessel monitoring software for authorised Tuna CHART vessels

CPUE - Catch Per Unit Effort. In this case the number of ABFT tagged per charter trip day.

CRRF - English Catch and Release Recreational Fishery

DAFM - Department of Agriculture, Farming and Marine of Ireland

DCEE - Department of Climate, Energy and Environment of Ireland

ICCAT - International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas

IFI - Inland Fisheries Ireland – Ireland's semi-state agency with responsibility for inland fisheries and sea angling

MI - Marine Institute - the State agency responsible for marine research, technology development and innovation in Ireland

RIB - Rigid Inflatable Boat

SFL - Straight fork length. Measurement of the fish from snout to fork but in a straight line with tape either below or above the body.

SFPA - Sea Fisheries Protection Authority - Ireland's competent authority for seafood safety and sea-fisheries protection.

TAC - Total Allowable Catch

Tuna CHART - Bluefin tuna CatcH And Release Tagging programme

VMS - Vessel Monitoring System

Abstract

Atlantic bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*), the largest tuna in the world, frequent Irish coastal waters to feed, following annual spawning migrations in the Mediterranean and possibly even the Gulf of Mexico. Ireland has no quota for commercially caught bluefin, or for recreational angling for bluefin, though it does have an 89 tonne by-catch allowance. The Tuna CHART programme commenced in 2019 and is a collaborative scientific programme between Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Marine Institute in partnership with the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of Climate, Energy and Environment (DCEE). This is a recreational catch and release fishery operated by authorised, trained charter skippers who take out paying anglers to catch tuna on rod and line for tagging and release.

In 2025, following an application process, 22 experienced charter skippers were authorised and 194 bluefin fishing trips resulted in the tagging of 293 Atlantic bluefin tuna. Bluefin ranged from 135 cm to 275 cm, and were, on average, 10cm smaller than the 2024 mean. There were no reported mortalities. Fight times and handling times were consistent with previous years.

2025 catch rates were higher than 2024, but despite the number of bluefin caught per trip, the 2025 season was a difficult angling season for authorised charter skippers as the available fishing window was condensed into a shorter time frame than in previous years due to difficult weather conditions. This meant that fishing effort was depressed compared to previous years. In 2024 and 2025 the primary challenge for the Tuna CHART fishery was not the availability of Atlantic bluefin tuna, but weather conditions limiting fishing effort.

These data will be shared with ICCAT and the EU, contributing to an improved understanding of the life history of Atlantic bluefin tuna in the northeast Atlantic.

1. Introduction

In 2018, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) permitted countries in the North-East Atlantic without an Atlantic bluefin tuna (ABFT) quota to authorise a limited number of sport vessels to target bluefin tuna with the purpose of data collection, through angling "tag and release", without the need to allocate a country-specific quota. To that end, Tuna CHART is Ireland's conventional tagging programme designed to implement, co-ordinate and oversee data collection delivered via "tag and release" of ABFT by authorised angling charter skippers.

The aim of the programme is to collect data on the spatial and temporal distribution of ABFT in Irish waters. Another function is to record biometric data such as length and general condition for Ireland to report to ICCAT and improve our understanding of aspects of the ecology of ABFT presenting in Ireland's coastal waters.

Typically, ABFT (*Thunnus thynnus*), the largest tuna in the world, frequent Irish coastal waters from mid-summer to mid-winter to feed, following annual spawning migrations in the Mediterranean and possibly even the Gulf of Mexico. Recent satellite tagging analysis demonstrates that ABFT are present in small numbers year-round in Irish waters (Pagniello *et al.* 2023). The bluefin tuna is prized by sea anglers for its power and fighting ability and is a highly valuable commercial species.

ICCAT is an inter-governmental fishery organisation responsible for the conservation of tunas and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean and its adjacent seas. ICCAT compiles fishery statistics from its members and from all entities fishing for these species in the Atlantic Ocean, coordinates research, including stock assessment, on behalf of its members, develops scientific-based management advice, provides a mechanism for Contracting Parties to agree on management measures, and produces relevant publications.

ICCAT manage Atlantic bluefin stocks under a two-stock hypothesis for management and assessment i.e.

- Eastern Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea stock, that spawns in the Mediterranean Sea
- Western Atlantic Ocean stock, that spawns in the Gulf of Mexico, with a boundary line dividing the stocks at 45 W longitude.

A third stock, spawning in the North American Slope waters from North Carolina to New England has been identified (Aalto *et al.* 2016; Richardson *et al.* 2023) but is not yet incorporated into ICCAT stock assessment models.

The Mediterranean and Eastern ABFT (considered a single stock) is a highly regulated species with annual catch limits set by ICCAT based on scientific advice.

The European Commission (EC) became a Contracting Party to ICCAT in 1997. EU TACs and quotas for ABFT were set by Council for the first time at the December 1997 meeting to implement ICCAT catch limits/TACs for these species. Ireland did not have a track record of targeting ABFT and does not have a quota. Ireland has access to a by-catch "others" quota for member states without a quota share to

cover by-catches of ABFT in commercial fisheries subject to certain conditions. Ireland has no quota to cover recreational angling for ABFT and has had no such quota since 1997. The Irish commercial fleet has a 2026 bycatch quota of 89 tonnes of bluefin, from the Northern Albacore Tuna fishery and Celtic Sea Herring fishery (SFPA Quotas 2026).

The Tuna CHART programme commenced in 2019 and is a collaborative scientific programme between Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Marine Institute in partnership with the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of Climate, Energy and Environment (DCEE). Management and staff from these agencies manage the overall Tuna Chart programme as part of Ireland's Tuna CHART Management group. A Technical group works as a subset of the management group and includes IFI Research staff and Marine Institute staff. The Technical group provides advice and analysis to the Tuna CHART management group.

This is a recreational catch and release fishery operated by authorised, trained charter skippers who take out paying anglers to catch tuna for tagging. Training skippers in tagging procedures, reporting of fish caught and fishing activities are requirements of the programme. Mortalities must be reported to ICCAT. The programme reports biometric and fishing effort data on Atlantic bluefin tuna caught in Ireland to the EU under Regulation (EU) 2023/2053

This report presents a summary overview of the 2025 programme results with a comparison to previous year's results, and adjacent regional programmes (e.g. English CRRF programme).

