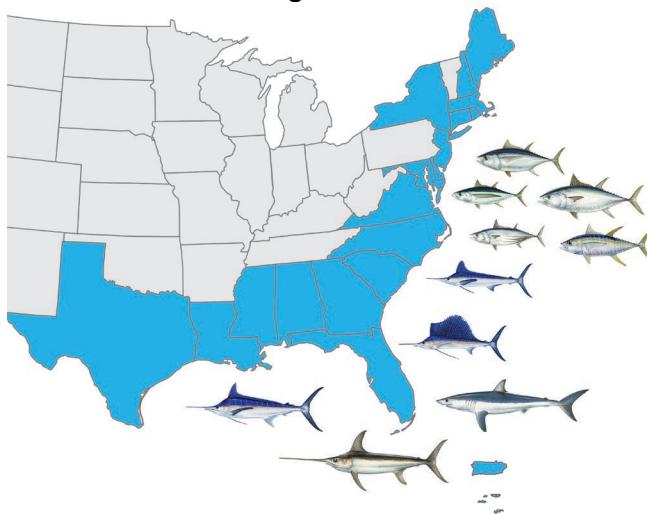


# HMS Compliance Guide: Recreational Fishing

Guide for Complying with the Atlantic  
Tunas, Swordfish, Shark, and Billfish  
Regulations



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Office of Sustainable Fisheries  
Atlantic Highly Migratory Species  
Management Division

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species>

U.S. Department of Commerce | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
National Marine Fisheries Service



## **Introduction to Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management**

This guide is intended to provide a plain language summary of how to comply with Federal regulations for Atlantic HMS (tunas, swordfish, sharks, and billfishes). Atlantic HMS within the U.S. Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean, are managed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) under the authority of the Secretary of Commerce.

Atlantic HMS fisheries are managed under the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and its amendments. When future regulatory changes occur they will be highlighted in this section.

Fishery rules change frequently. Check <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/atlantic-hms-fishery-compliance-guides> to be sure you have the most recent version of this guide. It is **your responsibility** to be familiar with the latest regulatory updates and to comply with the current official regulations. This version of the Commercial Compliance Guide replaces all previous versions and is produced in compliance with section 212 of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act.

To stay up-to-date with HMS regulations, sign up for **Atlantic HMS News** at [https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USNOAAFISHERIES/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=USNOAAFISHERIES\\_18](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USNOAAFISHERIES/subscriber/new?topic_id=USNOAAFISHERIES_18)

All Atlantic HMS that are caught but not kept must be released immediately to improve their chances of survival without removing them from the water.<sup>1</sup> Fishing techniques and gear modifications are summarized in the careful handling and release brochure:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/outreach-and-education/careful-catch-and-release-brochure>

### **Official Regulations**

For the Atlantic HMS regulations, please refer to the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), at 50 CFR part 635 (available electronically at <http://www.ecfr.gov/>). If there is a discrepancy between the summary in this document and the regulations in the CFR, the regulations take precedence.

**Endnotes** (<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>, etc.) are in the final chapter of this guide and refer to the locations of the regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) (Title 50, Wildlife and Fisheries).

NEW in 2023:

**Amendment 13 Final Rule:** Effective on January 1, 2023, this final rule modifies HMS bluefin tuna (bluefin) management measures applicable to the incidental and directed bluefin fisheries through an amendment to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS Fishery Management Plan (2006 Consolidated

HMS FMP). Regarding the recreational fishery, this rule increases the bluefin quota percent for the General and Angling quota categories, modifies the recreational trophy bluefin areas and subquotas, and provides more flexibility for vessel owners to change permit categories if they made an error in the permit application.



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This guide replaces and supersedes all previous guides and complies with section 212 of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act. For a comprehensive list of updated Atlantic HMS regulations, please refer to the electronic Code of Federal Regulations (<https://go.usa.gov/xUkDH>).

If there is a discrepancy between this document and the regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations, the regulations take precedence.

## I. PERMITS and ENDORSEMENTS <sup>2</sup>

To fish recreationally in federal waters for any authorized Atlantic tunas, swordfish, billfishes, and sharks,<sup>3</sup> vessel owners must have a valid federal fishing permit for their vessel. Additionally, to fish recreationally for tunas within the waters of Atlantic coastal states (excluding Connecticut and Mississippi), vessel owners must have a valid federal fishing permit for their vessel. The type of permit needed depends on the fish species, fishing gear, and fishing trip. The four types (or categories) of permits that can be used to recreationally fish for Atlantic HMS are: HMS Angling, HMS Charter/Headboat, Atlantic Tunas General category (can fish recreationally *only* when participating in an HMS tournament), and Swordfish General Commercial (can fish recreationally *only* when participating in an HMS tournament). Each permit is issued to a vessel owner for a specific vessel. All passengers onboard a vessel with a valid HMS permit may recreationally fish for Atlantic HMS under specified terms and conditions. Please refer to each species section for specific species and gear restrictions. To fish for sharks recreationally, permit holders need to apply for and receive a shark endorsement on their permit.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, vessels issued a Charter/Headboat permit need a commercial endorsement to sell HMS.<sup>5</sup> Vessels without the endorsement will be considered "recreational" and those with the endorsement will be considered "commercial" and will need to follow U.S. Coast Guard regulations for commercial vessels.

