



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

## **NMFS Requests Comments on the Issuance of Exempted Fishing Permits, Scientific Research Permits, Display Permits, and Chartering Permits for the Collection of Atlantic HMS and a Boundary Change for the Pelagic Longline Research Conducted in Closed Areas**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announces its intent to issue Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs), Scientific Research Permits (SRPs), Display Permits, Letters of Acknowledgement (LOAs), and Chartering Permits for the collection of Atlantic highly migratory species (HMS) in 2009. In general, EFPs and related permits would authorize collections of a limited number of tunas, swordfish, billfishes, and sharks from Federal waters in the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, and Gulf of Mexico for the purposes of scientific data collection and public display. Chartering permits allow the collection of HMS in the high seas or in the Exclusive Economic Zone of other nations.

The HMS Management Division issued 41 such permits in 2007 and has issued 31 such permits in 2008 to date. These permits were issued to vessels and authorized samplers participating in at-sea observer programs, NMFS and non-NMFS scientists collecting data on HMS, educational institutions, public aquaria, and collectors acquiring HMS for display, among others.

Exempted fishing applications would continue to be considered in 2009 for bycatch reduction research in closed regions of the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea to test gear modifications and fishing techniques aimed at avoiding incidental capture of non-target species. The HMS Management Division will seek additional public comment, as necessary, on any such specific proposals where research is not being conducted solely from *bona fide* research vessels.

On January 3, 2008, NMFS announced a final decision to issue EFPs to conduct research in portions of the East Florida Coast (EFC) and Charleston Bump closed areas using a limited number of pelagic longline (PLL) vessels. The goals of the research are to collect baseline data in closed areas under current PLL fishery conditions; evaluate existing PLL bycatch reduction measures; and, collect data to examine the effectiveness of existing PLL area closures to meet current conservation and harvesting goals. The EFPs expire on February 28, 2009; however, since only approximately 18 percent of the research sets have been completed thus far, NMFS will likely re-issue or extend the permits in 2009. In addition, NMFS is considering a request from the Principal Investigator for an additional 10 nautical mile (nmi) westward extension of the experimental research area of the EFC closed area. The requested extension of the boundary 10 nmi to the west of the currently authorized research area would enable setting of the gear to mirror historical fishing patterns in the EFC and to fulfill the scientific objectives of the research by providing PLL vessels with sufficient space to conduct the authorized PLL research. Details on completed trips, catch associated with the research, and the boundary extension are explained in a separate Federal Register notice. Based on an analysis of historical data from the PLL logbook and PLL observer program from 1995-2000, NMFS has determined that the potential increase in catch of target and non-target species in the proposed area extension would be minimal.



Written comments on these proposed collection, research, and fishing activities will be considered by NMFS when issuing EFPs, SRPs, Display Permits, and Chartering Permits if received on or before December 15, 2008. Please send comments to Craig Cockrell, Highly Migratory Species Management Division (F/SF1), NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. The permit applications and copies of the regulations pertaining to EFPs, SRPs, LOAs, Display Permits, and Chartering Permits may also be requested from this address. Comments may also be sent via facsimile (fax) to (301) 713-1917 or by e-mail to HMSEFP.2009@noaa.gov.

This notice is a courtesy to individuals interested in HMS fisheries activities to keep you informed about the fishery. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register. For further information, contact Jackie Wilson at (240) 338-3936 or Craig Cockrell at (301) 713-2347.

Emily Menashes  
Alan Risenhoover  
Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

11/14/2008  
Date

**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/>