2. Methods

This section provides an overview of the methods relating to various elements of the programme and any methodological changes implemented in 2025. The methods relate mainly to the process of enabling the charter skippers to capture and report data on individual tuna and to effect safe tagging and release. Tuna welfare is central to this process. A methods manual was compiled separately and provides an overview of the requirements of the programme - such as gear specifications and the requirement for all bluefin to be retained in the water at all times. Additionally, recommendations are included for handling, recovery, and release of the fish (Wögerbauer *et al.* 2019)

A subgroup, the Tuna CHART Technical group manage skipper authorisations, the training course, the tagging methodologies, and determine which data to collect. This group also coordinates the data collection by skippers, including the measurement and handling aspects, as well as overseeing the data collection observer programme.

2.1 Skipper authorisation and training

In 2025, following an application process, 22 experienced charter skippers were authorised under a DCEE Section 14 authorisation to operate a catch, tag and release bluefin charter fishery. A total of 21 skippers returned from previous Tuna CHART programmes. One new skipper, based on the west coast, was approved for inclusion. Authorised skippers were based in ports along the Northwest, West and South coasts (Fig.1).

Anglers are permitted to participate in the fishery as paying customers onboard authorised skippers vessels. Anglers participate in the fishery by hiring charter skippers and their vessels for angling trips. Anglers hook and play the bluefin to the side of the boat using angling gear, applying fish ‘playing’ methods approved by the wider Tuna CHART group. The process is strictly monitored. The angling methods and ABFT handling guidelines for the programme are detailed in the method manual (Wögerbauer *et al.* 2019) which is, in-part, based on the ICCAT Tagging manual (Cort *et al.* 2010).

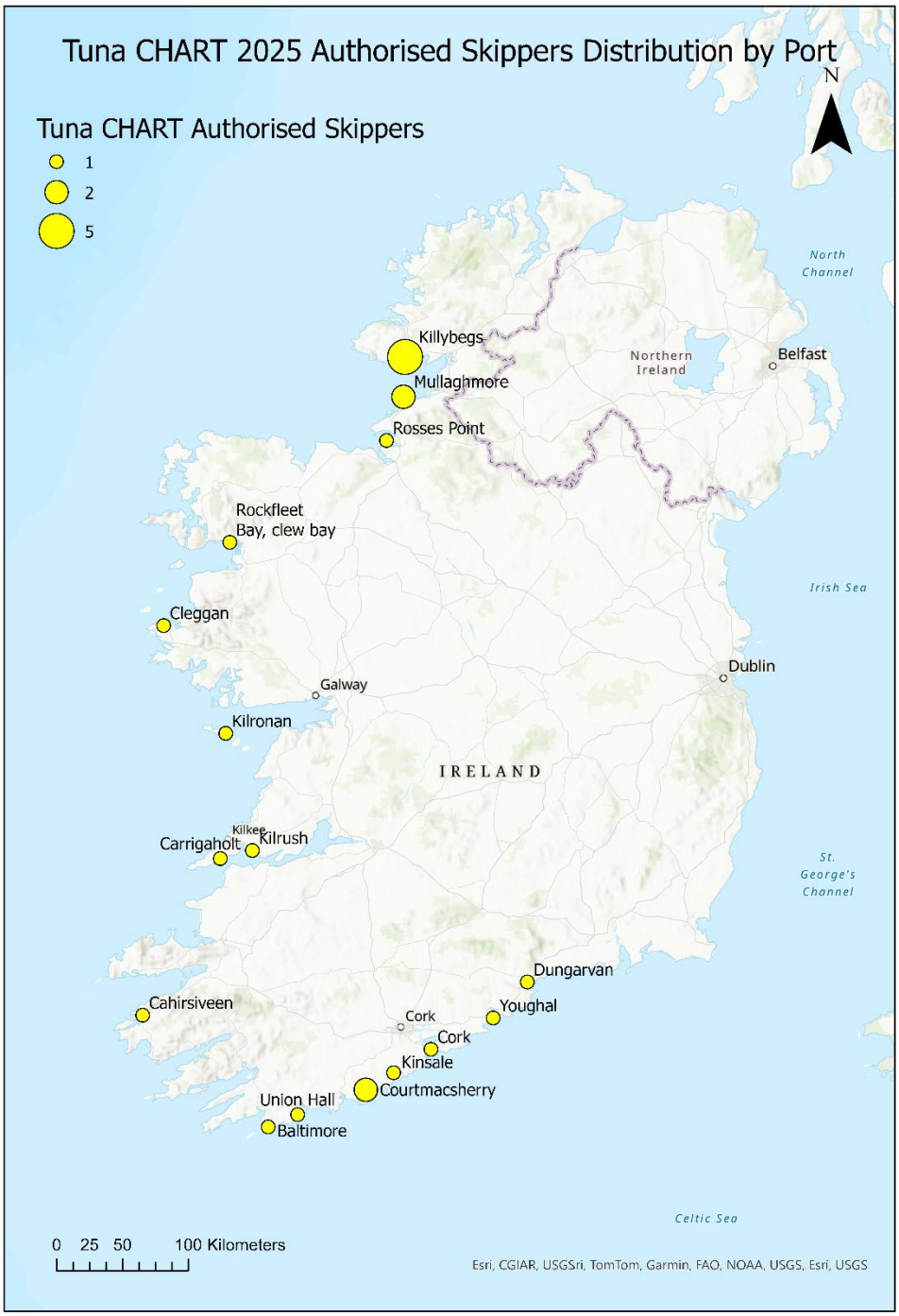


Fig. 1 Spatial Distribution of Authorised Skippers in 2025

As training must be undertaken by authorised skippers as a condition of the data collection fishery, a detailed online training course was developed in 2020 by IFI and the Marine Institute in collaboration with DAFM, DCEEand the SFPA. This course was expanded in 2021 to include information on the regulations regarding angling near cetaceans. New skippers are required to pass a test for each module to pass the course. The training course encompasses an introduction to ICCAT and bluefin tagging research, bluefin welfare, required angling gear and best practice, bluefin handling and tagging techniques, legislation, and data collection.

In addition, a live interactive on-line training session for all skippers was held in mid-June 2025 hosted by IFI and MI staff. The live session emphasised good handling and the best possible recovery of the bluefin prior to release changes to the programme in 2025 were discussed.

DCEE Section 14 authorisations enable the skippers to operate for the duration of the survey fishery (1st July - 12th November 2025).

All skippers/vessels are required to have suitably rated angling equipment, including 80-130lb class (or greater) bent butt rods and reels, and swivel rod holders. These basic provisions are required to minimise risk to tuna from lengthy playing bouts, and to allow for best management of fish welfare. Gear checks were undertaken by IFI staff prior to authorisation.