### Buy or Renew an HMS Open-Access Permit:

<https://hmspermits.noaa.gov>

(888) 872-8862

<b>HMS Angling</b>	Strictly for recreational fishing (i.e., no sale). A shark endorsement is required on the permit to fish for sharks. <sup>6</sup>
<b>HMS Charter/Headboat</b>	Required for vessels taking for-hire passengers recreational fishing for Atlantic HMS. A commercial sale endorsement is required to sell any HMS. <sup>7</sup> A shark endorsement is required on the permit to fish recreationally for sharks. See Section VIII for detailed information.
<b>Atlantic Tunas General category</b>	Commercial fishing permit for Atlantic tunas that can also be used for fishing recreationally for all HMS <b>only</b> when participating in a registered HMS tournament. <sup>8</sup> A shark endorsement on the permit is required to fish recreationally for sharks during registered HMS tournaments. Having a shark endorsement on the permit does not allow for fishing for sharks outside of an HMS tournament. See Section IX for more information.

## **Swordfish General Commercial**

Commercial fishing permit for Atlantic swordfish that can also be used for fishing recreationally for all HMS **only** when participating in a registered HMS tournament under certain restrictions.<sup>9</sup> A shark endorsement on the permit is required to fish recreationally for sharks during registered HMS tournaments. Having a shark endorsement on the permit does not allow for fishing for sharks outside of an HMS tournament. See Sections V and IX for more information.

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**Only one of these four permits can be issued to a vessel in a calendar year, except the allowable combination of an Atlantic Tunas General category permit and a Swordfish General Commercial permit.** Atlantic tunas permit holders may change permit category at any time during the fishing year, provided the vessel has not landed a bluefin tuna.<sup>10</sup>

### **Where do the Federal regulations apply?**<sup>11</sup>

Federal recreational fishing regulations apply in federal waters and on the high seas, and may apply to recreational fishing in state waters. Anglers possessing a federal HMS fishing permit who are fishing in state waters must follow federal regulations for HMS in those waters, unless the state regulations are more restrictive, in which case the state regulations apply. Anglers who are planning on fishing in state waters should be familiar with the state regulations for specific species and situations. A list of state agency contacts is in Section XI.

## **II. GEARS**<sup>12</sup>

Each HMS permit allows the use of certain fishing gears, depending on: 1) the type of permit and 2) the fish species. Please see each species section for fishing gear rules. The following gears are authorized for recreational HMS fishing:

<b>Bandit gear</b>	A vertical hook and line gear with rods attached to the vessel when in use. Manual, electric, or hydraulic reels may be used to retrieve lines.
<b>Rod and reel</b>	A handheld fishing rod with a manually or electronically operated reel attached.
<b>Handline</b>	A mainline with no more than two gangions or hooks attached. Must be retrieved by hand, not by mechanical means, and must be attached to, or in contact with, a vessel.
<b>Speargun</b>	A muscle-powered speargun equipped with a trigger mechanism, a spear with a tip designed to penetrate and retain fish, and terminal gear. Terminal gear may include, but is not limited to, trailing lines, reels, and floats. The term “muscle-powered speargun” means a speargun that stores potential energy provided by the operator’s muscles, and that releases only the amount of energy that the operator has provided to it from his or her own muscles. The operator must be physically in the water when using this gear, and

<b>Greenstick</b>	may freedive, use SCUBA, or other underwater breathing devices. <sup>13</sup>
<b>Secondary gears</b>	An actively trolled mainline attached to a vessel and elevated or suspended above the surface of the water with no more than 10 hooks or gangions attached to the mainline. The suspended line, attached gangions and/or hooks, and catch may be retrieved collectively by hand or mechanical means. Greenstick does not constitute a pelagic longline or bottom longline.
<b>Secondary gears</b>	(a.k.a. “cockpit” gears) may be used only at boatside to aid and assist in subduing, or bringing onboard, Atlantic HMS that have first been caught or captured using primary gears authorized for recreational HMS fishing. Examples: dart harpoons, gaffs, and tail ropes. Secondary gears may not be used to capture, or attempt to capture, free-swimming or undersized HMS. <sup>14</sup>

### **HOOK TYPES**

<b>Circle hook</b>	A hook originally designed and manufactured so that the point of the hook turns perpendicularly back toward the shank of the hook to form a generally circular or oval shape.
<b>Offset circle hook</b>	A circle hook originally designed and manufactured so that the barbed end of the hook is displaced relative to the parallel plane of the eyed-end, or shank, of the hook when laid on its side.
<b>J-hook</b>	Although not defined in federal regulations, J-hooks are fishing hooks that are generally shaped like the letter “J” and do not meet the definition of a circle hook.

