



# NMFS Announces the Availability of Draft Amendment 8 to the 2006 Consolidated Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan for Management of Atlantic Swordfish

February 22, 2013

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) proposes to implement Amendment 8 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Draft Amendment 8 would implement new and modified commercial vessel permits that would allow permittees to retain and commercially sell a limited number of swordfish (zero to six fish) caught on rod and reel, handline, harpoon gear, green-stick, or bandit gear. The purpose of Draft Amendment 8 is to provide additional opportunities for U. S. fishermen to harvest swordfish using selective handgears that are low in bycatch, given the rebuilt status of swordfish and their resulting increased availability. The management measures are intended to allow the United States to more fully utilize its domestic swordfish quota allocation, which is based upon the recommendation of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas. This action considers several options that would allow new entrants into the commercial swordfish handgear fishery under low (zero to six fish) retention limits.

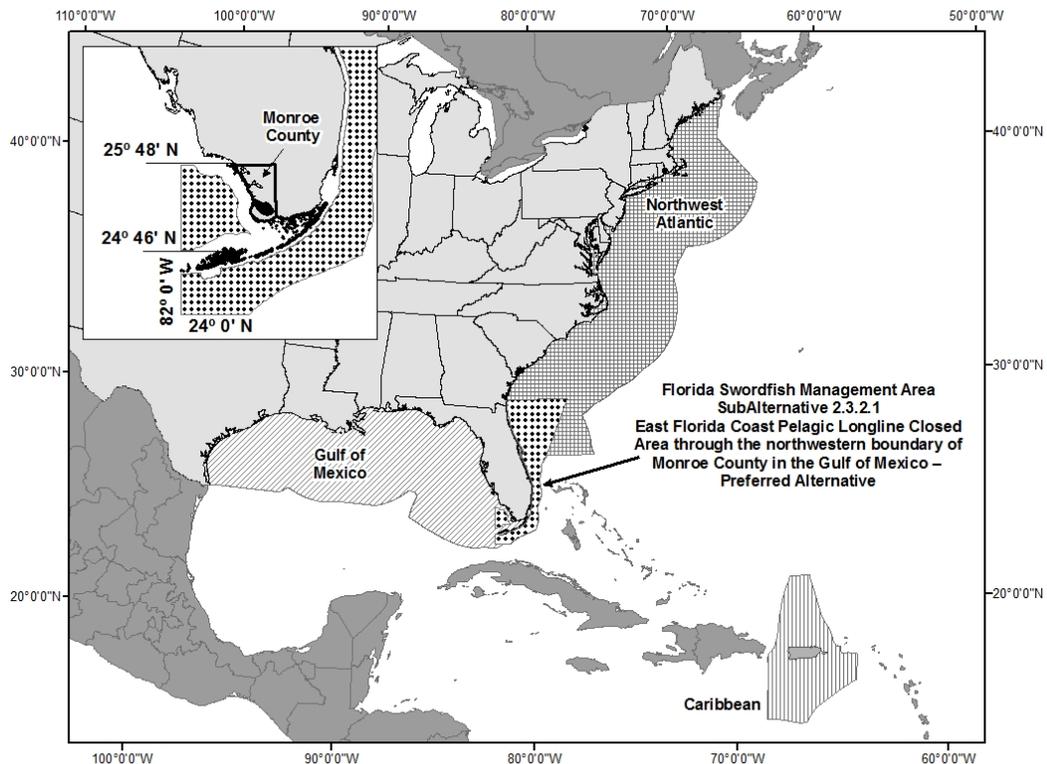
### What will it do?

The full range of alternatives considered are included in the draft environmental assessment and proposed rule, which can be found at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/FMP/AM8.htm>. The preferred alternatives are summarized below and include:

- 1) Establishment of a new open-access commercial swordfish handgear permit similar to the existing Atlantic tunas General category permit. Authorized gears under this permit would include rod and reel, handline, harpoon, green-stick, and bandit gear. HMS Charter/Headboat vessel permit holders would also be authorized to fish with rod and reel and handline under open-access swordfish commercial retention limits when not on a for-hire trip.
- 2) Establishment of regional swordfish management measures for the new permit, allowing for in-season retention limit changes in each region. The geographic range of the proposed regions would be based upon large reporting areas ((Northwest Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, U.S. Caribbean) with the addition of a separate Florida Swordfish Management Area. The separate Florida Swordfish Management Area would include the boundaries of the East Florida Coast Pelagic Longline Closed Area (extended in the EEZ along the south side of the Florida Keys to 82° 0' W longitude) through the northwestern boundary of Monroe County, FL in the Gulf of Mexico (*i.e.*, a region of Florida Bay in the EEZ that is south of 25° 48' N latitude and east of 82° 0' W longitude) (see Figure 1).

