



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Silver Spring, MD 20910

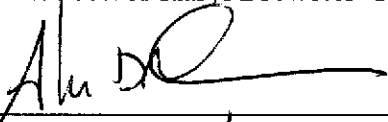
**NMFS ANNOUNCES A NOTICE OF RECEIPT OF A PETITION FOR
RULEMAKING TO AMEND THE EXTENT OF THE CURRENT TIME/AREA
CLOSURE FOR ATLANTIC SHARKS OFF THE MID-ATLANTIC REGION**

On March 7, 2005, NMFS received a request from the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Division of Marine Fisheries (Petitioner) to initiate rulemaking for a regulatory amendment to 50 CFR 635.2 in the definition of the "Mid-Atlantic shark closed area." The Mid-Atlantic shark closed area extends from approximately Oregon Inlet to Cape Fear, North Carolina out to the 55 fathom mark. The petition for rulemaking proposes to change the current closed area boundary to only include waters out to 15 fathoms coastwide for North Carolina.

The Petitioner believes that this change would allow North Carolina fishermen access to the larger sharks in deeper waters from 15 to 55 fathoms while minimizing discards of juvenile and protected sharks. The State of North Carolina claims that the available data suggest that juvenile sharks occur predominately near shore. Thus, the State of North Carolina proposes that closing waters out to 15 fathoms instead of 55 fathoms can still attain the management goal of protecting juvenile sandbar and prohibited dusky sharks and mitigates negative social and economic impacts of the current time/area closure on fishermen, dealers, and fishing communities in the South Atlantic.

NMFS has prepared a notice of receipt of this petition for rulemaking and is requesting comments on the social, economic, and biological impacts that a potential regulatory amendment to the closure would have on the large coastal shark rebuilding plan. Copies of the petition can be obtained by contacting Jackie Wilson at 301-713-2347 and are also available on the Internet at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms>. NMFS invites written comments from interested parties on the petition. Comments must be received on or before 5 p.m. July 11, 2005, and should be submitted to Jackie Wilson, Highly Migratory Species Management Division (F/SF1), Office of Sustainable Fisheries, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Comments may also be sent via facsimile (FAX) to 301-713-1917 or by email at SF1.040605D@noaa.gov. Please mark on the outside of the envelope for written comments or include in the subject line of emails the following identifier: "Comments on Petition for Rulemaking for Sharks."

This FAX notice is a courtesy to Atlantic HMS fisheries interests to keep you informed about your fishery. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register. For further information, please contact Jackie Wilson or Karyl Brewster-Geisz, 301-713-2347.



John H. Dunnigan
Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

MAY - 6 2005

Date

