

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This 2013 Stock Assessment and Fisheries Evaluation (SAFE) Report is produced by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management Division. It contains a review of the current status of Atlantic HMS stocks (tunas, swordfish, billfish, and sharks) and describes the year's accomplishments in managing Atlantic HMS. Atlantic HMS SAFE Reports provide the public with information on the latest developments in Atlantic HMS management and fulfill Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requirements.

Since the last HMS SAFE Report (December 2012), the HMS Management Division: held two HMS Advisory Panel meetings; published several rules regarding HMS fisheries, including a final rule creating a new commercial swordfish permit and additional swordfish management measures (Final Amendment 8), a final rule that established a rebuilding plan for scalloped hammerhead sharks and implemented other shark management measures (Final Amendment 5a), a proposed rule to modify and implement new bluefin tuna management measures, with a focus on reducing bluefin tuna dead discards (Draft Amendment 7), and a final rule to modify vessel monitoring system (VMS) requirements and allowing for long-term hail out of the HMS fishery for vessels required to use VMS; implemented specifications to adjust quotas for Atlantic bluefin tuna, North and South Atlantic swordfish, and sharks; and enacted several inseason actions for HMS.

In November 2013, the 23rd Regular Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) was held, during which the United States helped develop recommendations to promote the conservation, management, and rebuilding of Atlantic HMS stocks. At this meeting, ICCAT adopted recommendations regarding Western Atlantic and Eastern Atlantic/Mediterranean bluefin tunas; North and South Atlantic albacore tunas; North and South Atlantic swordfish; prohibited sharks; sea turtles; and fishery monitoring, control, and surveillance measures.

Three stocks of HMS underwent international stock assessments in 2013: North Atlantic albacore tuna, North Atlantic swordfish, and South Atlantic swordfish. A Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) assessment of bonnethead and Atlantic sharpnose sharks was also conducted (SEDAR 34). NMFS continued shark nursery grounds research and essential fish habitat (EFH) studies through two programs (COASTSPAN and GULFSPAN) along the U.S. Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean, and initiated the HMS EFH five-year review process.

Much of the data in this report is based on final reports of 2012 data that were completed and/or published in 2013. Domestic fishery landings and bycatch data are presented from the U.S. Annual Report to ICCAT, and directly from NMFS program databases including commercial landings from the HMS and Coastal Fisheries Logbook Programs, the Pelagic Longline and Southeast Gillnet and Bottom Longline Observer Programs, Southeast Fisheries Science Center's dealer reporting programs and the Commercial Bluefin Tuna Landings Database; and recreational landings from the Large Pelagics Survey, the Recreational Billfish Survey, and the HMS Recreational Reporting Program. NMFS permits data are presented from the Office of Science and Technology's International Trade Permit Database, the Northeast and Southeast Regional Permits Offices' Databases, the HMS Permits Database, the HMS Exempted

Fishing Permits, Display Permits, and Scientific Research Permits Database, and the HMS Tournament Registration Database.

International landings data are presented from the ICCAT Standing Committee on Research and Statistics' annual report. International trade data are presented from the National Seafood Inspection Laboratory's Bluefin Tuna Catch Document and Swordfish Statistical Document Programs, the U.S. Census Bureau, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

The Regulatory Flexibility Act requires periodic review of existing regulations that had or will have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. Thus, consistent with NMFS's recently published plan for this periodic review, this SAFE Report analyzes the 2005 Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Quota Specifications and the 2006 Consolidated HMS FMP.

Community profiles of the HMS fisheries from the 2010 national census were presented in the 2011 and 2012 SAFE Reports. Impacts to these communities from the major storms in 2012 are presented in this report. Finally, twenty-five HMS fishing communities were assessed for vulnerability or resilience to potential economic disruptions resulting from regulations, social changes, or natural disasters, and the results of these assessments are presented here.

Feedback and comments on this SAFE Report are encouraged and should be sent to the HMS Management Division, 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910, phone: (301) 427-8503, fax: (301) 713-1917.