The separate Florida area would be established due to the area's unique importance as a swordfish migratory corridor and as juvenile swordfish habitat.

- 3) Establish initial default swordfish retention limits separately in each region, ranging from zero to six fish, and provide for in-season adjustment to the regional retention limits based upon pre-established criteria (*i.e.*, review of dealer reports, quota availability, landing trends, availability of swordfish on the fishing grounds, variations in seasonal distribution, abundance, or swordfish migration patterns, and other relevant factors). Proposed initial default swordfish retention limits for the new permit are: a one-fish limit for the Florida Swordfish Management Area; a two-fish limit for the U.S. Caribbean region; and, a three-fish limit for the Northwest Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions.



**Figure 1: Proposed management regions under the preferred alternatives for Draft Amendment 8 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP. NMFS is proposing retention limits of 1 swordfish in the Florida Swordfish Management Area, 2 swordfish in the U.S. Caribbean region, and 3 swordfish in the Gulf of Mexico and Northwest Atlantic regions.**

NMFS will hold public hearings in Massachusetts, Florida (2), and Maryland, and a conference call/webinar to provide the opportunity for public comment on the measures described in the proposed rule and Draft Amendment 8. In addition, NMFS will conduct a conference call/webinar to consult with the HMS Advisory Panel. The HMS Advisory Panel conference call/webinar will be open to the public and public comment may be accepted at the end of the call if time is available. See Table 1 for times, dates, and locations. NMFS has also asked to present information on the proposed rule and Draft Amendment 8 to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Information on the date and time of that presentation will be provided on the Council agenda.

Table 1. Dates, Times and Locations of Upcoming Public Hearings and Phone Conferences

Venue	Date/Time	Meeting Location	Location Contact Information
Conference call / Webinar	March 11, 2013 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.		To participate in conference call, call: (800) 369-8439 Passcode: 69854 To participate in webinar, RSVP at: <a href="https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/958913664">https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/958913664</a> A confirmation email with webinar log-in information will be sent after RSVP is registered.
Public Hearing	March 11, 2013 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.	St. Petersburg, FL	NOAA Fisheries Service 263 13 <sup>th</sup> Avenue South St. Petersburg, FL 33701
Public Hearing	March 14, 2013 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Silver Spring, MD	NOAA Fisheries Service 1301 East-West Highway Silver Spring, MD 20910
Public Hearing	March 28, 2013 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.	Gloucester, MA	NOAA Fisheries Service 55 Great Republic Drive Gloucester, MA 01930
Public Hearing	April 10, 2013 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.	Fort Lauderdale, FL	Broward County Main Library 100 South Andrews Ave. Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 (954) 357-7544
HMS AP Conference call / Webinar	April 18, 2013 2:30 – 4:30 p.m.		To participate in conference call, call: (800) 369-8439 Passcode: 69854 To participate in webinar, RSVP at: <a href="https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/592965928">https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/592965928</a> A confirmation email with webinar log-in information will be sent after RSVP is registered.

### Submit Comments by April 23, 2013:

Written comments, identified by “NOAA-NMFS-2013-0026”, may be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal <http://www.regulations.gov>, or sent by fax or mail to the contact information included below. All comments received are a part of the public record and generally will be posted to <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All Personal Identifying Information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit Confidential Business Information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter N/A in the required

fields, if you wish to remain anonymous). You may submit attachments to electronic comments in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

This notice is a courtesy to Atlantic HMS fishery participants to help keep you informed about the fishery. Official notice of Federal actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of Federal Register. For further information on this proposed rule and draft environmental impact statement, contact Rick Pearson at 727-824-5399 or Jennifer Cudney at 301-427-8503. Copies of the proposed rule, draft environmental assessment, and other supporting documents are available upon request from the Highly Migratory Species Management Division, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (phone: 301-427-8503, fax: 301-713-1917). The information will also be posted on the HMS website at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/>.

### **Sign up for Atlantic HMS News**

An electronic newsletter informing you of the latest HMS-related actions

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/newslist/>