



NOAA  
FISHERIES  
SERVICE

# ATLANTIC HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES Saltwater Recreational Fishing Action Agenda

November 2011

NOAA



## A Message from the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

I am pleased to share with you the NOAA Fisheries' Atlantic Highly Migratory Species saltwater recreational fishing action agenda for 2012. Prepared by regional NOAA Fisheries staff in consultation with members of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee's Recreational Fisheries Working Group, HMS advisory panel, and other members of the public, this plan follows through on commitments made in the National Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda to develop regional plans that focus on actions where you live and fish.

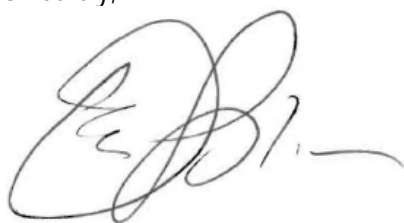
Since September 2009 when NOAA announced its commitment to a *Recreational Fisheries Engagement Initiative*, we have taken concrete actions to strengthen our ties with recreational fishermen across the nation. From appointing a new National Policy Advisor for Recreational Fisheries and nominating regional recreational fishing coordinators to hosting collaborative workshops on key issues and increasing our level of collaboration with our MAFAC advisors and anglers like you, we have worked to fulfill our commitments. These individual actions represent significant steps that build cooperation and create momentum.

These regional action plans are another step forward. The plans are organized around the five priority goals you identified during the 2010 Saltwater Recreational Fishing Summit. The objectives, activities, expected deliverables, and timelines reflect our best thinking on how we can make progress on the issues you raised.

Please take a moment to read through the plan, share it with your friends and colleagues, and let us know what you think. We would like to know because these action agendas are not an end in themselves, but rather a means-to-that-end we all seek – healthy fish stocks, vibrant and satisfying recreational fisheries, and a trusting relationship. We know that success will be judged not on the number of our promises, but on the strength of our actions and we encourage you to work with us as we work to implement the plans.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on how we can best move forward together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Schwaab', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Eric Schwaab  
Assistant Administrator  
NOAA Fisheries Service

## Background

The Secretary of Commerce manages Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS), and has delegated that authority to NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The Atlantic HMS Management Division of NMFS manages Atlantic HMS, including tunas, sharks, swordfish and billfish. Atlantic HMS are managed under the dual authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA). Management of HMS requires international cooperation given the migratory nature of the species.

The 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS Fishery Management Plan (FMP) was developed for the integrated management of HMS within the Atlantic Ocean (including the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico). The HMS Management Division oversees all aspects of recreational and commercial management, implements regulations, and initiates operational actions. This includes permitting, implementing quotas, supervising relevant fisheries, participating in enforcement activities, collecting data from recreational and commercial sectors, conducting outreach to constituents, and representing domestic interests in international management.

The HMS Management Division recognizes the importance of recreational fishing. HMS recreational fishing provides positive social experiences for recreational fishermen, and has significant positive economic impacts to coastal communities (e.g., angler expenditures, recreational charters, tournaments, and shore-side supporting businesses).

## Regional Overview

The goal of improving recreational fishing opportunities is supported through management measures that protect the health of target stocks. Currently, recreational fishing for Atlantic HMS requires one of two vessel permits: HMS Angling or HMS Charter/Headboat. A third vessel permit, the Atlantic Tunas General category permit, allows for fishing under certain recreational limits only in registered HMS tournaments. While many HMS are overfished, the North Atlantic swordfish stock is fully rebuilt and the fishery is undergoing revitalization efforts by NMFS to encourage utilization of the stock within recreational and commercial sectors. NMFS has invested in the reporting infrastructure for tournaments and individuals targeting billfish, and continues to investigate mechanisms that improve the timeliness of landings reports. NMFS supports the collection of social and economic data to better understand recreational and commercial fisheries and improve fishery management. The Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel (AP)—which includes private anglers, charter/headboat operators, and tournament operators, among others—provides important ideas and feedback about HMS fishery management measures and strategies. The Atlantic HMS Management Division regularly seeks out the opinion of constituents to inform the decision-making process, distributes fisheries news bulletins via e-mail through Atlantic HMS News and the Atlantic HMS web page, and includes the recreational constituency in roll-out plans for relevant rulemakings. Development of this Atlantic HMS Recreational Action Plan included input from the Atlantic HMS AP and the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) Recreational Fisheries Working Group.

## Goals and Objectives

This Atlantic HMS Recreational Fishery Action Plan outlines goals and initial objectives for recreational fishery management and provides a framework for future Atlantic HMS recreational fishery management work.

