



KING GEORGE WHITING TAGGING PROJECT

Project Update – May 2018

Welcome to the first project update newsletter for the Victorian King George Whiting tagging project. This project works through the involvement of recreational fishers and is supported by the Recreational Fishing Licence Funding Program. The project has been running since January 2017 and works in partnership with fishing clubs as well as individual anglers.

The project seeks to unlock some of the still unknown secrets about the life of King George Whiting in Victoria. We know that Whiting enter our major bays when they are only a few months old and then leave again at about 4 years of age when they are about to mature and begin spawning. We also know that at the known offshore spawning grounds in South Australia and Tasmania, fish up to 20 years old and over 70 cm in length can be found. But, we don't know how much juvenile (up to 4 years old) Whiting move within bays or between bays. And we also don't know where our older Whiting go once they leave the bays, including where they spawn.

Fish tagging

Area break down

Area	Fish tagged
Queenscliff	93
Clifton Springs	46
Somers	33
Tortoise Head	66
Middle Spit	20

So far in the project 260 Whiting have been tagged, and these have nearly all come from five main areas; Queenscliff and Clifton Springs in Port Phillip, and Tortoise Head, Middle Spit and Somers in Western Port. The area with the most fish tagged is Queenscliff (includes the Swan Bay and White Lady areas).

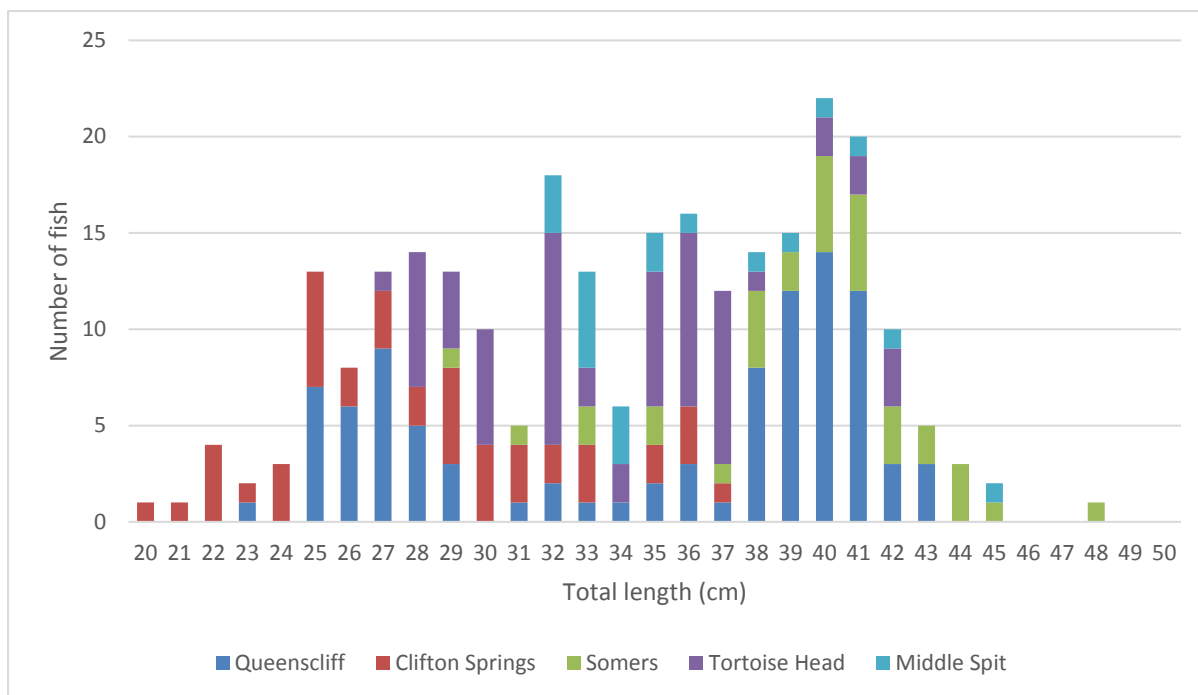


Figure 1. Number and size of King George Whiting tagged in five areas between January 2017 and April 2018.

Tagged Whiting have ranged in size from 20 cm to 48 cm (Figure 1). Very good numbers of large (38 cm +) Whiting have been tagged, mostly in the Queenscliff and Somers areas (Figure 1). This is valuable to the project because these fish are likely to be approaching the age where they will leave the bays and move to offshore waters. Smaller fish around or under legal size have mostly been tagged in the Queenscliff and Clifton Springs areas (Figure 1).