### **FISHING TECHNIQUES**

<b>Surface trolling<sup>15</sup></b>	A fishing technique where the lines trail behind a vessel which is in constant motion at speeds in excess of four knots with a visible wake. Such trolling may not involve the use of down riggers, wire lines, planers, or similar devices.
<b>Downrigger<sup>16</sup></b>	A piece of equipment attached to a vessel that has a weight on a cable that is attached to hook-and-line gear to maintain lures or bait at depth while trolling. Downriggers may be used with the authorized recreational hook and line gears including bandit, rod and reel, handline, and greenstick gear.

## **III. CLOSED AREAS**

An angler on an Atlantic HMS-permitted vessel may fish recreationally for Atlantic HMS in federal waters, except in areas closed to fishing. A description of these areas is below, followed by a map.

<b>The Tortugas Marine Reserves<sup>17</sup></b>	The Tortugas North area is bounded by 24°40'00" N. lat., 83°06'00" W. long.; 24°46'00" N. lat., 83°06'00" W. long.; 24°46'00" N. lat., 83°00'00" W. long.; thence along the line denoting the seaward limit of Florida's waters, as shown on the
Fishing for any species and anchoring by fishing in	

vessels is prohibited year-round in the EEZ portions of Tortugas North and Tortugas South.

current edition of NOAA chart 11438 to 24°40'00" N. lat., 83°06'00" W. long. Tortugas South is bounded by 24°33'00" N. lat., 83°09'00" W. long.; 24°33'00" N. lat., 83°05'00" W. long.; 24°18'00" N. lat., 83°05'00" W. long.; 24°18'00" N. lat., 83°09'00" W. long.; 24°33'00" N. lat., 83°09'00" W. long.

#### **Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps Closed Areas<sup>18</sup>**

Surface trolling is allowed from May-October, but fishing by any other method is prohibited year-round.

The coordinates for the Madison-Swanson closed area are: 29°17' N. lat., 85°50' W. long.; 29°17' N. lat., 85°38' W. long.; 29°06' N. lat., 85°38' W. long.; 29°06' N. lat., 85°50' W. long. The coordinates for the Steamboat Lumps closed area are: 28°14' N. lat., 84°48' W. long.; 28°14' N. lat., 84°37' W. long.; 28°03' N. lat., 84°37' W. long.; 28°03' N. lat., 84°48' W. long.

#### **Edges 40 Fathom Contour Closed Area<sup>19</sup>**

This area is closed to all HMS fishing gears from January- April. Open to HMS fishing May- December.

The Edges 40 Fathom Contour closed area is bounded by straight lines connecting the following coordinates: 28°51' N. lat., 85°16' W. long.; to 28°51' N. lat., 85°04' W. long.; to 28°14' N. lat., 84°42' W. long.; to 28°14' N. lat., 84°54' W. long.

#### **Gulf of Mexico Bluefin Tuna<sup>20</sup>**

Anglers may not target bluefin tuna at any time in the Gulf of Mexico. This area is bluefin tuna spawning grounds. However, HMS Angling or HMS Charter/Headboat permit holders may retain one “trophy” bluefin tuna (>73”) per vessel per year from the Gulf of Mexico, if it is caught incidentally while targeting other species, and provided the “trophy” category subquota in the Gulf of Mexico is available at the time of harvest (see Section VII).<sup>21</sup>

#### **South Atlantic Swordfish (South of 5° N latitude)**

Recreational anglers may not fish for or land swordfish south of 5° N. latitude.<sup>22</sup>

#### **Other Marine Protected Areas**

There are a number of marine protected areas (MPAs) throughout U.S. waters that may restrict recreational fishing activities. For more information, please visit <http://marineprotectedareas.noaa.gov/>.

