

---

---

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF  
**COMMERCE**

**NEWS**

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20230

---

---

NATIONAL  
OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC  
ADMINISTRATION

Contact: Susan Buchanan  
(301) 713-2370

NOAA03-R153  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
Dec. 24, 2003

**NOAA FISHERIES IMPLEMENTS NEW FISHING REGULATIONS FOR  
ATLANTIC SHARKS**

Fishing regulations aimed at rebuilding large coastal shark populations, preventing overfishing of all sharks, protecting essential fish habitat for sharks and reducing bycatch of depleted species will soon take effect for commercial and recreational shark fisheries in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean. The regulations were announced by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Amendment 1 to the Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish and Sharks concludes seven years of litigation with industry stakeholders and environmental organizations that impacted the development and implementation of long-term shark management programs. The new regulations are based on updated and peer-reviewed scientific shark assessments and fulfill requirements of a settlement agreement reached between the agency and litigants on shark management.

“Favorable peer reviews of our 2002 stock assessment have allowed us to move shark management out of the courts and back into the hands of scientists, fishery managers, and the American public,” said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries. “Now we can get these much-needed regulations in place to strengthen our rebuilding plan for large coastal sharks and to manage all Atlantic sharks for the long-term benefit of the species and the nation.”

The 2002 stock assessments for large and small coastal sharks included some good news about these species. In the large coastal complex, blacktip sharks have been rebuilt and sandbar sharks are no longer overfished. However, the assessment showed this complex as a whole was overfished and overfishing was still occurring. Therefore, Amendment 1 regulations will decrease annual catch levels for large coastal sharks by 45% to prevent overfishing and rebuild the stocks, with further catch reductions from a fishery closure January through July off North Carolina to protect habitat and nursery grounds. The small coastal complex is not overfished, and Atlantic sharpnose, bonnethead and blacknose sharks are healthy. The assessment showed that finetooth sharks were not overfished but fishing rates were too high for this species.

Certain measures in Amendment 1 will become effective on Dec. 30, 2003, while others take effect on Feb. 1, 2004. Changes are outlined in the attached fact sheet. Highlights include a revised rebuilding timeframe for the large coastal complex of 26 years, elimination of the commercial minimum size limit, establishment of regional commercial quotas, increase of recreational catch and size limits, and establishment of gear restrictions and a time and area closure.

Amendment 1 includes measures to prevent bycatch of prohibited and juvenile sharks and to protect one of the only shark habitat areas of particular concern that extend into federal waters.

Nineteen shark species are fully protected and may not be landed by fishermen. All 19 species have been identified for protection since 1997. Amendment 1 sets up criteria for determining which species belong on the protected list. These criteria include: the species biology makes it vulnerable for depletion, it is rarely encountered or observed in directed fisheries or as bycatch, or it is not easily identified by fishermen.

Copies of Amendment 1 and the regulations are available online at: [www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fa/hms](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fa/hms) or by calling 301-713-2347. Updated shark regulation brochures will also be available.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit [www.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov).

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. To learn more about NOAA, please visit [www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov).

###

# **Fact Sheet: Regulatory Changes in Amendment 1 to the Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish, and Sharks**

## **Atlantic Shark Species**

Small Coastal Shark Complex (four species)

Atlantic sharpnose, blacknose, finetooth, bonnethead

Large Coastal Shark Complex (eleven species)

sandbar, silky, tiger, blacktip, bull, spinner, lemon, nurse, smooth hammerhead, scalloped hammerhead, great hammerhead

Pelagic Sharks (five species)

shortfin mako, thresher, oceanic whitetip, porbeagle, and blue

Prohibited Species (no catches allowed, 19 species)

Whale, basking, sand tiger, bigeye sand tiger, white, dusky, night, bignose, Galapagos, Caribbean reef, narrowtooth, longfin make, bigeye thresher, sevengill, sixgill, bigeye sixgill, Caribbean sharpnose, smalltail, and Atlantic angel sharks

## **General Changes to Atlantic Shark Management**

Large Coastal Sharks

Elimination of ridgeback and non-ridgeback categories. New rebuilding timeframe of 26 years for all large coastal sharks (old was 39 years for ridgeback, 30 years for non-ridgeback).

## **Commercial Fishery Changes**

Removal of the minimum size limit, since the time/area closure will provide sufficient protection of young, small sharks. This change will reduce the amount of regulatory discards.

Bycatch Measures

Time and Area Closure for commercial vessels with bottom longline gear on board from January through July off North Carolina to protect shark essential fish habitat and nursery/pupping areas for sandbar and dusky sharks, effective January 1, 2005.

Vessels with bottom longline gear on board must use non-stainless steel corrodible hooks, linecutters, and a dipnet on board, and move one nautical mile after an interaction with a protected species. Vessels will also be required to have a dehooking device onboard once the dehooker type has been approved for use.

Small Coastal Complex

New annual quota of 454 metric tons (formerly the quota was 1,760 metric tons), effective Dec. 30, 2003.

Large Coastal Complex

New annual quota of 1,017 metric tons (formerly the quota was 1,285 metric tons), effective Dec. 30, 2003.

Three fishing regions are established, and each region gets a percentage allocation of the annual quota (effective Dec. 30, 2003):

- North Atlantic (Maine through Virginia) – 13% small coastal quota, 4% large coastal quota;
- South Atlantic (North Carolina through east Florida and the Caribbean) – 83% small coastal quota, 54% large coastal quota;
- Gulf of Mexico (west Florida through Texas) – 4% small coastal quota, 42% large coastal quota.

In addition, after the federal quota is reached and the federal shark fishery is closed, landings of sharks caught in state waters will be counted against the federal quota.

## **Recreational Fishery Changes**

Gear Changes

The only allowable gear is rod and reel and handline gear.

Effective Dec. 30, 2003, Recreational fisherman may possess only one shark per vessel per trip, with a minimum size limit of four and a half feet. In addition to this limit, sportfishermen may take one bonnethead per person per trip with no minimum size limit and one Atlantic sharpnose per person per trip, with no minimum size limit.

Sportfishermen are reminded that a federal angling permit is required to fish for sharks, and that all landings must be reported to NOAA Fisheries within 24 hours. For more information, go to [www.nmfspermits.com](http://www.nmfspermits.com).