



Sharkatag 2009



Results and post event survey



Sharkatag 2009

How successful was it ?

As a tagging exercise the anglers managed to catch 530 fish out of which around 220 were tagged; not a spectacular return given 476 rods fished over the three days, but of course it highlights the plight of the stocks.

Over the three days, Sharkatag generated £41K+ for the local economy.

To evaluate Sharkatag and the potential of the Solway as both a sea angling and holiday destination, a telephone and web based post event survey was undertaken, its findings are discussed in the following pages.

Sharkatag 2009 was a very special event.

Over 200 anglers of all capabilities from all over the UK descended on the Solway to combine their love of fishing with a serious effort to gather statistics on endangered species of shark and ray.

The event was followed UK wide on the BBC national news programmes and featured on STVs 'The Hour'. It also received tremendous coverage in national newspapers and the angling press as well as worldwide coverage on many internet web sites and internet blogs.

What motivated Sharkatag and the level of interest ?

For decades, decisions affecting commercial interests have been made without full knowledge of the state of fish stocks and the marine environment; however, when recreational stocks are in danger, there has always been a total lack of action due to 'an insufficiency of data'.

Sharkatag is part of SSACN's Scottish Shark Tagging Programme which has been introduced to help overcome that 'insufficiency' and fight for the regeneration of shark, skate and ray stocks in Scottish waters.

Public support - political action required.

Our thanks to all anglers, local residents and businesses who embraced the spirit of Sharkatag by taking part and contributing so much of their own effort, energy and resources to making Sharkatag a success.

Scotland's politicians and fisheries managers need to act decisively else they will effectively wipe out what was once one of Europe's most diverse inshore waters and leading sea angling venues which generates in excess of £25 million locally and £150+ million nationally.

SSACN – July 2009



The Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network (SSACN) is a nation wide Scottish Charity staffed and run by volunteers who address conservation issues of interest to Scottish sea anglers.



Sharkatag 2009 – The fishing

The venue for Sharkatag 2009 was the western end of The Solway in South West Scotland and the event ran from the 12th to the 14th of June.

Sharkatag involved volunteer anglers operating out of three centres – Drummore, Sandhead and Whithorn .

They were taking part from the shore, in kayaks and in boats - fishing for, tagging and releasing species like tope, spurdog, smoothhound and ray.

Though everyone enjoyed Sharkatag and the 220 fish tagged represent a goodly number, other than a few solitary females in the 50-60 pound range being taken, there was actually cause for concern as :

- the whole region seemed to be void of the expected male breeding stock
- the majority of the fish caught being mostly immature females, typically under twenty pounds
- Luce Bay was especially poor for the time of year.

These factors combined with the lack of rays tagged, only three throughout Sharkatag, shows how urgently plans are needed to help protect and regenerate the stocks. Twenty years ago virtually every boat would have recorded many mature tope and rays.

With a little political will and some proactive measures, the decline could be halted and the Solway could become a European centre of excellence for sea angling.

The remainder of this paper presents the findings of an anonymous post event survey.

Sharkatag in Summary

- 175 Anglers pre-registered for the event
- 92% via the web page
- 29 additional angler walk ups
- 4 shore anglers, 24 kayaks and 50 boats took part
- 204 anglers - fished 476 rod days in total
- 90% of the anglers came from outwith Dumfries and Galloway; 36% from outwith Scotland
- 530 shark were caught and 222 were tagged.
- None were killed.
- Sharkatag was featured on BBC Breakfast TV, BBC National news, STV, Internet TV, Radio5 Live, BBC World Service and reported in many newspapers and angling specialist press, web sites and forums.

Table 1 - Catch Returns by species

<u>Tope</u>	<u>Huss</u>	<u>Spur</u>	<u>Ray</u>	<u>Smooth hound</u>
182	13	10	6	9

** correct at time of going to press – may change !*



The BBC at work



**If Carlsberg made a fishing venue
this would be it – anon angler**

Sharkatag 2009 - The Survey

An anonymous post event survey was carried out to allow participants to rate the success of Sharkatag and to provide feedback on any issues they may have encountered, or thoughts they may have which could help improve it in the future.

Sixty one anglers (30% of attendees) were surveyed; 10% of the survey was face to face, 30% by telephone and the remainder by anglers filling in a web based form. The survey asked the following questions :

- How they rated Sharkatag
- Whether they would take part in another
- The home base of anglers – select from Dumfries and Galloway (**DG**), other parts of Scotland (**ROS**) and from the rest of the UK (**RUK**)
- Thoughts on the venue and likelihood they'd return
- Which method of fishing they would use
- Their spend in 4 categories
- any comments they may have regarding the event

Their responses are summarised at Table 2 (facing) and further discussed in the following section.

Summary

Although an inaugural event, Sharkatag 2009 attracted anglers from all over Scotland and the UK, for many it was their first visit to the area, and for some it was their first experience of shark fishing.