## Legend

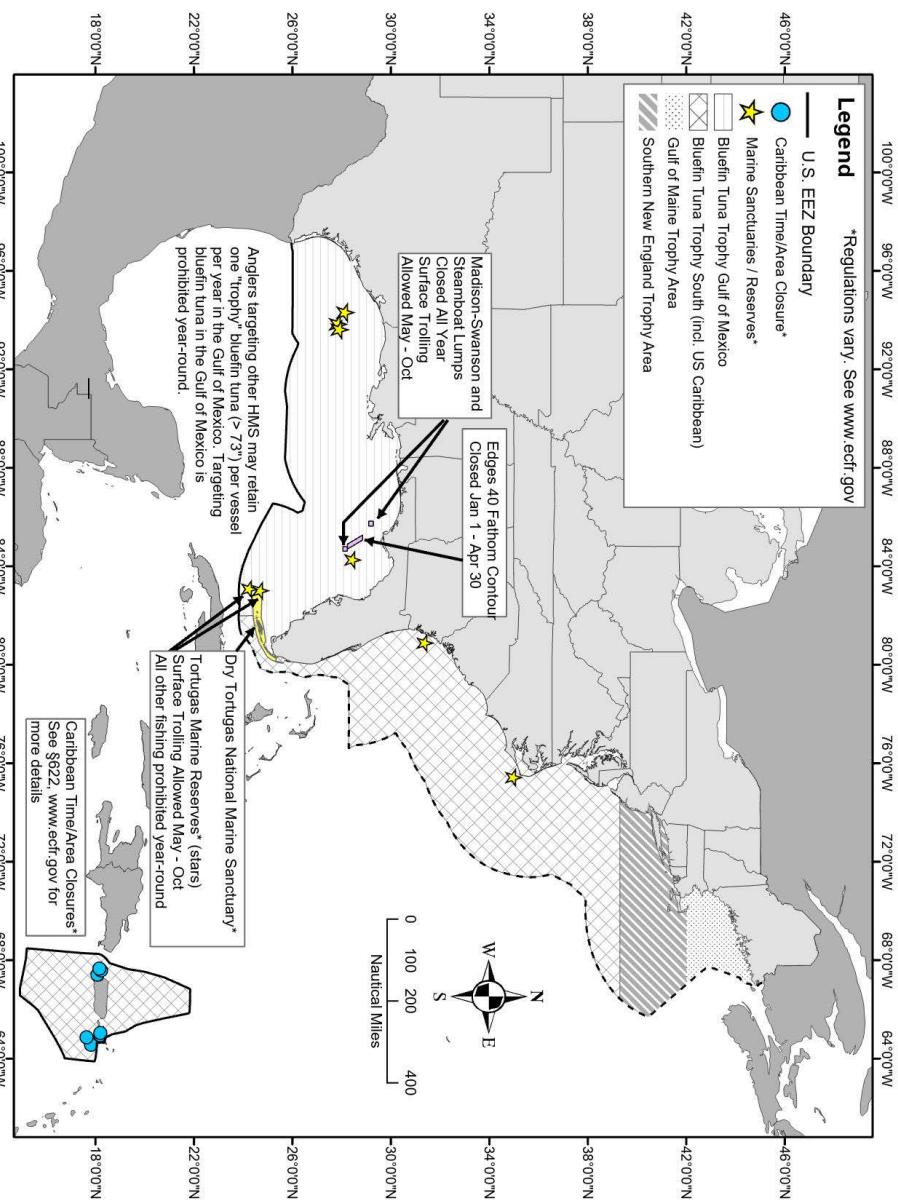
\*Regulations vary. See [www.ecf.gov](http://www.ecf.gov)

- U.S. EEZ Boundary
- Caribbean Time/Area Closure\*

- Marine Sanctuaries / Reserves\*
- Bluefin Tuna Trophy Gulf of Mexico

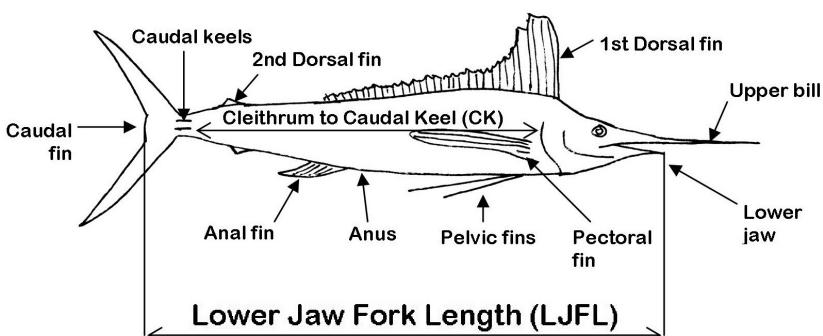
- Bluefin Tuna Trophy South (incl. US Caribbean)
- Gulf of Maine Trophy Area

