

Contact: Connie Barclay
301-713-2370

NOAA 02-116
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sept. 4, 2002

**NOAA Fisheries Determines Atlantic White Marlin
Does Not Warrant Listing Under the Endangered Species Act**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) announced today that the Atlantic white marlin (*Tetrapturus albidus*), a billfish that lives in the tropical and temperate waters of the Atlantic Ocean, does not warrant listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

In September 2001, the Biodiversity Legal Foundation and James R. Chambers petitioned NOAA Fisheries to list the white marlin as endangered or threatened throughout its range, and to designate critical habitat under the ESA. The ESA defines an endangered species "as any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range." A "threatened species" is defined as "any species which is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range."

In December 2001, NOAA Fisheries found the petition to list the white marlin contained substantial information that warranted further examination and initiated a comprehensive review of the status of the species. NOAA Fisheries also conducted a number of public meetings to solicit information from the public about the status of white marlin during the status review process.

"We put together a status review team that looked at this species very carefully," Dr. Bill Hogarth, NOAA Fisheries assistant administrator said. "They wrote a thorough report, containing the best available scientific and commercial information. Based on the review, we determined that, although the species has declined greatly from historical levels, it is not currently at a level that warrants listing under the ESA. "

The U.S. fishery accounts for approximately five percent of the total mortality of white marlin, which is mostly caught as bycatch in international longline fisheries. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) is responsible for the international management of white marlin. By consensus of participating nations, ICCAT adopts binding recommendations to manage for maximum sustainable catch of fish stocks.

-more-

The U.S. participates in ICCAT-supported stock assessments of white marlin based on data from ICCAT member fishing nations. ICCAT implemented binding measures in 2000 to reduce mortality of white marlin, but these measures have not been in place long enough to fully evaluate their effectiveness. Current U.S. measures include time/area closures, gear and bait restrictions, and a ban on possession of Atlantic white marlins on board commercial vessels.

Total reported landings of white marlin peaked in 1965 at almost 5,000 metric tons. Scientists estimate the current stock size of Atlantic white marlin at approximately five to 15 percent of carrying capacity, and declining. In recent years, the stock has declined by an average of six percent a year. The latest preliminary stock status evaluations from ICCAT, while uncertain, indicate that international conservation measures have a potential for stabilizing the white marlin stock near current levels.

“Over the past few years, the United States, in partnership with the international community, has implemented additional restrictions to reduce mortality of Atlantic white marlin,” Dr. Hogarth said. “We will continue to push for additional conservation measures, as necessary, consistent with our solid commitment to rebuilding. Our scientists will carefully monitor the results of conservation efforts already underway, and a full ESA review will be conducted within five years.”

White marlin are found in offshore waters throughout the tropical and temperate Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas. Unlike blue marlin and sailfish, white marlin occur only in the Atlantic Ocean. Although generally considered to be a rare and solitary species relative to other similar fish, white marlin occur in small groups consisting of several individuals.

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, and for more information on the Atlantic white marlin, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.