

None Regional Commercial Longline Hooks in the Billfish of the Azores

Associação Vida Pelágica - Azores - Oct 28, 2025

Concerns mount as sport fishing vessels fishing in the Azores are finding increasing numbers of none regional commercial longline hooks in larger specimens of blue marlin, notably in fish of 250 kg or more.



Left and centre: a longline hook removed from a large blue marlin by the Blue Skye on Oct 2, 2025. Right: the same blue marlin just before its safe release and after removal of both the longline hook and the hook used for its capture. Local “catch and release” sport fishing operators use a single hook that is removed from the fish in 95% of cases before the safe release of the fish).

In 2025 an estimated 5-10% of large blue marlin were found to have a pre-existing stainless longline hook described as “asian” in design in their mouth, often with a short trailing length (50-100 cm) of +/- 150 kg monofilament leader. If these hooks are being found in the Azores, it can be assumed that 5-10% of large 250 kg+ billfishes in the NE Atlantic currently have a commercial longline hook in their mouth?

Furthermore, the probability is that only the bigger stronger fish have the capability to chafe and break the longline leaders with the smaller fish unable to escape.

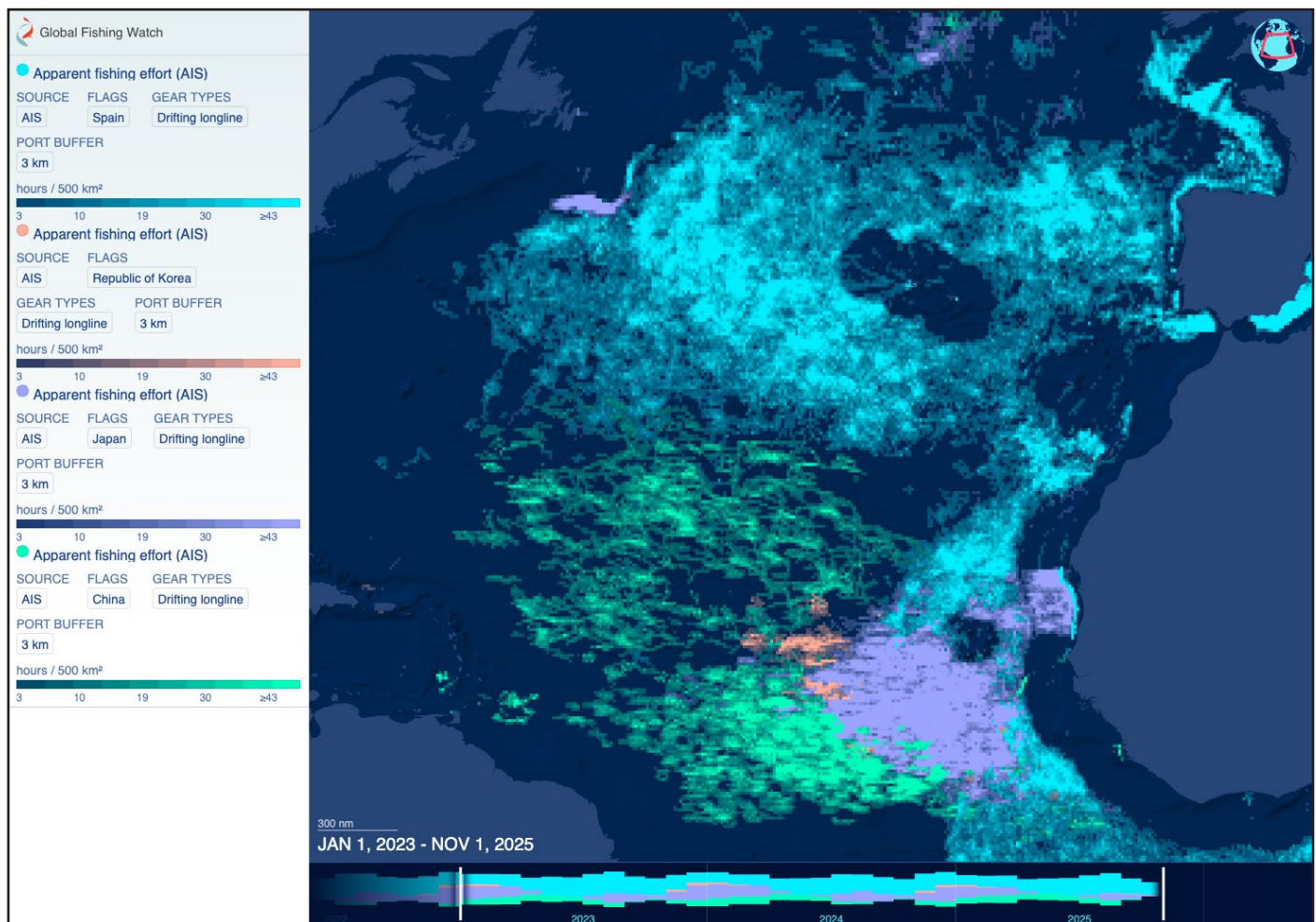
Local sportfishing catch data shows that smaller white marlin, once the most prolific billfish encountered in the Azores have all but disappeared in the last decade, but who is reporting this and what are the long term implications?



Left: the most commonly encountered “asian” style longline hook with a welded ring. These hooks are stainless, don’t rust out and are offset allowing them to lodge in places other than the jaw. The hook shown in the roof of the marlin’s mouth could not be removed (photo: Dr Guy Harvey Sept, 2025). Right: a less commonly encountered type longline hook with a commercial crimp recovered by the Alabote on Aug 26, 2025.

Whilst the Azores “catch and release” recreational billfish fishery is predominantly a close to 100% “no take” fishery, the impact of none regional commercial fishing which what appears to be the decimation of some billfish species in the North Atlantic is causing considerable concern.

Surface longline fishing in the North Atlantic is widespread and is having a significant impact on the billfish populations occurring in the Azores.



Above: apparent commercial surface longline effort in the North Atlantic during the period Jan 1, 2023 - Nov, 2024
(Blue = Spanish - Orange = South Korean - Green = Chinese - Purple = Japanese)

It should be noted that commercial longline effort within the 200 mile EEZ of the Azores is shown to be considerably less compared to the surrounding areas (with some Spanish boats entering the area for landing purposes). Furthermore, minimal or negligible catches of blue marlin in the Azores are reported by the ICCAT in their 2024 report.

Any regional concerns about billfish populations and their conservation should be directed at non-regional commercial longline fishing and not at regional recreational “catch and release” sport fishing with negligible impact on stocks. In fact, it is the regional “catch and release” sport fishers that move to report and expose the real threat to billfish occurring in the Azores.

The association “Vida Pelagica” was established in the Azores in 2025 with one of its objectives being to collect data and report the occurrence of pre-existing hooks in large pelagic species in the Azores. AVP encourages local operators to report, photograph and retrieve any pre-existing hooks found in large pelagic fish before their safe release. More info: www.vidapelagica.com