

A New Reason to Fish

Just another day in the Bahamian waters for the crew of the Makara: thirty frenzied minutes, thirty-six tagged peanut dolphin, thirty-six tag report cards in various states of saturation, a very messy mate, five big grins, one great boat, and an angler giving back. The story begins very simply: there are fewer fish in the oceans, and one man is doing something about it.

Tom McMurray has fished all his life, from lakes of North Carolina as a kid, to the wilds of Alaska, the bonefish flats of the Caribbean, the canyons off the East Coast. He really started his ocean work when he received his Ph.D. from Duke University, where his dissertation research was conducted at the Duke Marine Lab in Beaufort, NC. After many years funding startups in Silicon Valley as a partner at Sequoia Capital, he made yet another big decision, of the important, lifestyle variety: he left the venture business to focus on family. His vigilant and growing concern with dwindling fisheries populations would be his work.

Now, instead of being a career-focused dad, he's with his sons, nephews, and brothers aboard the second incarnation of Makara, a 2006 74 Viking ("the Viking 56 got a little tight.") He's helping to bring his kids and their cousins into the conservation mindset at an age of significance; young, strong, and bright, they are enthusiastic and accomplished anglers with a healthy respect for the oceans' inhabitants. And he's no longer funding companies: he funds scientific research, through his roles as President of Marine Ventures Foundation and Chairman of The Ocean Foundation.

Marine Ventures funds educational, technical and scientific organizations embarking on studies and projects that are cutting edge with the promise of a significant impact on marine conservation. Since inception, MVF has granted over \$500,000 for projects covering tagging of bluefin tuna, white marlin, bonefish, tarpon and trout, economic impact studies of commercial versus recreational water uses, and ecosystem management advocacy. MVF funds only six - eight projects a year, and accepts proposals by invitation only.

McMurray doesn't just write a check. He performs his customary diligence on the scientific community, the dedicated researchers seeking monies to further their work. He tags fish: to date, bluefin tuna, white marlin, and dolphin (Makara is the top dolphin tagging boat on the East Coast as of August 2006). The remainder of 2006 will be spent in Caribbean waters, for dolphin, bonefish, blue marlin, and sailfish. The 2007 calendar includes taking the Makara to the Pacific, to tag sailfish, striped marlin and blue marlin. A week of video for a new conservation film was just completed aboard the Makara, while in the Bahamas. The work grows exponentially as more results are published; with the 74 Viking, McMurray's group can tag anywhere in the world. And they will.

The oceans are in trouble. Any tentative hopes for regional management of the bluefin tuna populations in the Mediterranean and Eastern Atlantic have eluded successful result. According to the consensus results of five separate studies, the ICCAT quota on Atlantic bluefin tuna-- 32,000 metric tons -- was exceeded by as much as 40% last year. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), responsible for the majority of Atlantic billfish research for the U.S., reports that 70 - 90% of the Atlantic billfish catch (blue and white marlin, sailfish) reported to ICCAT is a result of longline bycatch. These statistics not only present the obvious and far-reaching implications to the oceans' food webs, due to destruction of the populations of these apex predators; the threat to U.S. recreational fisheries, a major economic driver estimated by the IGFA to reach approximately \$2.13B in annual expenditures, is obvious. Pollution, wetlands loss, reef destruction - the reach of scientific panic is broad. The science must continue: organizations like Marine Ventures must continue to support the right people. Anglers must be seriously involved in protecting the fish they love. McMurray and the Makara team are committed to the task ahead.

"The boat is key," says Tom. "The right boat, the right captain, the right mate, the right team, working together with the top fisheries' scientists in the world - it's the only way I can make a measurable difference. The capabilities of the Viking 74 sportfisher make it the perfect vehicle for combining my dedications to family and to the fish, and provides a comfortable and powerful fishing platform. The work is very serious, and the boat makes it possible." A new Maverick 17 HPX flats boat gets installed on the bow next month, and will enable bonefish and permit tagging work to begin. "Both Viking Yachts and Mike Burke from HMY Yacht Sales have spent countless hours working with us to outfit and prepare the Makara for our research trips," according to Tom McMurray. "Mike Burke is more than the HMY Sales rep; he is a member of the Makara tag team. We would have never gotten this far without his help."

For more information about marine conservation, fish tagging projects and Marine Ventures Foundation, visit www.makara74.com.