

FISHING

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Counting on marlin

Club prays prey arrive for contest

THE big question in gamefishing circles around Townsville this week is whether the black marlin will arrive in time for the huge annual billfishing tournament scheduled for the week after next.

Members of the Townsville Gamefishing Club, which will host the 6kg-line class tournament, have been unable to fully check out the billfishing grounds off Cape Bowling Green, east of Townsville, because of recent poor weather.

There have been reports of sailfish being caught and one or two marlin sighted.

Club president Anthony Florence has high hopes the marlin will arrive in numbers before the tournament starts on September 2.

The juvenile marlin and sailfish arrive each year on their migratory run south to feed off giant schools of baitfish that form off the cape this time of year. Reports say the baitfish are there in football field-sized schools following the record wet season earlier in the year.

Simon Polletti, of Giru Fishing Charters, hooked a small black while fishing in Bowling Green Bay waters three weeks ago.

Fish City Charters guide Eddie Riddle, while demonstrating the merit of using a downrigger to clients two weeks ago, had a swimming garfish bait pulled free of his grip (the bait only about 5m astern) by a small black marlin – one of the first seen in the region this year.

Four billfish, including only one marlin and three sails, won last year's tournament.

The year before, two tagged fish won the day, so Florence is hoping this year the marlin will return in big numbers.

In past years, winning boats have tagged and released scores of marlin.

In case this does not happen again this year, the club for the first time has introduced a heavy tackle tour-



Officers nab sailfish by hook or by crook

CAIRNS policewoman Talina O'Brien (right) caught this sailfish aboard the 16.5m gameboat *Kekoa* off Innisfail this week on the way south to compete in the Townsville Billfishing Challenge next month.

Helping her hold the fish before release is another Cairns policewoman, Sue McDonald. Talina, formerly of Townsville, is the daughter of Russell O'Brien, a long-time member of the Townsville Gamefishing Club.

It was her first sailfish capture and billfishing

circles were abuzz with the news this week.

Since she was young, Talina has been aboard her dad's boat and has watched while well over 20 sails have been tagged and released.

"Talina was always beaten to the rod," Russell said. "She's always wanted to capture one."

He said Talina had caught plenty of marlin and went close to catching a sail only recently when mackerel fishing with him and mum Katrina, of Balgal Beach, north of Townsville.

"I saw one of the rods bending over repeatedly

and said, 'Quick, grab it and free spool as it's a billfish,'" he said.

"Both Katrina and Talina looked at each other and said, 'You take it', 'No, you take it'."

"While they were arguing the toss, the fish hooked itself and Katrina grabbed the rod. After a long run, out came a sailfish."

However, Talina's wish came true off Flora Reef near Innisfail aboard *Kekoa*, which was heading south for the light tackle season on Wednesday.

nameant option, so the bigger gameboats can fish wide in deeper waters.

Usually most of the competing boats, particularly the smaller ones, troll teaser baits on either the northern or southern end of the known grounds off the cape.

Most switch bait. When a billfish appears behind a teaser lure, live yakkas are sent back into the wash by the anglers on strike hoping for a hook-up.

Teams of four compete in the tag-and-release competition, with about \$50,000 in prizemoney up for grabs

this year. The first billfish tagged each day is worth \$1000.

The tournament week starts with a meet-and-greet function on Friday night, September 2, followed the next day by the traditional sail-past off the Strand and the 7.30am shotgun start. Then comes four days of all-out

fishing until Tuesday afternoon, September 6.

The presentation of prizes will be held at the Townsville Yacht Club on Wednesday night, September 7.

For more information, contact Anthony Florence on 0402 628 821 or go to townsvillegamefishclub.com.