

VII. BILLFISH QUICK REFERENCE SHEET

AUTHORIZED SPECIES

Blue marlin, white marlin,
roundscale spearfish, and sailfish.



PROHIBITED SPECIES

Longbill spearfish

PERMITS AND GEARS

Species	Gear	Authorized Permits in Federal Waters
Blue marlin, white marlin, roundscale spearfish, and sailfish	Rod and Reel*	1. HMS Angling, OR 2. HMS Charter/Headboat, OR 3. Atlantic Tunas General category ONLY if participating in a registered Atlantic HMS tournament.

*Includes downriggers

SIZE/BAG LIMITS AND SEASONS

Species	Size Limit*	Bag Limit	Season
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	None**	Jan. 1-Dec. 31
Sailfish	63" LJFL	None	Jan. 1-Dec. 31
White marlin	66" LJFL	None**	Jan. 1-Dec. 31
Roundscale spearfish	66" LJFL	None**	Jan. 1-Dec. 31

Lower Jaw Fork Length measurement *There is no bag limit per trip; however, there is a recreational annual landings limit of 250 Atlantic blue marlin, white marlin, and roundscale spearfish combined for the entire United States. Please contact the HMS Management Division at (301) 427-8503 for landings updates and seasonal closures.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

- All non-tournament recreational Atlantic billfish landings (except in MD and NC) must be reported to NMFS within 24 hours either online at www.hmspermits.gov, or by calling the HMS Recreational Reporting Line (800) 894-5528.
 - Fishermen in MD and NC must report their billfish catch at a state-operated reporting station (see Section XI for details).
- If contacted, fishermen must participate in the Large Pelagic Survey (LPS) or Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP, formerly MRFSS). Survey contact may occur at the dock or by phone.

Please see 50 CFR part 635 for the current Atlantic HMS regulations, as regulations are subject to change. Regulations may change, and if disparities with this guide exist, the regulations prevail.

RESTRICTED AREAS

- Tortugas Marine Reserves (year-round)
- Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps closed areas (year-round) (surface trolling without downriggers allowed May-October)
- Edges 40 Fathom Contour closed area (closed January-April)

LANDING RESTRICTIONS

Billfish may be gutted at sea, but must be landed whole with head, fins, and bill intact.

FISHING GEARS AND TECHNIQUES

Authorized fishing gears and permit(s) required for recreational harvest of Atlantic billfish in federal waters are listed below. Detailed definitions of each gear type can be found in Section II.

Rod and reel: HMS Angling **OR** HMS Charter/Headboat **OR** Atlantic Tunas General category (only if participating in a registered Atlantic HMS Tournament).

Downriggers, wire lines, planers, or similar devices may **not** be used when trolling in the Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps closed areas. Please see Section III for more information.

There are no restrictions on the types of hooks that recreational billfish anglers can use unless they are participating in an Atlantic billfish tournament. Any fishing tournament that awards points or prizes for Atlantic billfish is considered an Atlantic billfish tournament, even if billfish are not the main species targeted in the tournament. Billfish tournament participants must use non-offset circle hooks when using natural bait or a natural bait/artificial lure combination. J-hooks may only be used with artificial lures.

NMFS strongly encourages releasing all billfish alive. An Atlantic billfish harvested from its management unit that is not retained must be released in a manner that will ensure maximum probability of survival, but without removing the fish from the water.