Overall the anglers were extremely impressed with the area, its people, and the potential of the area as a fishing and holiday venue, this led to very few participants responding that they would not return for either.

As the survey respondents are in the main keen anglers, it was quite easy to see what the key factors would be in their decision making – the state of fish stocks and the level of supporting infrastructure.

The area has a very enviable reputation for sea angling though it must be remembered that some of that is due to the almost totally depleted state of stocks in many other locations throughout Scotland.

Table 2 - Survey Responses

Item	Value
Participant rating out of 10 for Sharkatag	9.62
Would take part in Sharkatag again	100.00%
Split of participants - DG, ROS, RUK	10, 54, 36 %
Out of 37 ROS angler responses (NB :: not all responded to each section)	
• definitely return as tourists / anglers	16 / 30
• would definitely not return as tourists / anglers	4 / 0
• may possibly return as tourists / anglers	14 / 4
Out of 15 RUK angler responses (NB :: not all responded to each section)	
• definitely return as tourists / anglers	3 / 8
• definitely not return as tourists / anglers	2 / 2
• may possibly return as tourists / anglers	8 / 4
Angling method – shore, kayak, boat	4 / 28 / 50 %
Participants by % - shore, kayak, boat	2 / 14 / 84 %
Average participant total spend locally on accommodation over Sharkatag	£67.75
Average participant total spend locally on tackle / bait over Sharkatag	£34.12
Average participant total spend locally on food / drink over Sharkatag	£90.41
Average participant daily spend in region	£61.63

DG = Dumfries and Galloway

ROS = Rest of Scotland

RUK = Rest of UK



Sharktag 2009 - Survey Feedback

The anglers were asked to comment on the Solway as a sea angling / family holiday destination and their suggestions as to how the potential of the Solway could be maximised; their responses are discussed below.

The Solway as a sea angling location

Overall, anglers were very positive regarding the Solway as a sea angling location.

It was recognised as potentially being one of the finest sea angling venues in the UK, offering a diverse range of angling marks and species of fish throughout the Solway area, sufficient to test the full range of techniques used by the sea angler.

Respondents from a fast developing sector of sea angling – that of fishing from a kayak – were extremely positive about the opportunities offered by the Solway.

Many regular anglers to the area pointed out that though the fishing remains attractive, the numbers of fish in the Solway appear to be declining and/or getting smaller and there was great concern that stocks in the Solway should receive greater protection if the quality of the sea angling experience is not to suffer.

However, given that a high percentage of sea angling in the Solway takes place from boats trailed to the location, many of the negative comments were associated with the lack of suitable facilities.

The lack of “hard” all-tide launching facilities was a constant issue for many of the ports around Luce Bay in particular and the entire Solway in general.

It was also suggested that a proper marina with all the necessary facilities would encourage even more anglers and non-anglers to the area.

The Solway as a family holiday location

Once again, anglers had a very positive feel for the Solway as a potential holiday destination.

Its strengths were identified by the vast majority of respondents as making an excellent destination for a quiet peaceful holiday, with pleasant countryside, a clean and unspoilt environment and miles of accessible coastline potentially creating a paradise for anglers and other marine recreational activities.

Though anglers were very keen to consider the area as an angling destination they were less keen to consider it for a family holiday with the lack of activities for the whole family being the key issue identified.

Unsurprisingly, for touring anglers (especially for those outside Scotland) the lack of facilities to support marine activities was the key issue.

Other aspects which received far less comment were – the lack of locally sourced food on many menus; some of the accommodation and meals were considered expensive and not always value for money; and the lack of a good mobile phone signal.

Maximising the Solway's potential

Most respondents felt the Solway had great potential as a marine based recreation centre, especially for sea anglers. Their suggestions as to how this could be achieved were quite consistent -

- It needs promoting more.
- Correct initiatives would make venues a lot better.
- Greater access to the sea with better slipways and marinas would increase tourism of fishing, diving and sailing.
- It should be developed in a similar way as Southern Ireland - signposted fishing venues, up to date literature and maps to assist the travelling angler.

Many sea anglers who had not fished the Solway before Sharktag2009 were amazed at the quality and variety of the fishing and felt Scotland was light years behind other destinations in promoting it.

In closing

Sea angling is still a huge business in the Solway which is visited by hundreds of anglers, the majority coming from outwith the region, each week from May to October and by substantial numbers outside these times.

The SNH Watersports Survey Report 2006, stated that the Solway was the most visited venue in Scotland for shore anglers and second most visited for boat angling.

Unless something is done to protect, and in many cases regenerate the stocks in the Solway, it will follow many other coastal waters in Scotland and fall into decline.

The social and economic consequences of allowing such a decline to take place would be enormous; the public right to fish is managed by politicians in the Scottish Government – they have a duty to ensure it is managed in the public's best interest and to its best advantage.