

NEW ZEALAND BILLFISH NEWS



December 2020

La Niña summer

Logbooks for the new fishing season are being sent out. For those that returned their logbook this year there is a shirt included in the post. If you need a different size, please let us know.

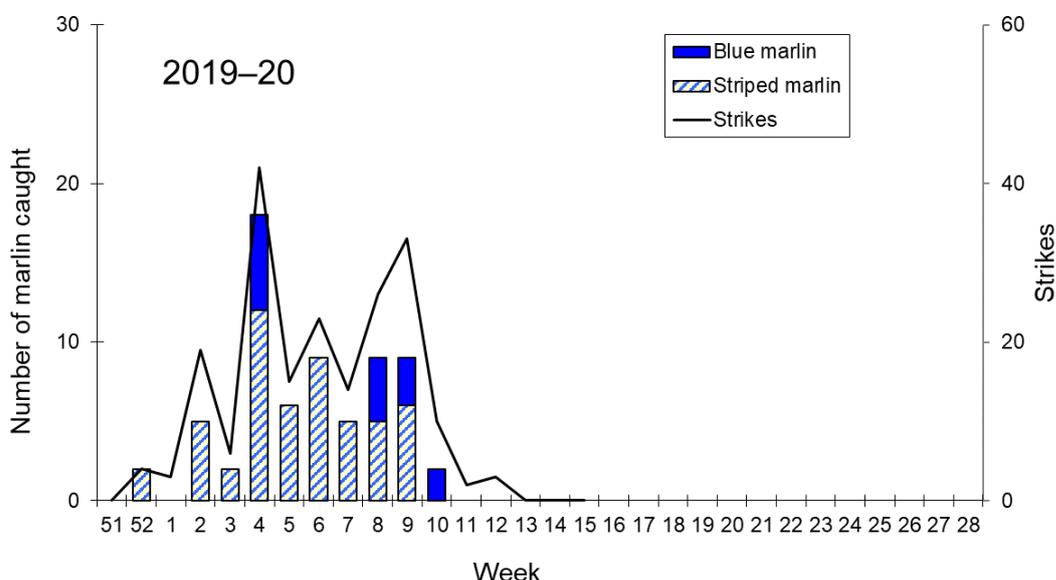
The climate models predict a moderate La Niña with further cooling of the central equatorial Pacific Ocean, and for La Niña thresholds to be met until at least February 2021. NIWA seasonal climate outlook says that “marine heatwave conditions formed near the northern North Island and northern Tasman Sea during November. Unusually warm seas in other coastal regions may develop into a marine heatwave over summer.”

This bodes well for a good marlin and yellowfin season especially if the saury and other bait fish turn up. A few warm years in the past have been disappointing and La Niña also means more northeasterly winds and probably a few ex-tropical cyclones.

Billfish logbook results 2020

The results of the Billfish Logbook project were presented to the Highly Migratory Species Science Working Group on 2 December 2020. Obviously Covid-19 restrictions affected the billfish fishing season. There were 389 days fished with catch of 51 striped marlin, 12 blue marlin, five spearfish, one black marlin and swordfish. It was good to see the return of some yellowfin, with 38 caught and three big eye tuna.

The plot below shows the number of logbook striped marlin and blue marlin caught per week and the number of billfish strikes (Figure 1). The scale for strikes (right hand side) is 2 times the scale for marlin caught. Week 4 of 2020 was the most successful with 12 stripies and 6 blues from 42 strikes.



