

STOCK ASSESSMENT AND FISHERY EVALUATION (SAFE) REPORT FOR ATLANTIC HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES



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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
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National Marine Fisheries Service



Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE)
Report for

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species

2007

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The photo on the cover was contributed by Loraine Hale, SEFSC, NOAA
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Documentation Requests:

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Dealer Permits:

Tuna dealer permits are issued out of the Northeast Regional Office of NOAA Fisheries (978-281-9370), shark and swordfish dealer permits are issued out of the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (727-824-5326).

Charter/Headboat Permits, Atlantic Tuna Permits & Recreational HMS Vessel Permits:

Charter/Headboat Permits, Atlantic Tuna Permits & Recreational HMS Vessel Permits are issued via the internet (www.hmspermits.gov) or through a toll free automated telephone system (1-888-872-8862). Questions regarding these permits should be directed to Customer Service at 1-888-872-8862, Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern Time. Fishermen may also listen to or view updates to the regulations via this toll-free automated telephone system or at the website listed above.

Atlantic Shark and Swordfish Permits:

Questions regarding renewals or transfers of shark and swordfish limited access permits should be directed to the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (727-824-5326).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (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 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the SAFE Report is used as a reference in the evaluation and refinement of fisheries management practices. The report summarizes the best scientific data available for determining appropriate annual harvest levels; documents significant trends in the resource, marine ecosystems, and fisheries over time; and identifies associated bycatch and safety issues. These data may be used in the decision-making process for future regulations.

The 2007 SAFE Report for Highly Migratory Species (HMS) is a stand alone document differing from the previous year in which it appeared in the 2006 Final Consolidated Atlantic HMS Fishery Management Plan (Consolidated HMS FMP) for HMS (July 14, 2006, 71 FR 40096). The latest stock assessment data, recommendations, and resolutions from the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and its Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) through December of 2007 are included. In addition, this SAFE report includes updated data for domestic shark populations for 2006.

Stock Assessment Update

In 2006, the SCRS completed several stock assessments for Atlantic HMS. Blue marlin, white marlin, Atlantic swordfish, and Atlantic bluefin tuna were assessed for abundance by ICCAT's SCRS during 2006. The SCRS conducted stock assessments on bigeye tuna, albacore, and Mediterranean swordfish (not considered in the HMS management unit) in 2007. Furthermore, ICCAT held a data preparation meeting for both blue and shortfin mako sharks in 2007. The SCRS plans to conduct another assessment of Atlantic pelagic sharks in 2008. All SCRS stock assessments can be found at <http://www.iccat.es/assess.htm>. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is responsible for conducting stock assessments for large coastal sharks (LCS) and small coastal sharks. The LCS complex was evaluated in 2006 by NMFS (July 24, 2006, 71 FR 41774), following the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process. In 2007, NMFS released a stock assessment for small coastal sharks (SCS) (November 13, 2007, 72 FR 63888).

Essential Fish Habitat

In 2007, Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) work continued with various tagging and monitoring projects for HMS. The Consolidated HMS FMP did not modify EFH descriptions or boundaries for HMS, but presented new data for EFH that was collected since 1999. NMFS plans to publish Draft Amendment 1 to the 2006 Consolidated FMP in 2008 which would consider modifications to current EFH for Atlantic HMS,

potentially amend current Habitat Areas for Particular Concern (HAPCs), and implement new HAPCs and EFH regions.

Fisheries Data Update

Atlantic HMS data is gathered from many different user groups of the fisheries. These sources include mandatory commercial and recreational permits, observer reports, mandatory logbook reporting in some fisheries, dealer reports, recreational surveys, and reporting requirements, and an HMS tournament database. Data has been analyzed by gear type to determine management strategies for these multi-species fisheries.

Economic Status of HMS Fisheries

The 2007 SAFE Report includes a section on the economic status of commercial and recreational HMS fisheries. Information in this section includes production (U.S. and international), ex-vessel prices, wholesale prices, fishing costs and revenues for commercial fisheries, costs and revenues for dealers, recreational fishing, and charter/headboat fisheries. This SAFE Report updates 2006 information regarding ex-vessel prices and total ex-vessel values in table format. A full description of economic information sources is given in the 2006 SAFE Report.

Community and Social Data Update

Analyses relative to National Standard 8 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act rely heavily on the availability of community studies and profiles. This section of the SAFE Report provides a summary of the socio-economic impacts of selected regulations. A brief bibliography of recent social science publications is given in Section 6 of the 2006 SAFE Report.

Fish Processing, Industry, and Trade

Domestic and international consumer preference continues to play a large role in HMS markets. Section 7 provides an overview of U.S. trade activities relative to HMS, required documentation, and summaries of U.S. imports and exports of HMS products. The use of trade data to supplement existing information sources is an important tool in the monitoring and management of HMS. Tables updating the 2006 SAFE Report with 2007 trade data on tunas, sharks, and swordfish are provided.

Bycatch

Bycatch and bycatch mortality of finfish, as well as incidental catches and fishing-induced mortality of marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds, continue to be issues of concern in the management of HMS fisheries. An HMS bycatch reduction plan identifies priority issues to be addressed in the following areas: (1) monitoring, (2) research, (3) management, and (4) education/outreach. Individual activities in each of these areas will be undertaken during 2008 and new activities may be added or removed

as they are addressed or identified. This section of the 2007 SAFE Report includes a discussion on the results of various bycatch reduction efforts in the HMS fisheries as well as bycatch reduction of HMS species in other fisheries.

HMS Permits

NMFS continues to monitor capacity in the HMS fisheries. Updated vessel and dealer permit numbers for HMS fisheries in 2007 are included in Section 9. Additional information on HMS permit programs can be found in the Consolidated HMS FMP.

NMFS continues to modify and improve its Atlantic tunas permitting system, including the website where constituents can purchase and renew permits for Atlantic tunas, update permit information, and report recreational landings of bluefin tuna and non-tournament landings of billfish and swordfish (www.hmspermits.gov). Increasing the level of automation in the permitting process, as well as the methods of renewal (i.e., phone, fax, internet), is expected to improve constituent satisfaction and reduce administrative costs. Information on new and existing regulations in the Atlantic HMS fishery can be obtained via the HMS “info line” (800-894-5528) and HMS website <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/>. NMFS hopes to build upon this success and consider automating other HMS permitting processes in the future.

Issues for Consideration and Outlook

In 2008, NMFS plans to continue implementing and evaluating FMP measures to rebuild stocks, prevent or stop overfishing, and address overcapitalization in the HMS fisheries. The major effort planned for 2008 is both a first and second amendment to the Consolidated HMS FMP. Issues that may be addressed in these amendments are listed in Section 10.

The 2007 HMS Advisory Panel meetings in March and October provided an excellent opportunity to discuss these and other issues raised in the previous SAFE report which may require further action. Through continuous public and constituent interaction, increased monitoring, ongoing scientific research, and additional socio-economic assessment, NMFS strives to continue building sustainable fisheries for all Atlantic HMS, as discussed in this SAFE Report.

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