



## NMFS Announces the Availability of the Final Scoping Summary for Amendment 4 to the Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan

Based on discussions with the Caribbean Fishery Management Council and the territorial governments of Puerto Rico (PR) and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) believes that there is an increased reliance on highly migratory species (HMS) resources in the Caribbean region as continental shelf fishery resources have been depleted. In addition, due to differences in fishing practices in the Caribbean region (*e.g.*, small artisanal fisheries, few Federally permitted dealers, etc.), NMFS has recognized the need to consider modifying the current HMS permitting and reporting requirements to improve participation by small commercial and recreational Caribbean vessels and to more efficiently collect catch and effort data.

On May 27, 2008 (73 FR 30381), NMFS published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to amend the Consolidated HMS Fishery Management Plan (FMP), and to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement on Caribbean HMS fisheries in the Federal Register. The NOI summarized the reasons for considering modifications to the current HMS permitting and reporting requirements in the Caribbean region and requested comments on a variety of management options for this action.

On July 14, 2008 (73 FR 40301), NMFS announced in the Federal Register the availability of an issues and options document describing potential measures for inclusion in the proposed Amendment 4 to the Consolidated HMS FMP (Amendment 4). In this announcement, NMFS provided details for five scoping meetings and requested comments on the issues and options document. The comment period was open until October 31, 2008. Five scoping meetings were held in Puerto Rico and the USVI during August and September 2008. NMFS also presented an issues and options presentation to the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, and New England Fishery Management Councils. The issues and options were presented to the HMS Advisory Panel at the September 2008 meeting.

The Amendment 4 scoping summary document, which provides a summary of the comments received during scoping from July 14, 2008, to October 31, 2008, is now available on the HMS website (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/>).

This 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 a notice with the Office of the Federal Register. For further information, contact Greg Fairclough or Randy Blankinship at (727) 824-5399, or Jackie Wilson at (240) 338-3936.

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Date