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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) establishes a long-range management process to manage sustainably the nation's fisheries beginning with the creation of a Fishery Management Plan (FMP). A component of the *Final Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish, Sharks* (HMS FMP) and *Amendment I to the Atlantic Billfish Fishery Management Plan* (Billfish Amendment) is the production of an annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report. The SAFE report provides a summary of the best available scientific information on the condition of stocks, marine ecosystems, and fisheries being managed under federal regulation. Consistent with the guidelines for National Standard 2 (NS 2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the SAFE report is prepared annually and used as a reference in the evaluation and refinement of fisheries management practices. The report updates the data necessary to determine appropriate annual harvest levels, documents significant trends in the resource, marine ecosystems, and fishery over time, and identifies associated bycatch and safety issues. Through a comprehensive annual update of key biological, economic, and social indicators, NMFS can ensure use of the best available scientific data in its decision making process.

The 2000 SAFE report for Atlantic Highly Migratory Species closely follows the April 1999 publication of the HMS FMP and Billfish Amendment. It is a vehicle to introduce information made available after the final HMS FMP, identify additional management issues that may need to be addressed, and begin preliminary assessment and evaluation of the fishery regulations. The SAFE report includes the latest stock assessment data, recommendations, and resolutions from The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and their Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS). In adherence with NS 2 guidelines, the report presents a comprehensive summary of the most recent Atlantic HMS fisheries-related data from a variety of sources across a wide range of disciplines. In addition, the current information is contrasted with previous years' data to highlight important trends and concerns for future management.

The report is divided into the following sections: Stock Assessment Update; Essential Fish Habitat; Fishery Data Update; Community Data Update; Fish Processing Industry and Trade; Bycatch; Limited Access and Permitting; Issues for Consideration; and Outlook. As discussed further in the report, the data and information necessary for effective HMS management come in various forms. The structure of the SAFE report is designed to provide a cohesive view of new information and present it in a format that is easily accessible to managers, Advisory Panel members, and the public.