Skippers were provided with standardised equipment including measuring kits, lip hooks, and double-barbed tags in 2025, the same tag types used since 2020. These tags were a more robust tag compared to the spaghetti tags used in 2019. The double-barb tag was once again supplied by ICCAT.

Fig. 2 Atlantic bluefin tuna a) and b) tagged, c) measured and d) recovered in the water as required by Tuna CHART guidelines.

2.1 Tiered pilot study for new methods

Following a formal request by the Irish Charter Skippers Association (ICSA) in 2024 for an expansion of the methods permitted to fish for ABFT, a review of proposed methods was made by the Technical Group (Wogerbauer *et al.* 2024). Recommendations were made to the Tuna Chart Management group. The management group agreed to approve two out of three new methods requested, with a tiered system based on skipper experience (Table 1). All skippers were permitted to allow anglers to use the currently most popular angling method of trolling and/or bait fishing if they wished.

Of the new methods requested, skippers were permitted in 2025 to allow anglers to troll and bring the fish alongside using a 'stand-up' angler harness, if the skipper deemed the angler capable. Experienced skippers, classified as those who had caught, tagged and released at least 40 ABFT between 2019-2024, were permitted to utilise jigging, using suitably rated gear, if weather conditions permitted and the skipper deemed the angler capable. A third new method, casting and popping, was requested in 2024 and 2025 but was not authorised for the programme by the Management group.

Table 1 Tiered pilot new angling method system

Tier 1 All Skipper	**Tier 1 All Skippers**	**Tier 2 Experienced Skippers**
Method 1	**Method 2**	**Method 3**
CURRENT METHOD - Trolling with swivel rod holders	Trolling with Stand-up Harness (Stand Up Fishing)	Jigging
All Skippers All Anglers Skippers Gear	All Skippers All Capable Anglers Anglers Own Harness	Most Experienced Skippers only All Capable Anglers Anglers Own Gear

2.2 Legal measures

The Department of Environment, Climate and Communications introduced a bye-law in 2020 to limit unauthorised angling using trolling gear for several larger fish species. Bye-law 981 of 2020 Control of sea angling methods for certain species of fish prohibits the use of surface trolling for catching any species of tuna, shark or billfish and prohibits retaining gear or equipment on board capable of trolling fishing lines for these species. This bye-law provided additional powers to protection officers to ensure that no unauthorised persons could target ABFT. As authorised persons, Tuna CHART skippers are exempt from this bye-law.

In 2024, the SFPA and DAFM updated the Bluefin tuna Statutory Instrument (SI No. 352 of 2024) to ensure the reporting of any tagged fish and the installation of vessel monitoring systems (VMS) is legally required.

2.3 Protection

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) have joint responsibility for the protection of ABFT. IFI undertakes RIB patrols and coastal surveillance to monitor for unauthorised fishing of bluefin. RIB patrols engage with authorised skippers at sea to ensure handling and release methods are in keeping with Tuna CHART requirements.

A report on IFI's Protection activities in 2025 is provided separately.

SFPA has responsibility for port inspections to ensure no ABFT are landed by authorised or unauthorised vessels.

2.4 Data

All skippers were required to permit onboard installation of a VMS for the duration of the open season. The VMS was provided by CLS (www.cls.fr, Toulouse, France), a provider of satellite systems, which support monitoring and tracking of vessels at sea. Vessel positions were monitored by the SFPA and IFI.

Skippers submitted a digital report of their bluefin angling trips to IFI and Tuna CHART using the Tuna CHART form on Survey123, an ArcGIS application developed by IFI on ruggedised dedicated Samsung tablets, or on authorised skippers' personal phones. The latter facility allowed skippers to use their own 'technology' and provided increased efficiencies. All skippers were also required to record all data on a paper form. Screenshots of the data collection process are available in the 2021 report (Wögerbauer *et al.* 2022).

Data collected from the programme were subsequently cross-checked between IFI and MI. At the end of the Tuna CHART reporting cycle the quality assured data are collated and submitted to ICCAT in the form of the conventional ICCAT tagging report (TG02-CnvTReRc). The tagging data forwarded to ICCAT is processed regularly and included in the international tagging database according to the relevant Species Group needs (in this case the ABFT) and is updated every year. A summary of these data is then published and made available publicly at https://www.iccat.int/en/accesingdb.html under the "Tagging" toggle.

3. Results

3.1 Overview

In 2025, 194 targeted bluefin fishing trips resulted in the tagging of 293 ABFT (Table 2). An additional 29 tuna were hooked but lost before measuring or tagging, five fish were tagged but not measured and two fish were not tagged because they were lost after measuring, one was not tagged as the wrong tagging equipment was onboard. No mortality was recorded. All data were digitally reported via trip survey forms and on paper forms, with full compliance from authorized skippers. No recaptures were reported this year. One bluefin had moderate injuries to the mouth however its behaviour upon release was recorded as lively. All except two fish were listed as in "lively" condition upon release. Two fish listed as "sluggish" were recovered for 10 and 20 minutes respectively prior to release.

Table 2 Summary of 2025 fishing effort, bluefin encounters and catch per unit effort (CPUE = no. bluefin tagged per angling trip).

Fishing Region	No. Authorised Skippers	No. Active Authorised Skippers	No. Trips	No. Angler Days	No. ABFT hooked	No. ABFT measured	No. ABFT Tagged	CPUE (Tagged /Trips)
Northwest* (Donegal and Sligo)	9	8	132	337	291	259	264	2.0
South (Kerry, Cork, Waterford)	8	7	47	90	33	29	29	0.6
West* (Clare to Galway)	5	3	15	12	1	1	0	0
Total	**22**	**18**	**194**	**439**	**325**	**289**	**293**	**1.51**

* One skipper is registered in both Co. Clare and Co. Donegal, but has only been operating from Killybegs, Co. Donegal. This skipper's data is listed within the Northwest row.

3.2 Fishing Effort

Bluefin angling occurred in Donegal Bay and along the west and southwest coasts of Ireland (Fig. 3). Peak bluefin tuna catch rates was recorded in September and October (Fig. 5). Four skippers did not fish due to only sporadic occurrences of bluefin tuna in the locality (1), health issues (1), cancellations due to weather (2).