- Southern New England Trophy Area



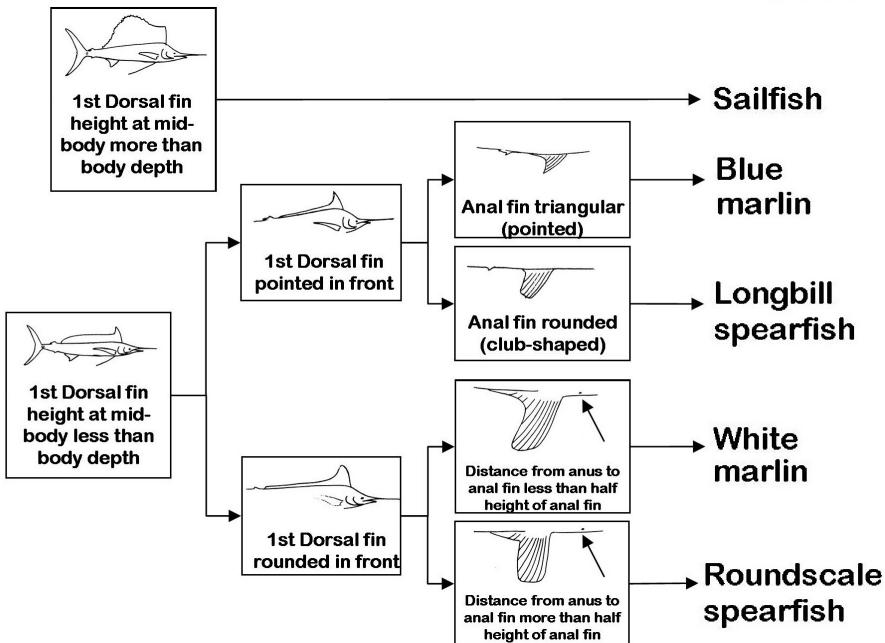
## IV. BILLFISHES

### ANATOMY AND MEASUREMENT OF ATLANTIC BILLFISHES



**LJFL measurement** – means the straight-line measurement from the anterior tip of the lower jaw to the fork of the caudal fin.

### IDENTIFICATION OF ATLANTIC BILLFISHES



## AUTHORIZED SPECIES<sup>23</sup>

Blue marlin | White marlin | Roundscale spearfish | Sailfish

## PROHIBITED SPECIES<sup>24</sup>

Longbill spearfish

## PERMITS AND GEARS

Permits	Gear <sup>25</sup>
1. HMS Angling, <sup>26</sup> OR 2. HMS Charter/Headboat, <sup>27</sup> OR 3. Atlantic Tunas General category <sup>28</sup> , OR Swordfish General Commercial <sup>29</sup> ONLY if participating in a registered Atlantic HMS tournament.	Rod and reel

Billfish tournament anglers fishing with natural bait (or natural/artificial bait combination) must use non-offset circle hooks. J-hooks and offset circle hooks may only be used with artificial lures.<sup>30</sup>

## SIZE/BAG LIMITS AND SEASONS

Species	Minimum Size (LJFL) <sup>31</sup>	Bag Limit	Season
Blue marlin*	99"	No limit**	Jan.1 – Dec. 31
White marlin*	66"	No limit**	Jan.1 – Dec. 31
Roundscale spearfish*	66"	No limit**	Jan.1 – Dec. 31
Sailfish	63"	No limit**	Jan.1 – Dec. 31

\* There is an annual U.S. landings limit of 250 Atlantic blue marlin, white marlin, and roundscale spearfish (combined). Landings updates and seasonal closures are posted at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/atlantic-highly-migratory-species-landings-updates>.<sup>32</sup>

\*\* Billfish cannot be retained if a hammerhead or oceanic whitetip shark is already on board or has been offloaded from the vessel.

## LANDINGS RESTRICTIONS

Billfish may be gutted at sea, but must be landed whole with head, fins, and bill intact.

### NOAA Fisheries strongly encourages the live release of billfishes.

An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately without removing it from the water to improve its chances of survival.<sup>33</sup>

### Some tips for safe handling and release of billfishes:

[http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/compliance/guides/cc\\_brochure\\_web.pdf](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/compliance/guides/cc_brochure_web.pdf)

1. Do not remove the fish from the water, even for a picture.
2. Use circle hooks and dehooking devices that hook the fish in the jaw or



corner of the mouth, making it easier to remove the hook and less harmful to the fish.

3. Use heavier tackle to reduce the fight time so the fish isn't exhausted and depleted of energy, which could add stress and contribute to death.

A vessel that has been issued an Atlantic Tunas General category or Swordfish General Commercial permit may use that permit to fish recreationally for Atlantic billfish during a registered Atlantic HMS tournament. HMS Angling category regulations for Atlantic billfish apply, including those addressing authorized gears, techniques, and size limits for billfish caught under either permit.

## **REPORTING REQUIREMENTS<sup>34</sup>**

- Anglers must report all recreational billfish landings.
  - Anglers in Maryland and North Carolina must report at a state-operated reporting station (state contact information is in Section XI).
  - All other anglers must report to NMFS within 24 hours via one of the following methods: online at <https://hmspermits.noaa.gov>, call (800) 894-5528, or use the HMS Catch Reporting App. To obtain the HMS Catch Reporting App, go to hmspermits.noaa.gov, click on "Fish Reporting" or "Mobile app download."
  - If the angler enters (reports) a billfish in a registered HMS tournament, the tournament operator must report that fish. A list of registered tournaments is available at [https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species-tournaments](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/atlantic-highly-migratory-species-tournaments)
- The Large Pelagic Survey (LPS) or Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP, formerly MRFSS) may survey anglers at the dock, by phone, or by mail.<sup>35</sup> If contacted, anglers are required to participate in these surveys; however, participation does not fulfill reporting obligations and vessel owners/operators must still report all billfish as described above.