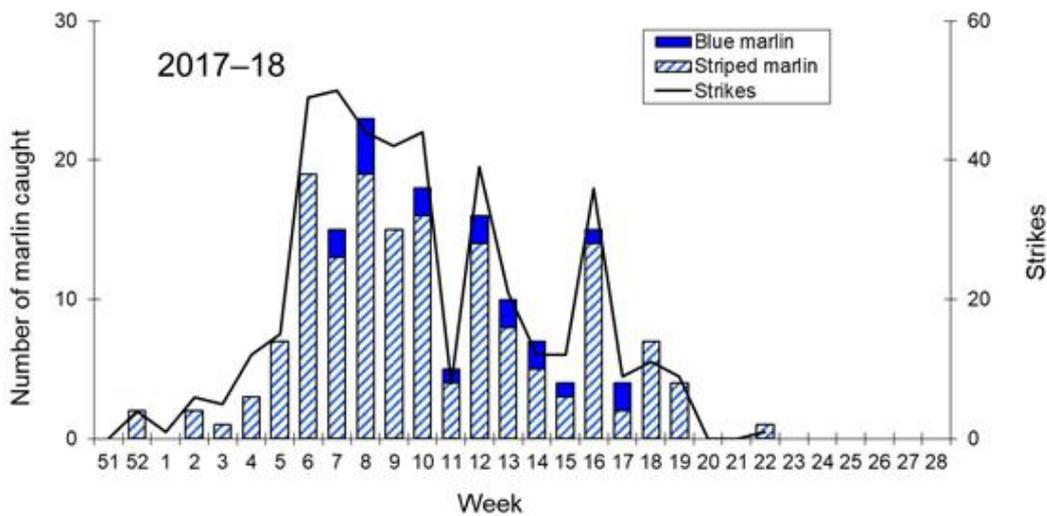


Figure 2: The number of striped, blue marlin and strikes by week from logbooks in 2017-18

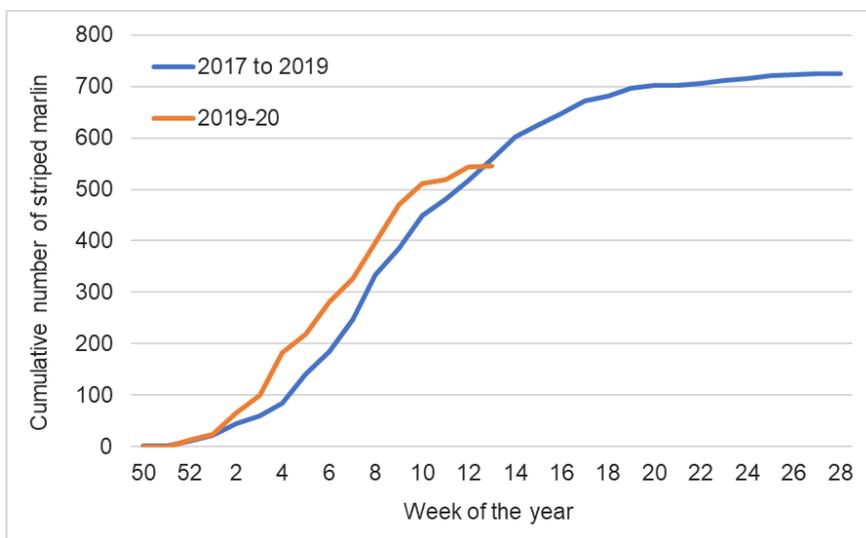
For comparison, the 2017-18 season was quite different with relatively poor fishing in January, the best month in February and good catches in April into May. Fewer blue marlin were caught per week but there was more fishing on bait schools inshore in 2018.

Another way to look at the 2019-20 striped marlin catch uses gamefish club records. In Figure 3 we track the combined catch tally for 2019-20 and the average of the three previous years. 2020 had a better than average start and then total catch was increasing at about the same rate as the previous 3 years until early March when few striped marlin were added to the tally before Level 4 restrictions began on 25 March.

Satellite tagging in 2020

This year only 2 of the 12 available pop-of satellite tags were deployed on striped marlin before Covid-19 restrictions effectively ended the marlin season. These fish were tagged off New Plymouth and the tags were due to report in October. No transmissions were received which is very disappointing for all involved. We will put the remaining tags out in 2021 and are discussing any action we can take in NZ to ensure success.

We are always keen to get more fishers in the Logbook Programme. If you have friends that are interested ask them to get in touch or pass their details on to us.



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Figure 3: the cumulative number of striped marlin caught by fishing clubs in 2019-20 and the average for the previous 3 years