### GOAL 1: Improve Recreational Fishing Opportunities

Management of HMS provides recreational fishing opportunities through the allocation of specific quotas or set-asides for the recreational fishery (e.g., bluefin tuna sub-quota management, a set-aside for the recreational fishery for blue and white marlin, swordfish incidental catch quotas, etc). These sub-quotas and allowances are established in the regulations, which ensure that access to these stocks is maintained and is legally defensible.

**Objective ▶▶ Provide fair and/or equitable access to recreational Atlantic HMS fisheries as consistent with legal obligations, stock health, and the goals and objectives of relevant fishery management plans.**

**Project ▶▶ Atlantic HMS permits**

Issue recreational Atlantic HMS permits to the public. The number of permits issued to the public may change as stock health fluctuates, but NMFS will always provide for fair access across stakeholder groups.

**Metric ▶▶** Number of HMS Angling and HMS Charter/Headboat permits.

**Timing ▶▶** Ongoing.

**Objective ▶▶ Provide for, and improve where practical, recreational opportunities for Atlantic HMS through management practices that ensure healthy stocks are available to the fishery.**

**Project ▶▶ Ensure access to North Atlantic swordfish stocks through continued revitalization efforts for the North Atlantic Swordfish fishery.**

These efforts include the cautious redevelopment of a sustainable fishery for North Atlantic swordfish using handgear and angling methodologies that result in minimal bycatch of protected resources and non-target species. A healthy stock increases availability of swordfish for recreational and commercial interests.

**Metric ▶▶** Metric tons harvested

**Timing ▶▶** Ongoing priority for HMS management.

**Project ▶▶ Educate constituents about the inclusion of roundscale spearfish in the Atlantic HMS management unit with management measures identical to white marlin.**

NMFS will assist anglers with species identification to distinguish roundscale spearfish from white marlin through the development of outreach materials and continued discussion with constituents. This action allowed recreational fishing opportunities to continue without interruption.

**Metric ▶▶** Information about roundscale spearfish management measures distributed to anglers in compliance guides; mt harvested

**Timing ▶▶** Roundscale spearfish were added to the management unit in 2010. Education of anglers is ongoing.

**Project ▶▶ ICCAT negotiations**

To ensure reasonable numbers of marlin are available to U.S. fishermen, NMFS will continue to support the recreational billfish fishery by pursuing negotiations to maintain the U.S. allocation of northwest Atlantic blue and white marlin at annual ICCAT meetings. Only rod and reel gear may be used to harvest billfish, which provides and protects harvest opportunities for anglers across regions.

**Metric** ▶▶ Individuals harvested

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing

**Project** ▶▶ Provide for recreational opportunities to catch Atlantic tunas—i.e., bluefin and BAYS (bigeye, albacore, yellowfin, and skipjack).

Tunas are extremely desirable sportfish to recreational anglers, and provide a high-value target for charter/headboat fisheries along the U.S. East Coast, in the Gulf of Mexico, and in U.S. Caribbean territories. NMFS issues permits to harvest BAYS tunas to anglers across regions. Anglers are not restricted to size or landing limits for albacore and skipjack tunas. Bigeye tuna have size limits, and yellowfin tuna have both size and landing limits to protect stock health. This action includes effective bluefin tuna sub-quota management. Sub-quota management ensures continued access for anglers to high-value bluefin tuna stocks across regions through modifications in size and retention limits.

**Metric** ▶▶ Metric tons harvested

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing

**Project** ▶▶ Support recreational fishing opportunities to catch sharks.

Recreational fishing opportunities are provided for in HMS FMP. NMFS permits recreational anglers to harvest 18 species within the large coastal sharks, small coastal sharks, LCS, SCS, and pelagic shark complexes when stock health and regulations permit. Young sharks are protected from harvest through minimum size and bag limits, except for two species of shark having no size limits (bonnethead and Atlantic sharpnose).

**Metric** ▶▶ Metric tons harvested

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing

## GOAL 2: Improve Recreational Catch, Effort, and Status Data

Catch and effort information from recreational fisheries is vital for accurate stock assessments and for understanding changing trends in recreational fisheries. These data provide the basis for sound fishery management strategies.

### **Objective** ▶▶ Implementation of Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) HMS Actions and Priorities

**Project** ▶▶ Finalize MRIP recalculation of recreational catch and effort estimates, which will be used to produce improved estimates for stock assessments in support of management.