## **RESTRICTED AREAS<sup>36</sup>**

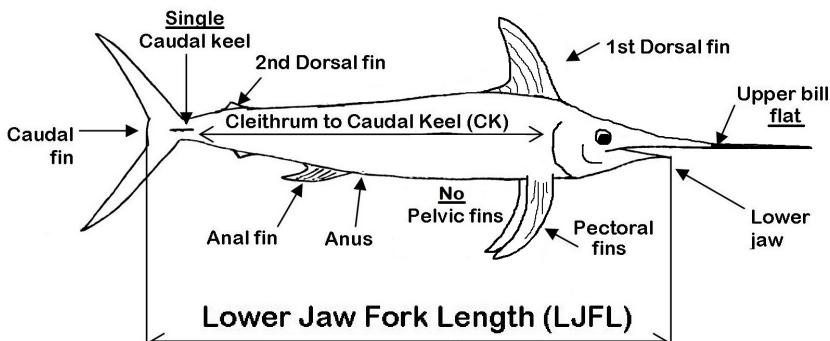
- Tortugas Marine Reserves (closed year-round)
- Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps closed areas (closed year-round except for surface trolling allowed May-October)
- Edges 40 Fathom Contour closed area (closed January-April)



## V. SWORDFISH

### ANATOMY, MEASUREMENT, AND IDENTIFICATION OF SWORDFISH

Differences between swordfish and billfish are underlined.



**LJFL measurement** – straight-line measurement used if the head is naturally attached; **CK measurement** – measurement along the curved body contour used if the head is removed/not naturally attached.<sup>37</sup> “Naturally attached” means the whole head is still fully attached to the carcass; the bill may be removed up to the tip of the lower jaw<sup>38</sup>.

### AUTHORIZED SPECIES

North Atlantic Swordfish (North of 5° N. lat.)

### PERMITS AND GEARS

Permits	Gear <sup>39</sup>
1. HMS Angling, <sup>40</sup> OR 2. HMS Charter/Headboat, <sup>41</sup> OR 3. Swordfish General Commercial <sup>42</sup> OR Atlantic Tunas General <sup>43</sup> <b>ONLY</b> if participating in a registered Atlantic HMS tournament.	Handline and Rod and reel



## SIZE/BAG LIMITS AND SEASONS

Permits		Minimum Size <sup>44</sup>	Bag Limit <sup>45</sup>	Season
HMS Angling OR Swordfish General Commercial OR Atlantic Tunas General category (in a registered HMS tournament)	HMS Charter/ Headboat*	47" LJFL or 25" CK	1 per person, up to 4 per vessel per trip	Jan. 1 - Dec. 31
Charter Vessels			1 per paying passenger, up to 6 per vessel per trip	
Headboat Vessels			1 per paying passenger, up to 15 per vessel per trip	

## LANDING RESTRICTIONS

Swordfish may be headed and gutted, but may not be cut into pieces at sea.<sup>46</sup>

If a swordfish carcass has been bitten by a shark, the remainder of the fish must still meet the minimum LJFL or CK measurement.<sup>47</sup>

A vessel that has been issued a Swordfish General Commercial permit may fish recreationally for swordfish during a registered Atlantic HMS tournament; however, Swordfish General Commercial regulations, including regional retention limits and other requirements apply (see the HMS Commercial Compliance Guide).<sup>48</sup>

A swordfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately to improve its chances of survival without removing it from the water.<sup>49</sup>

## REPORTING REQUIREMENTS<sup>50</sup>

- Anglers must report all recreational swordfish landings.
  - Anglers in Maryland and North Carolina must report at a state-operated reporting station (state contact information is in Section XI).
  - All other anglers must report to NMFS within 24 hours via one of the following methods: online at <https://hmspermits.noaa.gov>, call (800) 894-5528, or use the HMS Catch Reporting App. To obtain the HMS Catch Reporting App, go to hmspermits.noaa.gov, click on "Fish Reporting" or "Mobile app download."
  - If the angler enters (reports) a swordfish in a registered HMS tournament, the tournament operator must report that fish. A list of registered tournaments is available at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/atlantic-highly-migratory-species-tournaments>
- The Large Pelagic Survey (LPS) or Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP, formerly MRFSS) may survey anglers at the dock, by phone, or by mail.<sup>51</sup> If contacted, anglers are required to participate in these



surveys; however, participation does not fulfill reporting obligations and vessel owners/operators must still report all swordfish as described above.

