

## The Dolphin...a Strong-Strong fish

By: Tony Champion aka "Miracle Child "

When people outside the saltwater fishing community overhear someone discussing dolphin fishing they often visualize the cute and cuddly Flipper on a hook. In fact, the dolphin fish, or Mahi-Mahi as it is referred to so accurately in seafood houses and restaurants, bears no comparison to Flipper at all.



**Photo By Yeah Right Charters - South Port, NC**

The Dolphin fish, Dorado, or Mahi Mahi (Hawaiian for strong-strong), is arguably one of the most beautiful fish in the ocean with its iridescent blue, green and yellow body and yellow forked tail. There are two species of dolphin fish, the larger, or common dolphin, (**Coryphaena hippurus**) and the smaller of the two, the Pompano dolphin (**Coryphaena equiselis**) often referred to as chicken dolphin. Both are similar in appearance, sharing the same elongated fusiform body shape with a single dorsal fin that extends down the length of the body. Each fish has an anal fin that starts somewhere near the middle of their body and stops in the same location as the dorsal fin. Their pelvic fins are located directly beneath the pectoral fins and can be

retracted into a shallow groove located on the belly. The caudal fin is forked, like many other high speed fish of the ocean. Their head is bluntly shaped, the males more distinctive than the females in adult specimens. This happens as the males develop a prominent bony ridge atop their head at sexual maturity.

**Can you tell them apart??** So how do you tell an adolescent dolphin from a pompano dolphin? For starters, the depth of the dolphin body is less than 25% of its length, while that of a pompano dolphin is greater than 25% its length. The juvenile dolphin also has white tipped caudal fins and black pelvic fins, while the pompano dolphin has white edged caudal fins and no discernable coloration on the pelvic fins. Lastly the dolphin has a small oval tooth patch that covers half its tongue while the pompano dolphin has a large square tooth patch that nearly covers the entire width of the tongue. So, how long has it been since you examined your dolphins teeth? No need to worry, neither species currently have a size limit in NC and both are equally as appetizing.

**Common Dolphin Facts.** From here on we will only discuss the more commonly caught dolphin in our state waters, the *Coryphaena hippurus*, or common dolphinfish. The common catch averages 3-20 lbs, but they are capable of lengths in excess of 5 ft and weights over 70 lbs. The NC State record is 79 lbs caught near CapeHatteras in 1993. They are a fast, hard fighting fish, reaching speeds up to 35 mph and often spending more time out of the water after being hooked than beneath the surface. The fast paced, acrobatic fights make these fish a favorite among offshore fishermen. Dolphin can often be found beneath sea grass or other assorted flotsam found in eddies near the gulf stream, or anywhere breakoff currents bring warmer water near shore. Dolphin can often be caught within sight of the beach in the hot summer months when the water temperature rises. Their ideal water temperature range is 72-80 degrees F. The dolphin diet consists of flying fish, crabs, squid, shrimp and other assorted small baitfish, their favorite being flying fish which typically make up 25% of their diet. When large amounts of flying fish are seen leaping from the water to glide along the surface, chances are good that dolphin are nearby. The spawning season for dolphin is a long one. In the tropics, dolphins spawn year round with multiple spawnings the norm for both male and female fish. In cooler climates such as our own, dolphins only spawn in the warmer months. Dolphins reach sexual maturity at 4-5 months and only 8 inches in length. Their maximum life span is a meager 4 years. Maturing quickly and spawning in the first year of life makes the dolphin a fish that can withstand current levels of harvest without great worry of becoming over-fished.



## Photo By Second To None Charters - Morehead City, NC

What's in a name? We know them as dolphinfish, dolphin, dorado and mahi mahi, but they are called many things across the world. Read the list below to discover what others call them and pick out your favorite. I bet next time you come to the dock and tell your peers you caught your limit of fei niau fu, they'll think you had one too many adult beverages on the trip back in.

ailai (Tamil) anfalous (Arabic) avlis (Tamil) badahlen (Tamil) bakhti bakhti (Arabic) belitong (Malay) cabishot (Papiamentu) chapeau gouverneur (French) clic (French) corado (Spanish) corifena (Rumanian) coryphene commune (French) dakaunomoutas (Greek) dauphin (French) delfim (Portuguese) delfinka (Slovene) dhiya vannava (Sinhalese) doirado (Portuguese) doirado-de-topete (Portuguese) doirado macho (Portuguese) dolfiini (Finnish) dolfijn (Dutch) dolfijnvis (Dutch) dorad (French) dorade (Afrikaans) dorade coryphene (French) dorado (Spanish) dorado delfin (Spanish) दौरادا (Portuguese) दौरादे (Spanish) दौरादो (Portuguese) दौरादो comum (Portuguese) drader (Papiamentu) dradu (Papiamentu) ersuuch (Paluan) fei niau fu (Mandarin Chinese) fulusi (Swahili) galvannava (Sinhalese) goldmakrele (German) golok (Malay) goudmakreel (Dutch) guldmakrel (Danish) guldmakrill (Swedish) gullmakrell (Norwegian) ikan lumadang (Malay) ikan lumba (Malay) ili koni (Gela) kadapangan (Makassarese)

kal vanna (Tamil)

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