In line with previous years, fishing effort was highest in the Northwest, moderate in the South, and lowest in the West (Table 2), with anecdotal reports from west coast skippers that bluefin tuna tend not to stay for extended periods in the area, making chartering of bluefin-specific trips challenging. Charter fishing is weather dependant and particularly vulnerable to high winds. In 2025, Storm Floris brought strong gales early in August leading to multiple trip cancellations in Donegal Bay at peak bluefin tuna angling season. Trip times were reduced as a consequence, with skippers fishing in short weather windows close to shore. There were proportionally more trips between 300-400 minutes fishing than in

2024 (Fig. 4). The number of trips per week increased from mid-August when weather windows permitted (Fig. 5). In October, Storm Amy again led to widespread cancellations. Angling activity in the Northwest was concentrated in early September to mid-October, a shorter busy season compared to previous years. Storm Amy had a particular impact on the South coast as September and October are the main angling months for this region (Fig. 5). Fishing effort was reduced substantially to 47 trips in 2025 down from 73 in 2024.

In the West, three skippers fished, completing 15 trips, with one 202cm bluefin tuna hooked off Loop Head on the 9th of October (Fig. 3).

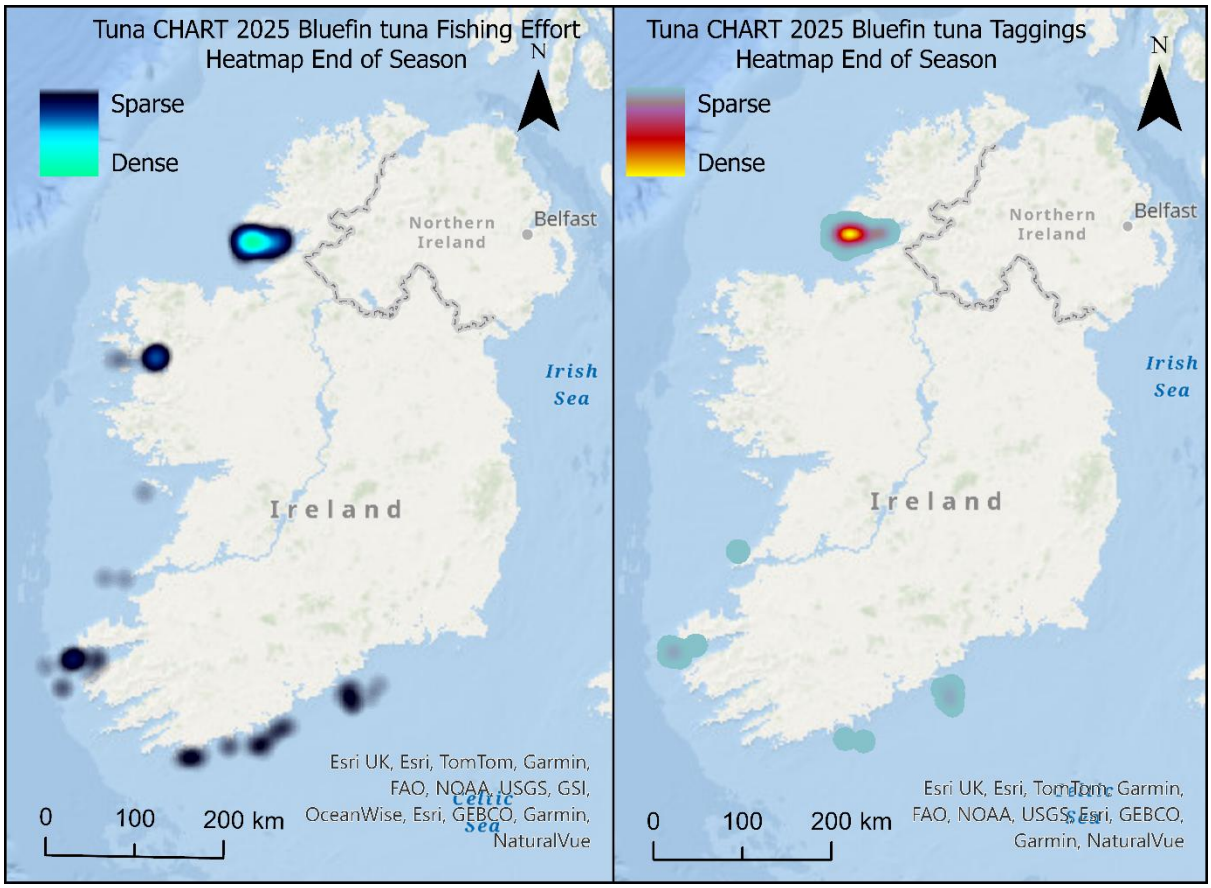


Fig. 3 a) Fishing locations by authorised skippers and b) ABFT tagging heat map Tuna CHART 2024

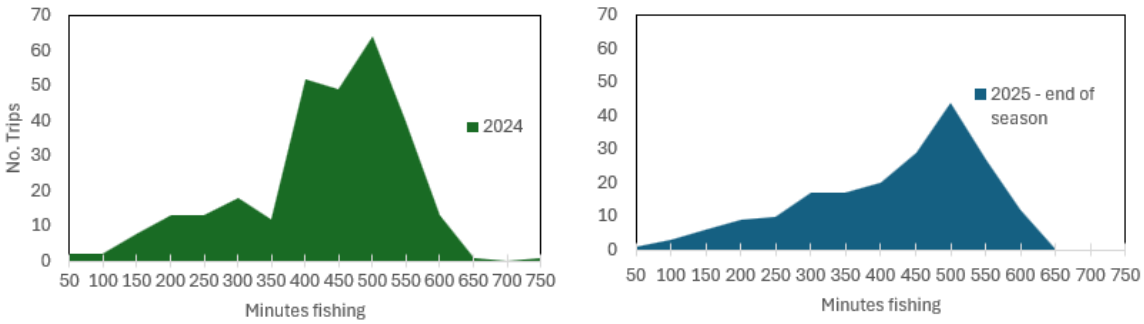


Fig. 4 Number of minutes fishing per trip in 2024 and 2025.

3.3 Tagging Results

The season's first bluefin angling trip occurred on July 2nd (Kerry), and the first tagged fish was recorded on July 24th (Donegal Bay). Bluefin were once again caught and tagged until the final day of the season, November 12th. The Northwest accounted for 60% of the fishing effort and 90% of tagged fish in 2025.

