



NMFS Maintains Three-fish General Category (Commercial) Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Daily Retention Limit for September-December 2012

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) maintains the current General category daily retention limit of **three** large medium or giant bluefin tuna (measuring 73" or greater) per vessel per day/trip for September 1 through December 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 bluefin tuna 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. bluefin tuna quota without exceeding it, while maintaining an equitable distribution of fishing opportunities; help achieve optimum yield in the General category bluefin tuna fishery; and collect a broad range of data for stock monitoring purposes.

Given the rollover of unused quota from the one time period to the next, current catch rates, and the fact that the daily retention limit will automatically revert to one large medium or giant bluefin tuna per vessel per day on September 1, NMFS anticipates that a one-fish limit would result in underharvest of the 2012 General category quota. However, based on the pattern exhibited over the last few years, NMFS anticipates an increase in both landings of bluefin tuna (in number) and average fish weight for the remainder of the year, relative to the same period of 2011, such that a three-fish limit may result in higher landings than in previous years. A limit higher than three fish could risk exceeding the available General category quota.

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 commercial Atlantic tunas General category and the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Charter/Headboat category *while fishing commercially*. These limits are effective for all areas except for the Gulf of Mexico, which are designated spawning grounds for bluefin tuna 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 regulations at 50 CFR 635.21(a)(1) require that all bluefin tuna 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 <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/>.



This notice is a courtesy to bluefin tuna 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.



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Date

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