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**NOAA ISSUES REMINDER ABOUT NEW FISHING RULES FOR THE
RECREATIONAL HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES FISHERY**

As the recreational fishing season for highly migratory species (HMS) begins, NOAA Fisheries wants to remind recreational fishermen about new regulations for anglers and charter boat operators who target highly migratory species in federal waters of the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and U.S. Caribbean. The new rules went into effect on March 1 & 2, 2003. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is an agency of the Commerce Department.

These conservation measures involve a recreational retention limit for swordfish, an inclusive recreational permit to fish for Atlantic tunas, swordfish, sharks and billfish and a new reporting system to monitor landings of billfish and swordfish.

Recreational fisheries and tournaments are big business in the economies of the East Coast and Gulf of Mexico, with the potential for hundreds of thousands of participants. It is imperative that NOAA Fisheries and the recreational community work collectively to rebuild these big game fish and monitor their populations.

While NOAA Fisheries continues to work with representatives of the recreational fishing industry to further clarify the permitting and reporting requirements, the agency is encouraging recreational fishing vessel owners who are intending to fish for Atlantic highly migratory species to secure a permit and comply with the new reporting program. Additional information, including a [fact sheet](#), a [downloadable flyer](#), and [frequently asked questions](#) are available on our Web site at www.nmfs.noaa.gov/. The components of these new rules are outlined below:

New Recreational Swordfish Catch Limit

Anglers fishing in federal waters of the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico are limited to one swordfish per person, up to three per boat, per day. This limit applies to all recreational vessels, including charter/headboat vessels, and is intended to complement the swordfish rebuilding program.

NOAA Fisheries changed the initial proposal of one swordfish per boat after considering public comment to minimize economic impacts on charterboat/headboat businesses, which often take multiple paying passengers out to sea on fishing trips. The retention limit also will assist in curbing illegal sales and ensure the protection of juvenile fish in nursery areas.

Recently, NOAA Fisheries announced that after just four years into a 10-year recovery program for North Atlantic swordfish, the species is almost rebuilt. However, much of the stock still consists of small, juvenile fish that need continued protection in order to become fully rebuilt.

New Recreational Permit for Highly Migratory Species (HMS Angling permit)

Currently, owners of recreational fishing vessels fishing for Atlantic tunas (bluefin, yellowfin, bigeye, skipjack, and albacore) must obtain an Atlantic tunas angling vessel permit. The new rules extend the tuna permit to include all regulated highly migratory fish B Atlantic sharks, swordfish, white marlin, blue marlin, sailfish and spearfish.

The Atlantic tunas angling permit is now called the Atlantic HMS angling permit. The permit costs \$22 (a decrease of \$5 from 2002) and can be obtained by calling 1-888-872-8862 or online at <http://www.nmfspermits.com/>. Fishermen can apply and pay for the permit online and print it to start fishing immediately. The permit application may also be printed and faxed or mailed.

The new HMS angling permit completes a process NOAA Fisheries initiated several years ago to separate commercial and recreational fishing activities for Atlantic highly migratory species. Since only one permit can be issued to a vessel, fishermen who have held general category permits in order to sell tunas will have to choose between the commercial or recreational fishing rules.

New Reporting Requirements for Billfish and Swordfish

HMS permit holders and charter/headboat permit holders are now required to report all landings of Atlantic blue and white marlin, sailfish and North Atlantic swordfish, including those landed on charter/headboats, to NOAA Fisheries by calling 1-800-894-5528 within 24 hours of the landing. Anglers will continue to report landings of bluefin tuna to 1-888-872-8862 or online at www.nmfspermits.com/. Landings are considered those fish killed and brought to shore.

The toll-free call will take less than five minutes. Individual anglers participating in registered tournaments do not need to report landings if the tournament operator is already reporting to NOAA Fisheries.

In addition, NOAA Fisheries is encouraging the voluntary use of circle hooks in the recreational swordfish fishery to increase the chance that gamefish survive upon release back into the water. Circle hooks consistently hook fish in the corner of the mouth rather than catching in the gut cavity or throat, making it much easier to release a fish unharmed. For a more detailed story on the environmental benefits of circle hooks, visit our Web site at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/>.

Charter/Headboats

The agency issues permits for the HMS charter/headboat fishery and manages the fleet as a unique sector due to its intrinsic mix of commercial and recreational operations. These operators will continue to apply for the HMS charter/headboat permit, which covers the same fish as the HMS angling permit.

Under the new rules, charter and headboat vessels in the highly migratory fishery are defined as commercial vessels, and may need to meet safety gear requirements under the Fishing Vessel Safety Act. However, when on a for-hire trip, charter and headboat owners/operators must comply with recreational regulations, such as retention and size limits.

Charter and headboat trips are deemed "for-hire" when carrying a fee-paying passenger or having on board more than three people (including captain and crew) for a vessel licensed to carry six or fewer. The definition of "for-hire" fishing will allow vessels with HMS charter/headboat permits to fish commercially when not engaged in for-hire fishing.

State/Federal Jurisdiction for New Rules

These new HMS rules apply in state waters for vessels fishing for Atlantic tunas. For other highly migratory species, the new rules will not be immediately applicable in state waters.

NOAA Fisheries is considering initiating administrative processes to extend the new federal regulations to the shore in states that do not have compatible rules for HMS fisheries. State waters are from the shore to 3 miles in the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico, except Florida's west coast and Texas, whose state waters extend to 9 miles offshore. Federal waters begin where state jurisdictions end and extend to 200 miles offshore.

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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 www.nmfs.noaa.gov/.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (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 www.noaa.gov/.

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