

NOAA Fisheries Announces the Availability of an Issues and Options Paper Regarding HMS Management, Requests Comments, and Announces Nine Public Meetings

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) announces the availability of an Issues and Options paper for Amendment 2 to the Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish, and Sharks Fishery Management Plan (HMS FMP) and Amendment 2 to the Billfish Fishery Management Plan (Billfish FMP), requests public comment, and announces the dates and times of nine public meetings. This paper examines management alternatives to issues raised by the HMS and Billfish advisory panels (APs) and by the general public.

In February 2004, NOAA Fisheries met with the APs for HMS and Billfish to discuss fishery management issues and potential options for future rulemaking. The Issues and Options paper raises issues and lists potential options to address these issues. Some of the issues include: General category quota allocation of Atlantic bluefin tuna, filleting tunas at sea, changing the swordfish bag limit for anglers, changing the large coastal shark trip limit for directed permit holders, streamlining the limited access permit program, non-tournament reporting of billfish harvest, species identification workshops, implementation of the bycatch reduction plan, simplifying the quota and permitting administrative processes for exempted fishing permits, and updating essential fish habitat (EFH) identifications for all HMS. These management measures could affect fishermen, dealers, equipment suppliers, or anyone who is involved in HMS fisheries.

Comments received on the Issues and Options paper will assist NOAA Fisheries in determining suitable alternatives for rulemaking and improve the management of Atlantic HMS. A copy of the issues and options paper can be obtained from our website at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms> or by contacting the HMS Management Division at 301-713-2347.

NOAA Fisheries will hold nine public meetings to receive comments from fishery participants and other members of the public on the options mentioned above and described in the Issues and Options paper. The meetings will be physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Heather Stirratt, 301-713-2347, at least 7 days prior to the meeting. See the attached table for the meeting schedule. NOAA Fisheries is also planning to attend and present the Issues and Options paper at several Fishery Management Council meetings that occur in May and June 2004.

This FAX notice is a courtesy to HMS fisheries interests to keep you informed about your fisheries. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register. For further information, contact: Karyl Brewster-Geisz 301-713-2347, Mark Murray Brown 978-281-9260, or Russ Dunn 727-570-5447.

John H. Dunnigan April 27, 2004
Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

The scoping meeting schedule:

Location	Address	Date	Time
Gloucester, MA	Gloucester Lyceum and Sawyer Free Library 2 Dale Ave. Gloucester, MA 01930	May 19, 2004	7-9 PM
Ocean City, MD	Ocean City Council Chambers 301 Baltimore Ave. Ocean City, MD 21842	June 2, 2004	7-9 PM
New Orleans, LA	Elquier Regional Library 3014 Holiday Dr. New Orleans, LA 70131	June 3, 2004	7-9 PM
Manteo, NC	North Carolina Aquarium Roanoke Island PO Box 967 Airport Road Manteo, NC 27954	June 8, 2004	7-9 PM
San Juan, Puerto Rico	Carnegie Library (Biblioteca Carnegie) Ponce De Leon Ave. #7 San Juan, Puerto Rico 00901	June 10, 2004	2-4 PM
Destin, FL	Destin Community Center 101 Stahlman Ave. Destin, FL 32541	June 17, 2004	7-9 PM
Montauk, NY	Montauk Fire House 12 Flamingo Avenue Montauk, NY 11954	June 22, 2004	7-9 PM
Port Aransas, TX	University of Texas Marine Science Institute Visitor's Center (located on Cotter St. near beach) 750 Channel View Dr. Port Aransas, TX 78373	June 24, 2004	7-9 PM
Cocoa Beach, FL	Cocoa Beach Public Library 550 North Brevard Avenue Cocoa Beach, FL 32931	June 30, 2004	7-9 PM