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NOAA sets fishing quotas for bluefin tuna
*2011 quotas support international recovery efforts
and proactively account for unintentionally caught fish*

NOAA today announced quotas and other measures for bluefin tuna that underscore the nation's commitment to sustainable science-based management of this vital fish stock. The allocations divide the available 2011 U.S. bluefin tuna quota of 957 metric tons among commercial and recreational fishing sectors for the fishing season that began on June 1.

"The best way to ensure the long-term sustainability of bluefin tuna is through international cooperation and strong domestic fishery management," said Eric Schwaab, assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "Today's domestic quotas provide allocations to U.S. commercial and recreational fishermen who target bluefin tuna. At the same time, the quotas ensure that longline fishermen can continue to operate while they will take additional steps to minimize their unintended catch of bluefin."

In addition, NOAA's Fisheries Service announced it would begin a review of domestic bluefin tuna management to address allocation issues, discards of dead bluefin tuna and the best ways to reduce unintended catch of bluefin tuna.

The total U.S. quota was set by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas in November, the international body made up of 47 nations and the European Union that manages this highly migratory species. Each of the member nations divides its national quota among its domestic users. The U.S. has been a leader at ICCAT in promoting quotas based on science and in urging the adoption of strong measures to help with the recovery of bluefin tuna and other fisheries.

The General category, which includes commercial fishermen who use rod and reel, will receive 435 metric tons, nearly half the 2011 U.S. quota. Allocations for the other categories are as follows: Angling category (which includes recreational fishermen), 182 metric tons; purse seine fishermen, 171.8 metric tons; longline fishermen, 61 metric tons; harpoon fishermen, 36 metric tons; trap fishermen, 0.9 metric tons; and a reserve of 70.6 metric tons. The reserve is set aside for scientific research and to account for landings and dead discards.

The allocations account for potential discards of unintentionally caught bluefin tuna. Bluefin tuna are primarily discarded by longline fishermen who are targeting swordfish and other tunas. Although fishermen attempt to release fish alive, many discarded fish do not survive. The longline fishery was the only sector to receive reductions in its base quota to account for dead discards in advance of them actually being caught. Data from the 2010 fishing season was used to estimate the discard amount.

"We are working closely with longline fishermen to reduce the amount of bluefin tuna that they catch unintentionally," said Schwaab. "This spring, we began requiring longline fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico to use [weak hooks](#) to reduce the unintended bluefin catch while still allowing them to catch swordfish and yellowfin tuna."

The weak hook, a circular hook constructed of thin gauge wire, is designed to straighten when a large fish such as bluefin tuna is hooked, releasing it but holding on to smaller, lighter fish.

After extensive scientific review, NOAA announced on May 27 that the Atlantic bluefin tuna currently [do not warrant species protection under the Endangered Species Act](#). NOAA also committed to revisit this decision by early 2013, when more scientific information will be available. NOAA has also formally designated Atlantic bluefin tuna as a “species of concern” under the Endangered Species Act, placing the species on a watchlist for concerns about its status and threats to the species.

For more information on bluefin tuna go to: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/stories/2011/05/bluefin_tuna.html

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