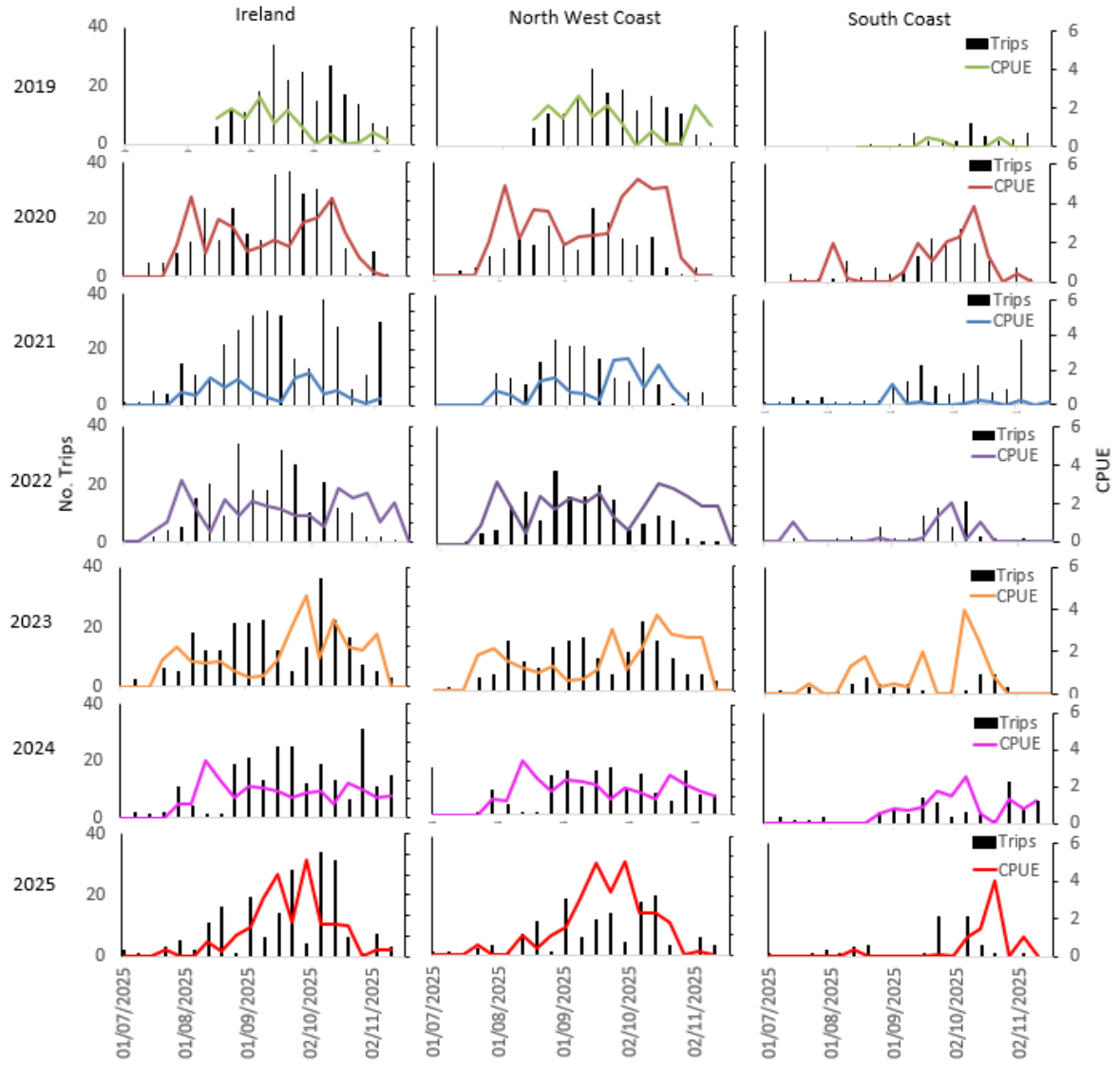


Fig. 5 Fishing effort presented as number of fishing trips and Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE Total Tagged Bluefin/ Total Trips per week). Data are presented for the entire country and separated for the Northwest and South Coasts by year.

In the Northwest, eight skippers conducted 132 trips, tagging 264 fish (Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) = 2.0, up from 1.4 in 2024). Peak weekly CPUE was 4.75 (week of Oct 6th). Only four trips were undertaken in the region that week but 19 bluefin were tagged. However, Storm Amy hit that week and subsequent weekly CPUEs reduced to 2.0 and then tapered off for the remainder of the season. In the South, seven active skippers completed 47 trips, tagging 29 fish (CPUE = 0.6, down from 1.05 in 2024). The highest weekly CPUE (4) occurred in the week of October 21st, describing the number of bluefin

tagged from just one trip that week. The highest number of bluefin tagged in one week was 15 bluefin tagged from 14 fishing trips. In the West, one 202cm bluefin tuna was hooked off Loop Head on the 9th of October.

3.4 Size Distribution

Measured bluefin ranged from 135 cm to 275 cm (SFL mean = 194 cm, SD = 20.8), on average 10cm smaller than the 2024 mean. Just one fish in the smaller cohort of 120-139 cm size range recorded in 2019 and 2023 was recorded in 2025 off the south coast. The north and south reported a median length of 190cm and 183cm respectively (Fig. 6). Since 2023, the length distributions of bluefin in both the north and south regions have been more truncated although some large individuals were encountered (Fig. 7).

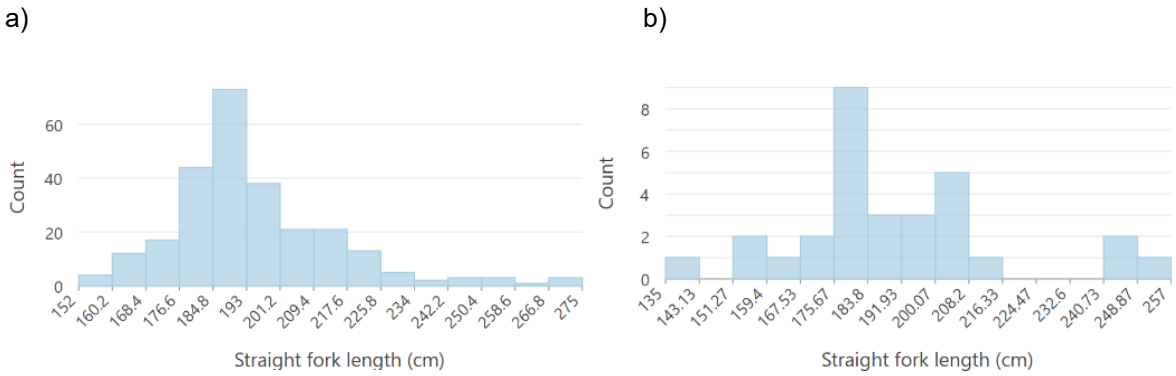


Fig. 6 Length distribution of bluefin tuna from a) Northwest and b) South and west coasts 2025

