



NMFS Announces Final 2013 Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Quotas and Closes Longline Category

Announcement Date: June 18, 2013

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announces final quota specifications for the 2013 bluefin tuna fisheries. NMFS is adjusting the annual U.S. baseline bluefin quota recommended by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) to account for underharvest of the adjusted 2012 U.S. bluefin quota.

NMFS is also closing the incidental Longline category northern and southern area bluefin tuna fisheries for the remainder of 2013, as we project that the Longline category adjusted subquotas in the final specifications will be reached by the date the specifications are effective. The Longline fishery in the Northeast Distant gear restricted area (NED) remains open at this time.

Final 2013 Bluefin Adjusted Quotas and Subquotas

As detailed below and shown in the attached table, the final rule:

- Allocates the full 2013 baseline quotas to all directed categories and the Reserve category;
- Uses an updated (2012) dead discard estimate of 239.5 mt (the proposed rule used the 2011 estimate of 145.2 mt as a proxy);
- Accounts for half of the dead discard estimate of 239.5 mt up front (i.e., at the beginning of the fishing year) in the specifications process;
- Allocates 46 mt to the Longline Category, not including the 25-mt allocation for the NED.

In the proposed rule (78 FR 21584, April 11, 2013), NMFS used the 2011 bluefin dead discard estimate of 145.2 mt as a proxy for potential 2013 bluefin dead discards. The 2012 estimate, 239.5 mt, became available in late May 2013. NMFS is using the more recent estimate in this final rule because it is the best available and most complete information NMFS currently has regarding dead discards.

Based on preliminary data available as of May 31, 2013, bluefin landings in 2012 totaled 713.2 mt. Adding the 2012 dead discard estimate (239.5 mt) results in a preliminary 2012 total catch of 952.7 mt, which is 90.9 mt less than the amount of quota (inclusive of dead discards) allowed under ICCAT Recommendation 12-02 (1,043.6 mt). Thus, the underharvest for 2012 is 90.9 mt. This amount is within the current ICCAT limit on the amount of underharvest that can be carried forward to 2013, which for the United States is 94.9 mt.

As proposed, NMFS is accounting up front for half of the expected dead discards for 2013, using the best available estimate of dead discards (2012), and deducting that portion directly from the

Longline category subquota. This is the same approach that NMFS took for the final 2011 and 2012 bluefin quota specifications.

NMFS had proposed to carry 94.9 mt of available underharvest forward to 2013 and distribute half to the Longline category and half to the Reserve category. NMFS stated that any necessary adjustments to the 2013 specifications would be made in the final rule after considering updated 2012 landings and dead discards information. NMFS also stated that it could allocate the amount carried forward in another manner after considering domestic management needs for 2013.

If NMFS deducts one half of the dead discard estimate from the Longline category subquota and provide half of the available underharvest, the result is a 2013 adjusted Longline category subquota of less than 1 mt ($74.8 \text{ mt} - 119.75 \text{ mt} + 45.45 \text{ mt} = 0.5 \text{ mt}$). Therefore, NMFS has decided to add all of the 2012 underharvest that can be carried forward to 2013 (i.e., 90.9 mt) to the Longline category. Thus, the adjusted Longline category subquota would be $74.8 \text{ mt} - 119.75 \text{ mt} + 90.9 \text{ mt} = 46 \text{ mt}$. In these specifications, NMFS is balancing the need of the pelagic longline fishery to continue fishing for swordfish and Atlantic tunas with the need of directed bluefin fisheries participants to receive their base quota.

NMFS considers the 2013 specifications approach to be an interim measure as we continue to develop Draft Amendment 7 to the 2006 Consolidated HMS FMP. This amendment will explore related bluefin tuna fishery management issues consistent with the need to end overfishing and rebuild the stock. NMFS anticipates that measures in Draft Amendment 7 would address several of the long-standing challenges facing the fishery and will examine, among other things, revisiting quota allocations; reducing and accounting for dead discards; adding or modifying time/area closures or gear-restricted areas; and improving the reporting and monitoring of dead discards and landings in all categories. NMFS anticipates that Draft Amendment 7 will publish in mid-2013.

See attached table for the final 2013 bluefin quotas and quota specifications. To view the proposed rule and supporting documents, see www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/breaking_news.htm.

