



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA TEMPORARILY SUSPENDS REQUIREMENT TO USE CIRCLE HOOKS IN ATLANTIC BILLFISH TOURNAMENTS

NOAA Fisheries Service is temporarily suspending a recently adopted rule that requires fishermen who participate in Atlantic billfish tournaments to use non-offset circle-hooks.

The suspension began Friday, and will continue to Dec. 31, 2007. The decision comes after recreational tournament fishermen said they needed more time to become familiar and proficient with using circle hooks. The agency plans on reinstating the circle hook requirement for tournament participants in January.

Circle hooks have been used for many years in some fisheries. Billfish caught on these hooks instead of on traditional "J-hooks" are more likely to survive after being released back into the ocean. Circle hooks do not typically embed in the gut or lodge deep in the throat of a billfish. Instead, they tend to hook the jaw of the fish and can be removed by sport fishermen without severely injuring the released fish.

"In the long-term, our goal is to allow anglers to better understand the new regulation and its benefits to a fishery in need of strong conservation," said Dr. Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries Service. "We hope the seven-month suspension will give fishermen time to test their skill at using circle hooks and then be more apt to comply with the rule."

The temporary suspension could affect participants in as many as 200 billfish tournaments involving Atlantic highly migratory species such as blue marlin, white marlin, sailfish and longbill spearfish.

A copy of the rule and *Federal Register* notice may be obtained online at:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms>.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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