



## NOAA FISHERIES

### Atlantic Highly Migratory Species

# Atlantic Bluefin Tuna: NMFS Maintains Three-fish General Category (Commercial) Daily Retention Limit for September-December 2013

August 16, 2013

## Actions being taken and important dates

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) maintains the current Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) General category (commercial handgear) daily retention limit of **three** large medium or giant BFT (i.e., three BFT measuring 73” or greater) per vessel per day/trip for September 1 through December 31, 2013. NMFS takes this action after considering the regulatory determination criteria regarding inseason adjustments, which include, among other things, available quota, fishery performance in recent years, the anticipated availability of BFT on the fishing grounds, and 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.

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 2013 General category quota. A three-fish limit 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. Although NMFS has the authority to set the daily retention limit to up to five fish, a limit higher than three fish could risk exceeding the available General category quota. 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 2012, such that a three-fish limit may result in higher landings than in previous years.

*In accordance with NMFS regulations, the default retention limit would be one large medium or giant BFT per vessel per day/trip unless changed via this action.*

## Who is affected?

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. This limit is effective for all areas except for the Gulf of Mexico, which is designated as BFT spawning grounds 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 will continue to monitor the fishery closely through dealer reports. Depending on fishing effort and catch rates, NMFS may determine that additional retention limit adjustment or fishery closure is necessary to ensure available quota is not exceeded or to enhance scientific data collection from, and fishing opportunities in, all geographic areas.

NMFS regulations at 50 CFR 635.21(a)(1) require 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/](http://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 [hmspermits.noaa.gov](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov). Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register.

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