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**NOAA Outlines Management Issues for
Billfish, Swordfish, Tuna and Shark Fisheries
*Seeks Comment on Options Identified by Constituents***

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has released an issues and options paper for fisheries management of highly migratory species in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean. The paper identifies potential management measures for billfish, swordfish, tunas and sharks. Fishermen and the interested public are encouraged to review the paper and offer ideas and suggestions for management of these fisheries. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Members of two constituent panels that advise the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) on appropriate management of highly migratory species helped develop the issues and options paper. After consideration of public comment, the options may become part of draft Amendment 2 for the Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish and Sharks Fishery Management Plan and draft Amendment 2 to the Billfish Fishery Management Plan.

“The public has the opportunity to participate in federal management of these ecologically and economically important species,” said Chris Rogers, chief of the Highly Migratory Division of NOAA Fisheries. “I encourage fishermen and the public alike to review this options paper and provide input to guide us in our continuing efforts to conserve, manage, and rebuild these fisheries.”

The paper outlines ongoing fisheries issues identified by the advisory panels during a meeting in February 2004. During that meeting, panel members made recommendations to address these issues.

Some of these include a quota allocation for the general category fishery for 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 identifications for highly migratory species.

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NOAA Fisheries will hold nine public scoping meetings in May and June to receive public comments on the options described in the paper. For a listing of meeting dates and locations, visit us online at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms> or call Karyl Brewster-Geisz at (301) 713-2347. Public comment also may be mailed, faxed or e-mailed. Written comments should be mailed to: Christopher Rogers, Chief, NMFS Highly Migratory Species Management Division, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910; faxed to (301) 713-1917; or e-mailed to: 060303D.issues@noaa.gov.

The issues and options paper is posted online at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms>, or may be obtained from Karyl Brewster-Geisz by calling (301) 713-2347.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement, and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

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, 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: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

The Commerce Department's 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 <http://www.noaa.gov>.

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