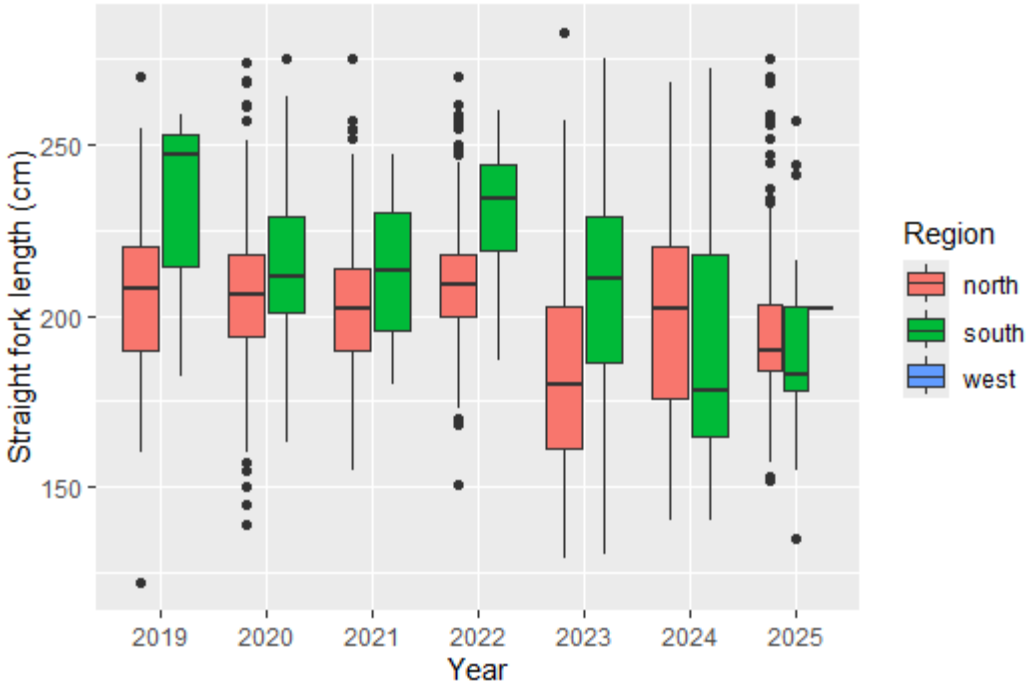


Fig. 7 Length distributions of measured ABFT 2019-2025

3.5 Satellite Tagging

The Marine Institute satellite-tagged six bluefin under HPRA Licence No. AE19121/P007. These fish, caught by authorized vessels and tagged onboard under scientific supervision, are not included in this dataset.

3.6 Observer Programme

IFI staff conducted three observer days with three skippers (Donegal Bay). Additional observer trips were planned but had to be cancelled on safety grounds due to Small Craft warnings. On these three observer trips six bluefin were hooked and tagged, three on the 24th September and three on the 25th September. One observer trip on the 23rd September ended without fish caught or tagged. For the six bluefin hooked, observers documented proper fish handling and tagging and recovery procedures, ensuring welfare guidelines were followed.

3.7 Angling and Handling Trends

Fight times averaged 19 minutes (SD = 7.8), similar to the seven-year mean of 20 minutes (Fig. 8a) and less than the maximum recommended fight time of 30 minutes. Handling times averaged 8.46 minutes (SD = 3.7), almost identical with the seven-year mean of 8.40 minutes (Fig. 8b) and above the recommended minimum recovery time of five minutes. All photographs taken of fish confirmed that skippers ensured all tuna remained in the water, following Tuna CHART Technical Group guidelines for post-release survival.

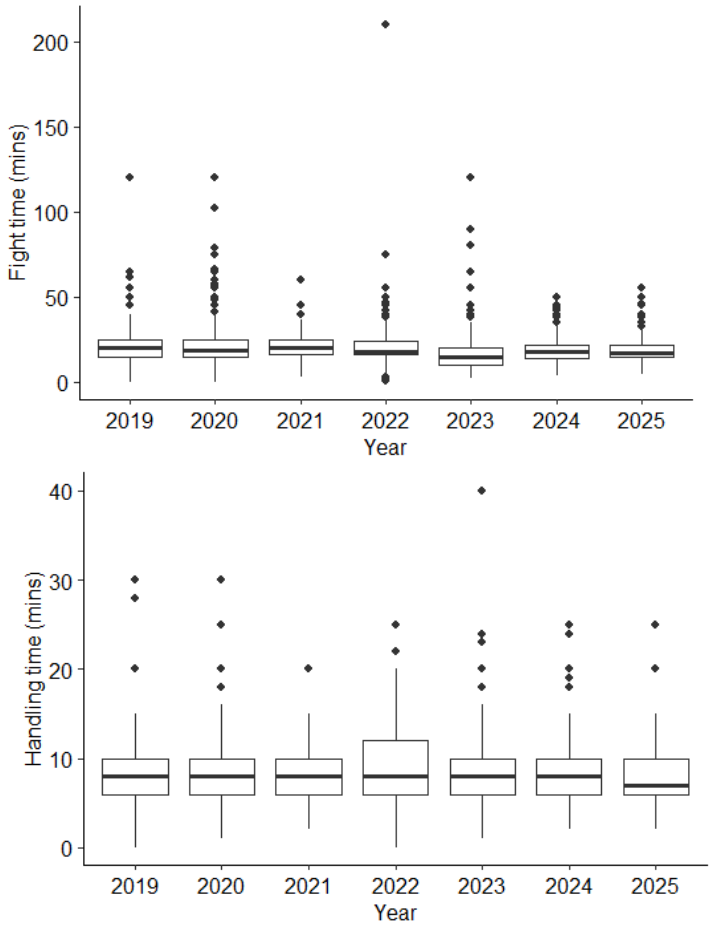


Fig. 8 a) Fight time and b) handling times 2019-2025

3.8 Reporting procedures

The relevant data were reported digitally by skippers upon submission of their individual trip survey form. All data were submitted fully to the programme and there was good compliance by authorised skippers with the requirements of the programme.