**Metric** ▶▶ New estimation roll-out to the public

**Timing** ▶▶ January 2012

**Project** ▶▶ Finalize project results and reports for the HMS For-Hire Survey – Florida Pilot Study.

**Metric** ▶▶ Report completed June 2011 and available at:

<http://www.countryfish.noaa.gov/projects/index.html>

**Timing** ▶▶ Pilot study completed in April 2011

**Project** ▶▶ **Conduct a billfish catch card pilot program and HMS Angling phone survey in Puerto Rico.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Completion of project and report anticipated 3rd quarter 2012

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing

**Project** ▶▶ **Conduct Pilot Phase 1 of a Massachusetts Recreational Bluefin Tuna Landings Census (Design and Testing)**

**Metric** ▶▶ Completion of project and report anticipated 2nd quarter 2013

**Timing** ▶▶ Project team is currently developing/designing, and the pilot will be implemented for the 2012 season.

**Project** ▶▶ **Test for non-response bias in the Large Pelagics Telephone Survey.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Completion of project and report anticipated 2nd quarter 2013

**Timing** ▶▶ Project team is currently developing survey design; pilot test will be implemented from June through October 2012.

**Project** ▶▶ **Conduct for-hire electronic logbook studies in the Gulf of Mexico.**

**Metric** ▶▶ To be determined

**Timing** ▶▶ Project still underway with testing in Texas and Florida

**Objective** ▶▶ **Support the operation of Atlantic HMS tournaments and provide opportunities to obtain recreational catch and biological data on a variety of HMS species.**

**Project** ▶▶ **Administer Atlantic HMS tournament reporting.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Number of tournament reports

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing.

**Project** ▶▶ **Online Registration**

Provide mechanisms for tournament operators to more quickly and efficiently register Atlantic HMS tournaments online. Tournament registries will be made available to the general public on the HMS webpage.

**Metric** ▶▶ Number of tournament registrants, length of time it takes to register the tournament online

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing.

**Objective** ▶▶ **Facilitate quick reporting of catch information by anglers through internet & phone reporting**

**Project** ▶▶ **Promote live release of shortfin mako and collect data from the public on catch and release location through shortfin mako web page and Android application of live release maps.**

Phase 1: Develop beta testing of shortfin mako webpage. Web page launched May 24, 2011.

Phase 2: Development and launch of Android application. Launched June 30, 2011.

Phase 3: Collect shortfin mako data and release locations and update maps.

**Metric** ▶▶ Number of hits on website, number of data submissions

Timing ►► Ongoing

Project ►► Maintain infrastructure for internet and phone reporting for billfish and swordfish.

Metric ►► Number of reports

Timing ►► Ongoing

Objective ►► Improve timeliness of estimated landings from the Large Pelagic Survey (LPS) which will improve the availability of information for fishery management

Project ►► Improve recreational bluefin tuna landings estimates by reducing the time between data collection and availability of preliminary estimates while preserving accuracy and precision.

Metric ►► Time between interviews and preliminary estimate

Timing ►► Starting in 2011, LPS preliminary estimates are produced monthly and available with a 1-month lag (previously estimates were produced bimonthly).

Objective ►► Support stock assessments of HMS species to provide a better picture of stock health and improve management of the fishery for recreational and commercial uses

Project ►► Participate in Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) shark stock assessments and ICCAT assessments for other HMS.

Metric ►► Completed stock assessments

Timing ►► Ongoing

### GOAL 3: Improve Social and Economic Data on Recreational Fisheries

Social and economic information about recreational fisheries helps us better understand the value of recreational fisheries and benefits and impacts of fishery management measures.

Objective ►► Explore the feasibility of updating the benchmark analyses used to analyze socio-economic impacts of rules on recreational and commercial fishing communities.

Project ►► Identify funding opportunities for benchmark socio-economic analyses.

Metric ►► Identification of potential funding sources

Timing ►► Ongoing

Objective ►► Collect updated social and economic data from recreational anglers.

Project ►► Support 2011 National Marine Recreational Fishing Expenditure Survey.

Metric ►► Completion of project and report

Timing ►► Ongoing

Objective ►► Collect social and economic data from Charter/Headboat owners/captains.

Project ►► Complete For-Hire Cost & Earnings Survey (Mid-Atlantic and New England) data analysis and issue final report.

Metric ►► Completion of project and report

Timing ►► Data collection completed; final results anticipated 4th quarter 2011.

**Project** ▶▶ **Conduct Decennial Economic Survey of For-Hire Boats in the Southeastern U.S.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Completion of project and report

**Timing** ▶▶ Data collection completed; final results anticipated 4th quarter 2011.

#### **Goal 4: Improve Communication**

The Atlantic HMS Management Division actively seeks out constituent feedback on regulatory activities, and has adopted digital and face-to-face mechanisms to receive comments for the public record. NMFS is represented at many tournaments and events. HMS relies on its Advisory Panel (AP) as a major vehicle of communication with recreational, commercial, and environmental constituencies (and for advice on the changing nature of constituent communities). Each sector must be adequately represented, and the intent is to have a group that, as a whole, reflects an appropriate and equitable balance and mix of interests given the responsibilities of the AP. NMFS consults with, and considers the comments and views, of the AP when preparing and implementing Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) or FMP amendments for Atlantic tunas, swordfish, billfish, and sharks.