Closure of Longline Category Northern and Southern Areas

NMFS is closing the incidental Longline category northern and southern area fisheries (north and south of 31°00' N. lat., near the Georgia/Florida border, including the Gulf of Mexico) for large medium and giant bluefin (measuring 73" curved fork length or greater) effective 11:30 p.m., local time, June 25, 2013. Based on the best available landings information for the incidental Longline category bluefin fishery (i.e., 16.2 mt in the northern area and 27.1 mt in the southern area as of May 31, 2013), NMFS projects that the adjusted 2013 Longline category northern and southern area bluefin subquotas described above will be reached by the effective date of the final rule. Given the extended duration of trips, a closure of the Longline category northern and southern area bluefin fishery is warranted at this time with 7 days' notice.

Fishing for, retaining, possessing, or landing bluefin by Longline category vessels in the northern area (other than the NED), and in the southern area (including the Gulf of Mexico), is prohibited effective 11:30 p.m., local time, on June 25, 2013, for the remainder of 2013. While pelagic longline fishing for swordfish and other target species may continue in

the northern and southern Longline areas, bluefin may no longer be retained, possessed, or landed by longline vessels in those areas.

The incidental Longline fishery for bluefin in the NED, an area far offshore the northeastern United States, remains open at this time. The NED is the Atlantic Ocean area bounded by straight lines connecting the following coordinates in the order stated: 35°00' N. lat., 60°00' W. long.; 55°00' N. lat., 60°00' W. long.; 55°00' N. lat., 20°00' W. long.; 35°00' N. lat., 20°00' W. long.; 35°00' N. lat., 60°00' W. long. NMFS will continue to monitor incidental Longline category BFT landings from the NED against the 25 mt allocated for that area and may take further action, if necessary. Any subsequent adjustments to the Longline category fishery for 2013 would be published in the Federal Register. In addition, fishermen may call (978) 281-9260, or access www.hmspermits.noaa.gov, for fishery updates.

The intent of these closures is to prevent overharvest of the Longline category northern and southern area bluefin subquotas. NMFS will account for all 2013 U.S. landings at the end of the year, make further year-end adjustments if and as needed, and report total 2013 landings along with the 2013 estimate of dead discards to ICCAT in 2014.

This notice is a courtesy to fishery participants to help 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 the HMS Management Division at (978) 281-9260.

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Final 2013 Atlantic bluefin tuna quotas and quota specifications (in metric tons)

Category (% Share of Baseline Quota)	Baseline Allocation (per Current ICCAT Recommendation and the 2006 Consolidated HMS FMP Allocations)	2013 Quota Specifications		
		Dead Discard Deduction (1/2 of 2012 Estimate of 239.5 mt)	2012 Underharvest to Carry Forward to 2013 (90.9 mt Total)	Adjusted 2013 Fishing Year Quota
Total (100)	923.7*			894.9
Angling (19.7)	182.0 <u>SUBQUOTAS:</u> School 94.9 Reserve 17.6 North 36.5 South 40.8 LS/SM 82.9 North 39.1 South 43.8 Trophy 4.2 North 1.4 South 2.8			182.0 <u>SUBQUOTAS:</u> School 94.9 Reserve 17.6 North 36.5 South 40.8 LS/SM 82.9 North 39.1 South 43.8 Trophy 4.2 North 1.4 South 2.8
General (47.1)	435.1 <u>SUBQUOTAS:</u> Jan 23.1 Jun-Aug 217.6 Sept 115.3 Oct-Nov 56.6 Dec 22.6			435.1 <u>SUBQUOTAS:</u> Jan 23.1 Jun-Aug 217.6 Sept 115.3 Oct-Nov 56.6 Dec 22.6
Harpoon (3.9)	36.0			36.0
Purse Seine (18.6)	171.8			171.8
Longline (8.1)	74.8 <u>SUBQUOTAS:</u> North (-NED) 29.9 NED 25.0* South 44.9	-119.75	+90.9	46 <u>SUBQUOTAS:</u> North (-NED) 18.4 NED 25.0* South 27.6
Trap (0.1)	0.9			0.9
Reserve (2.5)	23.1			23.1

*25-mt ICCAT set-aside to account for bycatch of bluefin tuna in pelagic longline fisheries in the NED. Not included in totals at top of table.