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Sailfish and Satellites

Broome's iconic sailfish are about to be thrust into the international spotlight thanks to a new state of the art research program into the high speed and gracious predators.

With help from the Broome Fishing Club, the Kimberley Marine Tourism Association (KMTA), and Woodside, internationally renowned researcher Dr Julian Pepperell is leading a world-first satellite tagging study of sailfish in Broome waters.

The study seeks to answer a range of questions about the habits and movements of Broome's most famous fish. There will be three tagging programs that will see two types of satellite tags, known as PSATs, and one type of 'transmitter tag', known as a SPOT tag deployed on the fish.

The PSAT tags will be able to log important environmental information such as depth, water temperature and light levels and when programmed will be able to detach themselves from the fish and begin transmitting this information to satellites for processing and analysis. Dr Julian Pepperell says "This data can be used to provide valuable information on not only the movements of sailfish, but also their use of their marine habitat during daylight and nighttime hours "

Broome Fishing Club President, Jeff Cooper, says "This information will not only provide a more comprehensive understanding of our sailfish in Broome, but could also shed light on the sailfish populations in Dampier, Onslow and even Exmouth."

KMTA Chairperson, Chris Nisbet says "For so long we have been hypothesizing what the Sailfish do during the spring tides and at night as well as how far they travel, this research will answer some of these long debated questions."

But it is the SPOT tags that probably generate the most amount of interest. Dr Julian Pepperell says "The SPOT tags work like a radio transmitter and are mounted to the tail of the fish rather than shoulder. When the fish are 'tailing' on the surface the aerial of the transmitter is able to broadcast information to a satellite which can provide real time information on the day to day location of the fish to the researchers. This information can even be put on a website for the public to see where the fish are at."

This will be the first time that these revolutionary tags have been used on sailfish and Jeff Cooper says "This is a fantastic opportunity for Broome and will cast the international spotlight on what is a world class recreational fishery."

Chris Nisbet says "Broome has always been well known for its sailfish fishery and we have customers from all over the world come over here to fish, but with this research we can generate more interest in our great fishery and high light Broome as a great fishing destination."

The tags will be deployed over the next seven weeks whilst the sailfish are in close to shore and are in good abundance. Jeff Cooper says "There have been good numbers of sailfish around at the moment, and there have been some really good sized ones in amongst them too."