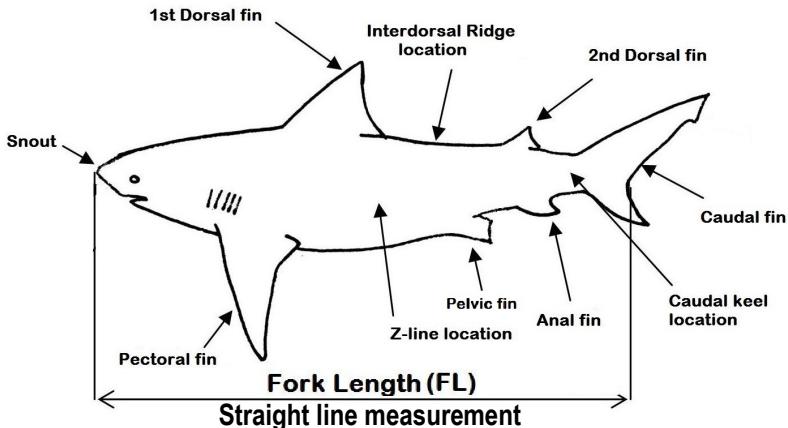
## **RESTRICTED AREAS<sup>52</sup>**

- Tortugas Marine Reserves (closed year-round)
- Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps closed areas (closed year-round except for surface trolling allowed May-October)
- Edges 40 Fathom Contour closed area (closed January-April)
- South of 5° N latitude (closed year-round)<sup>53</sup>



## VI. SHARKS

### ANATOMY OF A SHARK

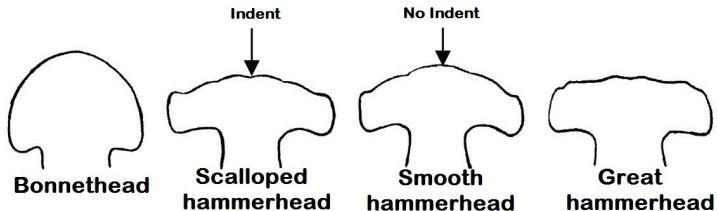


**Fork length<sup>54</sup>** - Refers to the straight line measurement of a fish from the midpoint of the anterior edge of the fish to the fork of the caudal fin.

### IDENTIFICATION OF RIDGEBACK SHARKS

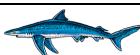


### IDENTIFICATION OF HAMMERHEAD SHARKS



Sharks can be difficult to identify, even for experts. To make sure you do not accidentally retain a prohibited species, release any sharks you are not sure you can identify correctly. If the shark has an interdorsal ridge (a ridge of skin on the back between the two dorsal fins), there it a good chance it is a prohibited species and you should release it.

Remember: *If you don't know, let it go.* For help with shark identification, download the Recreational Atlantic HMS Shark ID Placard (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/outreach-and-education/shark-ID-placard>)



[identification-placard](#)), the Prohibited Shark ID Placard (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/outreach-and-education/prohibited-shark-identification-placard>) or contact the Atlantic HMS Management Division at 301-427-8503 to request a waterproof hard copy of the placard.

### AUTHORIZED SPECIES<sup>55</sup> (retention allowed)

Large Coastal Sharks (LCS) (non-ridgeback LCS & tiger)	Small Coastal Sharks (SCS)	Pelagic Sharks	Smoothhound Sharks**+
Blacktip	Lemon	Atlantic sharpnose	Smooth dogfish
Bull	Nurse	Blacknose	Florida smoothhound
Hammerhead, great*	Spinner	Bonnethead	Gulf smoothhound
Hammerhead, scalloped*	Tiger+	Finetooth	
Hammerhead, smooth*		Thresher	

+ Ridgeback sharks that have an interdorsal ridge, or visible line of raised skin, between their dorsal fins.

\* Anglers cannot possess these sharks while in possession of tunas, billfish or swordfish.<sup>56</sup>

\*\* Smoothhound sharks are the only authorized species with both a predorsal and an interdorsal ridge.

\*\*\* Porbeagle sharks caught alive must be released unharmed if swordfish, tunas, or billfish are retained, possessed, or offloaded from the vessel during that trip.<sup>57</sup>

### RETENTION PROHIBITED<sup>58</sup> (must be released)

Atlantic angel	Caribbean reef+	Night+	Sixgill
Basking	Caribbean sharpnose	Sandbar+	Smalltail
Bigeye sand tiger	Dusky+	Sand tiger	Whale
Bigeye sixgill	Galapagos+	Sevengill	White*
Bigeye thresher	Longfin mako	Shortfin mako	
Bignose+	Narrowtooth	Silky+	

\* A person may fish for white sharks with rod and reel, but must release the fish immediately, with minimal injury, and without removing it from the water.<sup>59</sup>

+ Ridgeback sharks that have an interdorsal ridge, or visible line of raised skin between their dorsal fins.

### PERMITS, ENDORSEMENTS, AND GEARS

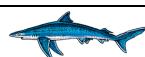
#### Permits and Endorsements<sup>60</sup>

To fish recreationally for sharks, a **shark endorsement** must be held on one of the following permits:

1. HMS Angling,<sup>62</sup> OR
2. HMS Charter/Headboat,<sup>63</sup> OR
3. Atlantic Tunas General category<sup>64</sup> OR Swordfish General Commercial<sup>65</sup>  
**ONLY** if participating in a registered Atlantic HMS tournament. Having a shark endorsement on the permit does not allow for fishing for sharks outside of an HMS tournament.

