



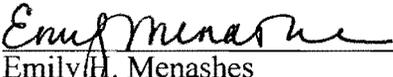
NMFS Adjusts General Category (Commercial) Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Retention Limit for June-August 2012

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) adjusts the General category Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) retention limit to **three** large medium or giant BFT (i.e., three BFT measuring 73 inches or greater) per vessel per day/trip effective June 1 through August 31, 2012. NMFS takes this action after considering the regulatory determination criteria regarding inseason adjustments, which include, among other things, the effects of the adjustment on the BFT stock and on accomplishing the objectives of the 2006 Consolidated Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan. This adjustment is intended to provide a reasonable opportunity to harvest the U.S. BFT quota without exceeding it, while maintaining an equitable distribution of fishing opportunities; help achieve optimum yield in the General category BFT fishery; and collect a broad range of data for stock monitoring purposes.

Based on June-August landings rates over the last several years, it is highly unlikely that the subquota will be filled with the default limit of one BFT/vessel. However, based on the pattern exhibited over the last few years, NMFS anticipates an increase in both landings of BFT (in number) and average fish weight for the June-August period this year. A three-fish limit starting June 1 provides reasonable opportunity to harvest the available subquota without exceeding it while also maintaining equitable distribution of fishing opportunities, helping to achieve optimum yield, and collecting a broad range of data for stock monitoring purposes. Starting the summer season at a retention limit higher than three fish could reduce the potential for higher revenues later in the season. NMFS will continue to monitor the fishery closely through dealer reports. Depending on fishing effort and catch rates, NMFS may determine that additional retention limit adjustments are necessary to ensure available quota is not exceeded or to enhance scientific data collection from, and fishing opportunities in, all geographic areas.

The General category daily retention limit applies to vessels permitted in the Atlantic tunas General category and the HMS Charter/Headboat category *while fishing commercially*. This limit is effective for all areas except for the Gulf of Mexico, which is designated as spawning grounds for BFT and where NMFS does not allow targeted fishing. Regardless of the duration of a fishing trip, the daily retention limit applies upon landing. For example, whether a vessel fishing under the General category limit takes a two-day trip or makes two trips in one day, the daily limit of three fish may not be exceeded upon landing. NMFS requires that all BFT that are released be handled in a manner that will maximize survivability, and without removing the fish from the water. For additional information on safe handling, see the Careful Catch and Release brochure available at www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/.

This notice is a courtesy to BFT fishery permit holders to help keep you informed about the fishery. For additional information, call (888) 872-8862 or (978) 281-9260, or go to www.hmspermits.gov. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register.


Emily H. Menashes
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

MAY 14 2012

Date

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