



TOURNAMENT ENCOURAGES TUNA CHAMPIONS

Now in its fifth year, the Coast 2 Coast Tuna Tournament in Victor Harbor has evolved into the biggest tuna fishing competition in South Australia. Representing the Tuna Champions program, Dr Sean Tracey found it an excellent example of how a tournament can encourage anglers to adopt better fish handling techniques to enjoy more from their catch.

Minimising waste and maximising the eating qualities of the tuna were priorities of the tournament, so all tuna presented for weighing had to be gilled and gutted, and stored on ice.



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Whether you're an experienced game angler or embarking on your first tuna fishing adventure, the Coast 2 Coast Tuna Tournament in South Australia's Victor Harbor is the place to be each February. Organised by passionate local anglers, this grassroots event is now the biggest tuna fishing competition in the state, with over 75 boats and 250 individuals competing this year, and \$25,000 worth of prizes and giveaways up for grabs.

I was there to promote the Tuna Champions program and, with such a large and diverse field of competitors, it was a great opportunity to chat to avid and new anglers alike. This competition perfectly aligns with the Tuna Champion ethos, with the organisers putting a lot of thought into the responsible handling of tuna and promoting zero-wastage from the fish. All fish are weighed-in bled, gilled, gutted and held on ice, with this year's winning gilled and gutted tuna weighing in at 22.6kg.



PREPARED WITH ICE

It was so impressive to see competitors storing their fish well-iced in eskies or chill bags. From the boat ramp to the weigh-in station at the nearby harness racing club, the fish only left the ice to be inspected, measured and weighed – which helped to achieve maximum food quality from their catch.

After the weigh-in, competitors process their own fish at the cleaning station provided, complete with a fish disposal bin, or they can watch and learn from a professional fish filleter who will do the job for them. This has been part of the competition since its inception and is a great initiative, with many competitors opting to have their fish processed this way.

The fish filleter had a captive audience, with many competitors and spectators watching the process and learning from a professional how to use as much of the fish as possible. As he worked, he also talked about icing the fish and how this made the filleting process much easier and meant a much better quality of meat.

ZERO WASTAGE

It didn't stop there. All the fish frames (skeletons) are collected up and made available to commercial crab fishers in the area as bait. Any leftover frames are taken to a local abattoir, to be minced down into protein pellets for livestock. It's a great example of a zero-waste competition!

The organisers have also considered the issue of anglers high-grading their catch – discarding dead smaller fish if they subsequently catch a larger one – and how the competition can influence this. While the bag limit in South Australia is two fish per person per day, with a boat limit of six fish, each competitor can only weigh in one fish. This translates to anglers keeping their first tuna of the day, then release any subsequent smaller fish. If they happened to catch a larger fish, they could retain it and still be within their bag limit.

Left: Part of the winning team's catch at the Coast 2 Coast Tuna Tournament held at Victor Harbor in South Australia.

Right: A professional fish filleter was provided by the tournament to prepare competitors' tuna, and teach them about the various cuts of meat and how to minimise wastage.



The tournament offers a prize for the largest released fish, which is photographed on a measuring board provided to all competitors. The tournament stipulates a minimum 15kg line class to help reduce stress on released tuna, and single hooks are required to reduce the chance of damage and improve the survival rates of released fish.

A NEW CULTURE OF CARE

There is a great sense of community around the competition. I overheard many conversations where more experienced anglers were chatting to fellow competitors about fishing techniques and good handling practices. The whole ethos of competing in a game fishing tournament where the catch was iced and weighed-in gilled and gutted to ensure better quality meat was embraced by everyone there.

It was great to see these positive, responsible fishing initiatives, driven by a grass-roots fishing competition and embraced wholeheartedly by competitors and spectators. It's no surprise the tournament has been awarded 4 out of 5 stars in meeting the National Environmental Assessment of Tournament Fishing standards (see www.NEATFish.com).

NEATfish standards ensure tournaments minimise detrimental impacts on fish stocks, promote environmental sustainability, encourage support from local communities, provide safe fishing experiences for competitors and spectators, and provide significant positive social and economic benefits to the communities in which they are held.

BUILDING RESPECT FOR BLUEFIN

At Tuna Champions, we believe the most powerful way to get the message out about respecting the southern bluefin tuna and making the most of those retained is through those who fish for this amazing species.

This competition overflowed with good handling practices and respect for the fish. I applaud the organisers, who have voluntarily given up their time to develop what is a great event for southern bluefin tuna anglers. They are true Tuna Champions! 🐟

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BECOME A TUNA CHAMPION

Discover more at www.tunachampions.com.au. Learn how to catch and handle tuna so the ones you release have the greatest chance of surviving, and how to process and prepare the ones you keep to get better meals from every fish.

Tuna Champions is an initiative of the Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation in collaboration with the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies at the University of Tasmania, funded by the Australian Government through the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