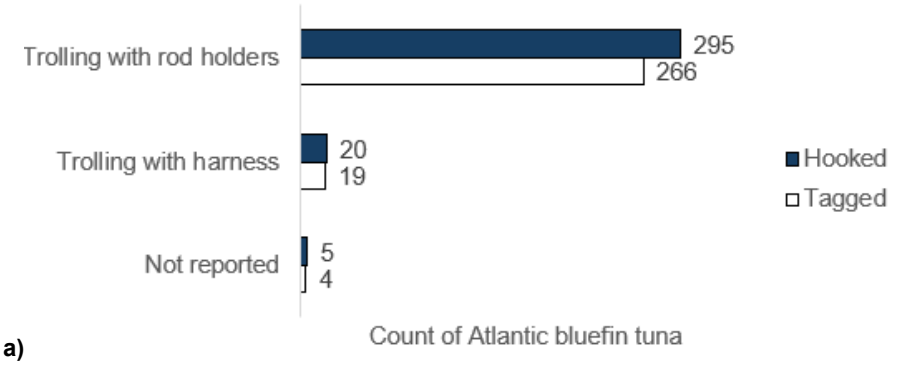
3.9 Tiered pilot angling gear study

The standard method of trolling, using rods inserted into rod holders, continued to be the most used method in 2025 (Fig. 9a). 14 out of 195 fishing trips recorded Trolling with stand-up harness. There was no uptake for jigging again in 2025.

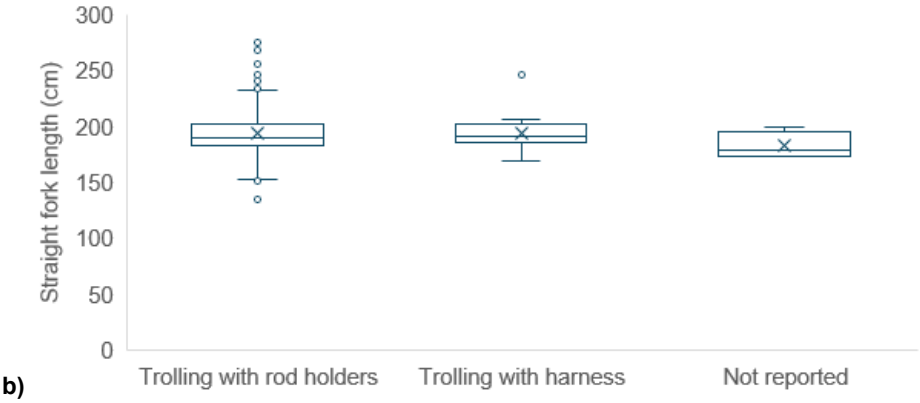
20 fish were hooked using the method of trolling with a stand-up harness, 295 fish were hooked using trolling from rod -holders, 5 fish were hooked up by unreported method. 5% of bluefin hook with stand-up harness were lost before tagging; 10% of fish hooked using trolling and rod holders were lost before tagging. This is a change from the 2024 result, where 12% of bluefin reeled in using stand-up harness were lost before tagging.

Consistent with the 2024 results, the size distribution of fish caught using trolling with a harness fell within the same range as trolling with rod holders (Fig. 9b). The largest fish reeled alongside using the stand-up harness was 247cm. Although the fight time was longer than recommended at 50 minutes, the fish was recorded as in good condition and without injuries and was recovered alongside the vessel for an additional 10 minutes above the minimum recommended recovery time prior to release.

There is a weak but positive relationship between handling time and fight time, where larger fish tended to be fought for longer before being brought alongside, and larger fish tended to be handled, including recovery, for longer before release. Fight times and handling times for both methods were similar for similarly-sized fish. Seven large bluefin (≥245cm) were fought for 50 minutes or more before being brought alongside. One of these was fought using trolling with harness, the remainder were fought using trolling with swivel rod-holders. No anglers brought their own gear on board despite easing of restrictions.



a)



b)

Fig. 9 a) No. ABFT hooked up per method and b) size range of ABFT brought alongside per method category.

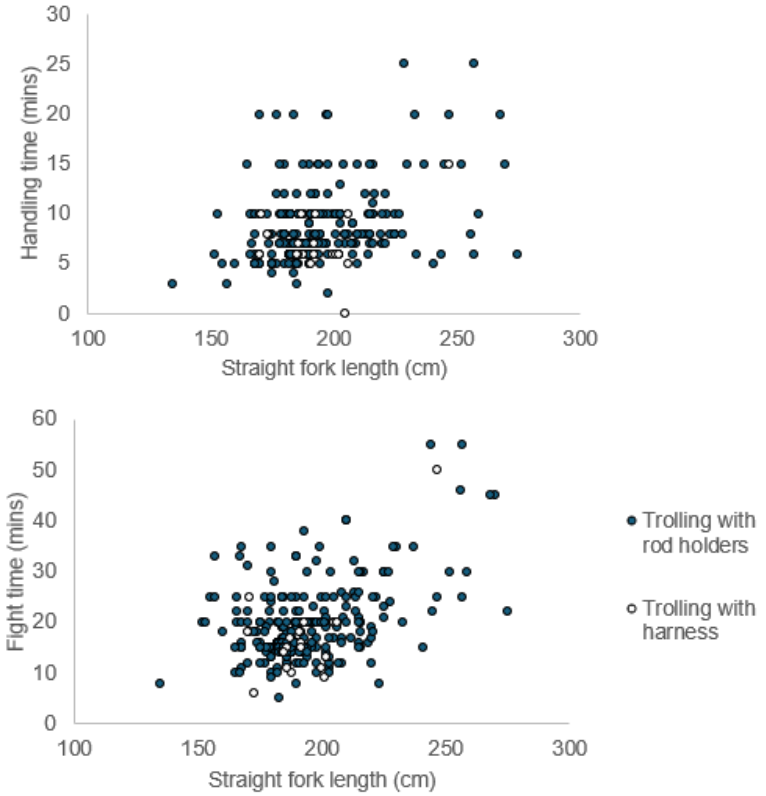


Fig. 10 a) Handling time and b) Fight time plotted against length for the two methods used.

4. Discussion

Ireland's Tuna CHART programme is extensive, involving many different elements (governance, administration, research, technical, protection and the angling sector) working together for a common goal. The high level of co-operation amongst the various partner agencies has allowed this programme to operate efficiently and effectively.

There was stability in the number of bluefin tagged and an improvement in CPUE this year, despite a marked reduction in fishing trips. Trip success was only slightly reduced at 60% (Table 3). CPUE increased to levels recorded in 2022 and 2023. The advent of storms interrupting fishing effort has become a regular feature during the Tuna CHART open season. Fishing trips undertaken after storm conditions reported lower catch rates, supporting the anecdotal reports from skippers that storms can disperse shoals of bluefin tuna, disimproving catch rates as a consequence.

