



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

NMFS Announces a Proposed Rule and Draft Amendment 4 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan: U.S. Caribbean Management Measures

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) proposes to modify the regulations governing the federal small-scale highly migratory species (HMS) fisheries in the U.S. Caribbean Region. The purpose of this amendment is to enact HMS management measures that better correspond with the traditional operation of the small-scale HMS fishing fleet in the U.S. Caribbean Region and to provide NMFS with an improved capability to monitor and sustainably manage those fisheries. NMFS conducted extensive public scoping to better understand the differences that exist between some segments of the U.S. Caribbean HMS fisheries and the HMS fisheries that occur off the mainland of the United States. These differences include, but are not limited to: limited fishing permit and dealer permit possession; smaller vessels; limited availability of processing and cold storage facilities; shorter trips; limited profit margins; and, high local consumption of catches. These differences can sometimes create an awkward fit between current federal HMS fishing regulations and the traditional Caribbean small-scale commercial fisheries. Fishermen in the region often find these factors difficult to overcome given the limited local infrastructure and small market for their catches.

NMFS proposes to create a HMS Caribbean Small Boat Commercial Permit (CSBP) allowing fishing for and sales of bigeye, albacore, yellowfin, and skipjack tunas, Atlantic swordfish, and Atlantic sharks; collect HMS landings data through existing territorial government programs; authorize specific gears; restrict the size of vessels eligible to be issued a CSBP; limit the CSBP to be valid only for fishing in the U.S. Caribbean Region; and, propose that the CSBP may not be held in combination with any other Atlantic HMS vessel permit.

The proposed rule modifies regulatory text that is also proposed to be amended by the HMS Electronic Dealer Reporting System (E-dealer) rulemaking (76 FR 37750). The proposed language included in the HMS E-dealer rulemaking is being utilized in the proposed rule for this action.

The comment period for this proposed rule (77 FR 15701) is open through June 14, 2012. NMFS will announce the dates and locations of public hearings in a future Federal Register notice.

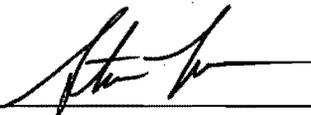


Written comments, identified by "NOAA-NMFS-2012-0053", may be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal <http://www.regulations.gov>, or sent by fax or mail to the contact information included below. All comments received are a part of the public record and generally will be posted 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 assessment (EA), contact Gregory Fairclough, Randy Blankinship, or Rick Pearson at 727-824-5399, or Delisse Ortiz at 301-427-8503. Copies of the proposed rule and draft (EA) 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/>.

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FOR Carrie D. Selberg
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

MAR 19 2012

Date