Top taggers

Anglers	Fish tagged
Chris Garner	66
Don Newman	53
Peter Kellam	40
Gordon Robinson	29

Chris Garner of the Western Port Angling Club is our top tagger so far, closely followed by Don Newman of the same club. Don also has the honour of tagging the largest Whiting so far (48 cm!). Along with Peter Kellam of the St Leonards Angling Club and Gordon Robinson, these top four taggers have tagged 70% of the fish so far – great effort!

Recaptures

There have been 18 recaptures of tagged whiting, giving a comparatively high return rate of 7% so far. The longest time between tagging and recapture so far has been 11 months, and the shortest is 45 minutes! Surprisingly, all fish have been recaptured close to the location where they were tagged, indicating that the Whiting in the bays are either site attached (stay in the same spot!), or possibly move and then return to the same location on a frequent basis. Don Newman is our leader in both the number of fish tagged that have been recaptured, and the number of fish recaptured!

Tagging Angler	Total Length (cm)	Tagging Location	Recapture Angler	Total Length (cm)	Recapture Location	Days at liberty	Distance travelled
Daniel Sparks	38	Queenscliff	Gordon Robinson	39	Queenscliff	32	< 1 km
Daniel Sparks	39	Queenscliff	S. Planken	44	Queenscliff	335	< 1 km
Kevin Hunter	38	Queenscliff	Mick White	38	Queenscliff	29	5 km
Don Newman	38	Somers	Don Newman	38	Somers	8	< 100 m
Don Newman	39	Somers	Don Newman	39	Somers	13	< 100 m
Don Newman	38	Somers	Don Newman	40	Somers	93	< 100 m
Don Newman	40	Somers	Don Newman	41	Somers	67	< 100 m
Don Newman	44	Somers	Geoff Wall	47	Somers	343	< 5 km
Don Newman	41	Somers	Kiara Lacey	42	Somers	267	< 1 km
Don Newman	34	Middle Spit	Bruce Styles	35	Middle Spit	20	< 2 km
Don Newman	34	Middle Spit	Chris Cassar	36	Middle Spit	83	< 2 km
Don Newman	38	Middle Spit	Bruce Styles	38	Middle Spit	3	< 1 km
Don Newman	35	Middle Spit	Brian Willis	37	Middle Spit	62	< 2 km
Chris Garner	37	Tortoise Head	Alex Van Camp	38	Tortoise Head	223	< 1 km
Chris Garner	35	Tortoise Head	Chris Garner	35	Tortoise Head	190	< 100 m
Chris Garner	32	Tortoise Head	Chris Garner	32.5	Tortoise Head	145	< 100 m
Gordon Robinson	41	Queenscliff	Gordon Robinson	41	Queenscliff	45 minutes	< 100 m
Gordon Robinson	39	Queenscliff	Mick White	39	Queenscliff	36	< 5 km

There has been no evidence of juvenile Whiting moving between bays or offshore so far. Fishers are still catching some large (40 cm +) whiting, but they are harder to find this year, most likely because some have now moved out onto the coast. As this movement offshore happens we are hopeful of receiving some recaptures from further afield in the near future.

Please be on the lookout for tagged whiting

If you capture a Whiting with one of the yellow tags, please contact us on 03 52583686, or email whitingtag@gmail.com, and provide the tag number, as well as the length of the fish, date and location of capture. If desired, the fish can be released again to provide even more information for the project.

Fishers are reporting that the Whiting fishing has been pretty tough going this year, which is consistent with our predictions based on the number baby whiting (larvae – see picture) that the Victorian Fisheries Authority have monitored in the past few years. The large fish that have been around recently were spawned in 2013, which was a strong year for numbers of larvae. Numbers of larvae were down, however, in 2014 and 2015, and this is now reflected in fairly low numbers of fish in the 30 to 40 cm range. Fortunately, 2016 was a strong year for larvae, and we expect these fish to reach legal size over the next year. There are already reports of large numbers of whiting that are just under legal size in some areas. The number of larvae in 2017 was also strong, and so we expect excellent whiting fishing once these two groups of fish enter the fishery over the next few years.



Acknowledgements

We are most grateful to the anglers who have embraced this project and the fantastic contribution they are making to the project's success.

We thank Lauren Veale of the Nature Glenelg Trust for letting us use her newsletter on Mulloway tagging as a template for this one.

We thank Fisheries Victoria, the Victorian Fisheries Authority and VRfish for their ongoing support for the project.

For any enquiries on the project please contact Greg Jenkins on 52583686 or email whitingtag@gmail.com, further information on the project can be found at: <http://blogs.unimelb.edu.au/fisheries-ecology/king-george-whiting-tagging-project/>