Table 3 Tuna CHART CPUE summary data 2019-2025

Year	No. Skippers	Total Trips	No. Tagged	No. Successful Trips	CPUE (Tags/Trips)	Max. CPUE in any week	% Successful Trips
2019	15	204	209	99	1.02	2.4	49
2020	22	302	685	219	2.27	4.0	73
2021	22	336	242	129	0.72	1.8	38
2022	22	235	364	158	1.55	3.2	67
2023	19	238	380	152	1.60	4.5	64
2024	22	234	294	153	1.25	3.0	65
2025	22	194	293	116	1.51	4.0	60

Regional Fishing Effort and CPUE

Despite poor weather conditions highest fishing effort was recorded in the Northwest region, with 153 trips resulting in a CPUE of 2.0, an increase from 1.4 in 2024 (Wögerbauer et al. 2025). This is comparable to catch rates on the larger English Catch and Release Recreational Fishery (CRRF) with an average of CPUE of 1.96 per trip across 1,362 trips. The bluefin were on average smaller than the Irish-caught bluefin (straight fork length = 179.5cm) (UK ABFT Fishery Statistics 2025).

The south reported a decreased CPUE of 0.6, notably lower than the previous year's value of 1.05. Between 2021-24, annual tagging numbers in the South had increased year-on-year, indicating some growing potential. It remains to be seen if the 2026 season maintains the early gradual improvement in CPUE in this area, which will largely depend on good weather conditions between September and November. An opportunity to fish using jigging could positively benefit authorised skippers in this area, where static fishing habitats such as reefs are more prevalent than in Donegal Bay.

Size Distribution

The length range of measured bluefin contracted in 2025, with a mean value of 194cm, estimated to be part of an 8–10-year-old cohort (Santamaria et al. 2009). Irish-caught bluefin were larger than the 2025 English Catch and Release Recreational Fishery (CRRF) caught bluefin (mean straight fork length = 179.5cm) (UK ABFT Fishery Statistics 2025) but smaller than Danish tagged fish in 2024 (Curved Fork Length; mean ± S.D. 259.2 ± 16.5 cm) (Aarestrup et al. 2025).

New methods pilot study

No anglers used the jigging method in 2025. It is recommended that jigging is permitted for experienced skippers once again in 2026 to provide an opportunity to record data on smaller fish that may be present, but not captured, using established surface trolling methods. Skipper feedback indicates that lack of jigging uptake was due to the high success of trolling in this area. Jigging is a method most fitted to fishing at a static structure e.g. reef or wreck. Donegal Bay is sandy basin with few features or static structures, therefore trolling remains the preferred methodology in this area where the 65% bluefin tuna angling takes place annually. This method is most appropriate for skippers fishing outside Donegal Bay and may provide an additional opportunity for south and west coast skippers

Casting and Popping has not been permitted to date, but this new method would provide an additional method for the most experienced skippers to target bluefin and potentially widen the length distribution of bluefin available to angling.

Bluefin tuna angling in English waters

In 2025, the England's CRRF (Tuna CHART equivalent) authorised 142 vessels to fish from 18 July to 30 November 2025 in English waters. 124 active vessels made a total of 1,362 trips of which 70% were successful. 2,666 bluefin tuna were caught , with an average of CPUE of 1.96 per trip. The bluefin were on average smaller than the Irish-caught bluefin (straight fork length = 179.5cm) (UK ABFT Fishery Statistics 2025). The CRRF permitted a wider range of methods than the Ireland's Tuna CHART programme including trolling (spreader bars and daisy chains), bait fishing, popping and casting. Trolling was the most reported method, with 4% of trips referencing casting or popping. Similar to Ireland's Tuna CHART, bluefin must be retained in the water, requiring them to be released unharmed where possible and mandating the presence of a trained individual aboard for each trip and a report of tuna-fishing activities within 24 hours, including details of length and number of tuna caught.

A rod and reel commercial trial fishery was also undertaken in English waters in 2025. Fifteen licenses were issued with a catch retention quota of 45 tonnes (with three tonnes of quota per vessel) from 1 July to 31 December in English and Scottish waters (Bluefin tuna fisheries in 2025)

Post-Release Mortality and Handling Practices

The program reported zero mortality in 2025, highlighting effective fish handling and tagging protocols operated by skippers. This result aligns with findings from the Tuna CHART England 2025 programme,

which reported a low mortality rate of 0.53%, up slightly from 0.21% in 2024 (UK Government Fishery statistics 2025)

Data Reporting and Compliance

Full compliance in data reporting by authorized skippers ensured the integrity of the dataset. Digital submission of trip survey forms to a GIS database managed by IFI on the ArcGIS Online platform facilitated efficient data collection and analysis.

Conclusion

Ireland's 2025 Bluefin tuna tagging program provides valuable insights into national and regional variations in fishing effort, CPUE, spatial and size distribution. These findings are compared with UK and European tracking studies to provide an insight into the population of the Atlantic bluefin tuna in the Northeast Atlantic. A recent review of 30 years of electronic tagging of *Thunnus thynnus* describes the recovery of the species formerly on the brink of extinction and recommends ongoing science-based management that utilises life history information to sustainably manage the species (Block *et al.* 2026). Continued monitoring and collaboration across programs are essential for effective management and conservation of ABFT populations.

Despite the strong CPUE result, the 2025 season was a difficult fishing season for authorised charter skippers the available fishing window was condensed into a shorter time frame than in previous years by difficult weather conditions. When fishing trips were undertaken, bluefin tuna were tagged and released in high numbers. The consistency in the total number of fish tagged compared to previous years, despite lower fishing effort, is a positive sign for the abundance of the species around the Irish coast. The 2024 & 2025 challenge for the Tuna CHART fishery was not the availability of Atlantic bluefin tuna, but weather conditions limiting fishing effort.

A future challenge in 2026-2028 may be the increased fishing pressure on the east Atlantic stock. The 2026 Total Allowable Catch (TAC) will be 48,403t per year, a 19% increase on the previous three years. This is in response to improved stock status but may impact catch rates in the coming years.

High quality spatial, temporal, and size data were again recorded in 2025, which will be shared with ICCAT in 2026 to satisfy national reporting requirements. This builds on the dataset from Tuna CHART activity in 2019-2024 previously submitted to ICCAT and allows for monitoring of population status. This data contributes to an understanding of ABFT trends in Irish waters.

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