**Objective** ▶▶ **Increase constituent awareness and understanding of Agency actions.**

**Project** ▶▶ **Regularly update and distribute HMS News, Recreational Compliance Guide, Bluefin Tuna Guide, and a shark identification placard for recreational fisheries stakeholders.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Number of downloads/mailings/printed per year

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing

**Project** ▶▶ **Include recreational information on the HMS webpage.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Completed webpage.

**Timing** ▶▶ To be determined

**Objective** ▶▶ **Conduct on-the-ground communication efforts with constituents.**

**Project** ▶▶ **Conduct outreach at boating, recreational, and species-specific events.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Number of outreach events attended by an NMFS representative

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing

**Project** ▶▶ **Identify constituents and constituent groups through Atlantic HMS tournament registration for distribution of outreach materials; facilitate biological data collection on landed HMS; and provide on-the-ground outreach to anglers.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Number of registered tournaments, number of tournaments submitting landings reports, number of tournaments sampled

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing

**Objective** ▶▶ **Communicate information regarding major NOAA initiatives with constituents, tournaments, and various associations that represent fishermen.**

**Project** ▶▶ **Collaborative outreach**



Share information with our constituents about public participation opportunities and Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning (CMSP) activities. HMS will explore collaborative opportunities with the MRIP Communications and Education Team to increase awareness of the projects in the fishing community.

**Metric** ▶▶ Effort made to distribute information to constituents, tournaments, and through various fishing organizations.

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing

### Goal 5: Institutional Orientation

Improving institutional orientation toward recreational fisheries includes the integration of recreational fishing principles and values into NMFS' mission and culture. The HMS management division evaluates the effects of rulemakings on both recreational and commercial fisheries, strives to maintain balanced representation on the Atlantic HMS AP, and includes key members of the recreational fishing community in roll-out plans for rulemakings. The Atlantic HMS Management Division will continue to seek input from the recreational fishing community on management activities, and will use annual updates on the HMS Action Plan to further engage leadership and constituents in enhancing institutional orientation toward recreational fishing sectors.

#### **Objective** ▶▶ **Balanced recreational and commercial representation on the Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel (AP)**

**Project** ▶▶ **Ensure balanced constituent representation.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Number of individuals in each sector on the AP

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing

**Project** ▶▶ **Include recreational information on the HMS webpage.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Completed webpage.

**Timing** ▶▶ To be determined

#### **Objective** ▶▶ **Improve institutional awareness**

**Project** ▶▶ **Annual in-house planning sessions by the HMS recreational action plan coordination team. This will include soliciting feedback from HMS leadership and HMS team members who interact regularly with constituents.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Annual updates to the Atlantic HMS Action Plan

**Timing** ▶▶ This will be completed once each year prior to the AP meeting in which the Action Plan will be discussed.

**Project** ▶▶ **Briefing and discussion on the Atlantic HMS Recreational Action Plan and activities with the Atlantic HMS AP during public AP meetings, as appropriate.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Public briefing / presentation

**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing

**Project** ▶▶ **Atlantic HMS Regional Coordinators will coordinate with leadership within NMFS Office of Sustainable Fisheries to evaluate the Atlantic HMS Action Plan on an annual basis. This includes regular meetings with the MAFAC working group for feedback.**

**Metric** ▶▶ Briefing / presentation for NMFS OSF leadership  
**Timing** ▶▶ Ongoing (annually).

## Summary

The Atlantic HMS Management Division will continue to integrate recreational considerations into the management of tunas, sharks, swordfish, and billfish and provide for recreational fishing opportunities. The Atlantic HMS Management Division recognizes the need for balanced communication, decision making, and AP panel representation across sectors. The HMS Management Division will continue to actively share information with stakeholders through a variety of mechanisms, and will continue to seek the input of all sectors. The actions listed above will enable progress in achieving the plan's objectives and goals for Atlantic HMS recreational fisheries in keeping with the NMFS Recreational Fishery Action Agenda. Dates listed above indicate expected timeframes for each action. Input about this plan and its execution will be solicited from the Atlantic HMS AP. Outcomes from the actions above will enable the Atlantic HMS Management Division to better address the needs of the Atlantic HMS recreational fishery.

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U. S. Government – 2011

