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**NOAA's Fisheries Service Seeks Public Comments on
New Ways to Govern U.S. Swordfish, Bluefin Tuna Fishing**

NOAA's Fisheries Service is holding a series of public meetings this summer seeking comments on potential changes in the way commercial and recreational fishermen fish the U.S. quotas for swordfish and bluefin tuna in the Atlantic.

In the case of both fish stocks, U.S. fishermen have not been able to catch the U.S. quotas designed to ensure that the stocks are fished sustainably. While these species are managed internationally, the United States manages the domestic part of these fisheries by taking into account the ecosystem and working to reduce bycatch of turtles and other species. This approach increases expenses for U.S. fishermen and makes it more difficult for them to compete in the marketplace with cheaper imports from fishing nations that subsidize their fleets and do not use an ecosystem approach.

"Swordfish are nearly rebuilt, yet our fishermen are only catching 54 percent of the U.S. quota," said Jim Balsiger, acting NOAA assistant administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "Bluefin tuna are a more complicated story. U.S. fishermen have followed quotas based on scientific recommendations designed to end overfishing. There may be ways to fish more of the U.S. quotas for both stocks in a sustainable manner."

The public process will also be a chance to examine using "catch shares," which would allocate a portion of the total catch to a person, company, community or sector, to better manage these fisheries. NOAA will also examine novel ways to limit the bycatch of sea turtles, marine mammals, or undersized, prohibited and spawning fish in the bluefin and swordfish fisheries.

"We've heard a number of ideas from constituents and we want to broaden the conversation to include recreational fishermen, environmental organizations and the general public on how best to manage these valuable highly migratory fish species," said Balsiger.

This effort to involve the public comes as NOAA's Fisheries Service announces this season's bluefin tuna quota for U.S. commercial and recreational fishermen. The rule puts in place reductions in overall quota that were adopted at the November 2008 meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, the international body that manages tuna, swordfish and other species that cross international boundaries.

The rule, which published on June 1, raises the daily catch limit from one to two bluefin tunas for recreational fishermen. NOAA had originally proposed a daily limit of one but raised the limit to two per day after reviewing comments from the fishing industry and analyzing the change for consistency with the bluefin tuna rebuilding program. The new rule maintains the three-fish per day limit for commercial fishermen.

NOAA received many comments and suggestions during the recent bluefin tuna rulemaking on ways to improve long-term management of bluefin and swordfish. These proposals will now be part of this summer's public process.

In addition to considering catch shares and bycatch reduction, some of the proposals that will be discussed include:

- an industry request to allow more bluefin tuna to be landed that have been incidentally caught in longline fishing gear
- a proposal to allow approximately 5,000 commercial tuna fishermen who use rod and reel to land swordfish at low catch levels
- an industry request to lower the commercial minimum size for bluefin tuna from 73 to 65 inches

Public comments on bluefin tuna fishery issues will close June 30, while comments on all other issues, including swordfish, will remain open until Aug. 31.

Public meetings to obtain additional comments will be held from 5 to 9 p.m. at the following locations. All meetings will begin with an opportunity for people to view information on the issues raised in the public process and ask questions at 5 p.m., followed by a presentation and opportunity for public comment beginning at 6 p.m.

June 23

Holiday Inn
151 Route 72 East
Manahawkin, N.J. 08050

June 25

Roanoke Island Festival Park
1 Festival Park
Manteo, N.C. 27954

June 29

Radisson Hotel Plymouth Harbor
180 Water Street
Plymouth, Mass. 02360

July 21

Belle Chasse Auditorium
8398 Hwy. 23
Belle Chasse, La. 70037

July 28

Broward County Main Library
100 S. Andrews Ave.
Fort Lauderdale, Fla. 33301

To learn more about the public comment process or the bluefin tuna quota go to:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/>

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