#### Gear<sup>61</sup>

Handline  
and Rod  
and reel



## SIZE/BAG LIMITS AND SEASONS

Permits	Species	Minimum Size <sup>66</sup> (FL)	Trip Bag Limit** <sup>67</sup>	Season
HMS Angling, Charter/Headboat, Atlantic Tunas General Category****, or Swordfish General Commercial****	Atlantic sharpnose	None	1 per person	Jan. 1 - Dec. 31
	Bonnethead	None	1 per person	
	Smoothhound sharks	None	None	
	Hammerheads (Great, Smooth, and Scalloped)	78"	1 per vessel*	
	All other sharks***	54"	1 per vessel*	

\* Only 1 hammerhead or 1 other shark can be landed on a trip.

\*\* For example, if there are 3 passengers on a trip, the vessel may retain up to 3 Atlantic sharpnose, 3 bonnethead, and 1 hammerhead or other shark (7 sharks total). Any number of smoothhound sharks may also be retained. If a hammerhead shark is retained, no tunas, billfish, or swordfish may be retained.

\*\*\* See above for lists of which species are authorized and which species cannot be retained.

\*\*\*\* Only if participating in a registered HMS tournament.

## SHARK ENDORSEMENT<sup>68</sup>

All HMS permit holders that recreationally fish for, retain, possess, or land sharks are required to obtain a shark endorsement on the permit, which requires completing an online shark identification and fishing regulation training course and quiz. Permit holders can take the quiz at any time during the fishing year but the vessel(s) may not leave the dock on a trip that will include fishing for sharks unless a new or revised permit with a shark endorsement has been issued for the vessel. If requested by the vessel owner, the shark endorsement may be removed from the permit at any time; removal of the shark endorsement means sharks can no longer be fished for, retained, or landed by person(s) aboard that vessel.

All HMS permits, including those with shark endorsements, are vessel-based permits that authorize all individuals fishing on the permitted vessel to fish for, retain, possess, and land species under that permit. Anglers that wish to fish for other HMS (billfish, tuna, swordfish) are not required to obtain a shark endorsement if they do not intend to fish for sharks or harvest the sharks they catch incidentally. HMS permit holders without a shark endorsement that incidentally hook a shark while fishing for other species are required to release the shark immediately without removing it from the water.

## CIRCLE HOOK REQUIREMENT FOR SHARKS<sup>69</sup>

HMS recreational permit holders fishing recreationally for sharks on a vessel with the permits listed above must use non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks except when fishing with flies or artificial lures. Circle hooks are required for any line that is targeting sharks, and this can be determined by the angler on a line-by-line basis. Any shark caught on a hook other than a non-offset, non-



stainless steel circle hook must be released unless caught using flies or artificial lures.

## **LANDING RESTRICTIONS<sup>70</sup>**

All sharks must be landed intact with the head, tail, and all fins naturally attached. The shark may be gutted and bled at sea (e.g., by making an incision at the base of the tail).<sup>71</sup> “Naturally attached” means attached to the shark carcass by at least some portion of uncut skin.<sup>72</sup>

An Atlantic shark is caught but not kept, it must be released immediately without removing it from the water to improve its chances of survival.<sup>73</sup>

## **REPORTING REQUIREMENTS<sup>74</sup>**

- The Large Pelagic Survey (LPS) or Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP, formerly MRFSS) may survey anglers at the dock, by phone, or by mail.<sup>75</sup> If contacted, anglers are required to participate in these surveys.
- Anglers in Maryland must report all recreational shark landings, and anglers in North Carolina must report some pelagic shark species, at a state-operated reporting station (state contact information is in Section XI).

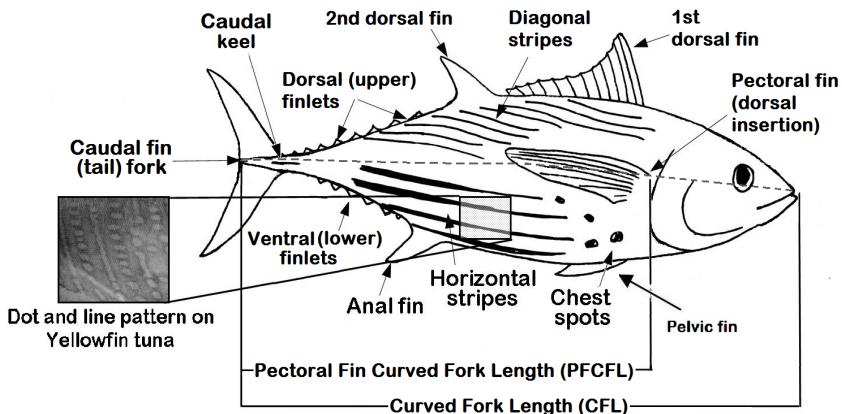
## **RESTRICTED AREAS<sup>76</sup>**

- Tortugas Marine Reserves (closed year-round)
- Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps closed areas (closed year-round; except for surface trolling, allowed May-October)
- Edges 40 Fathom Contour closed area (closed January-April)



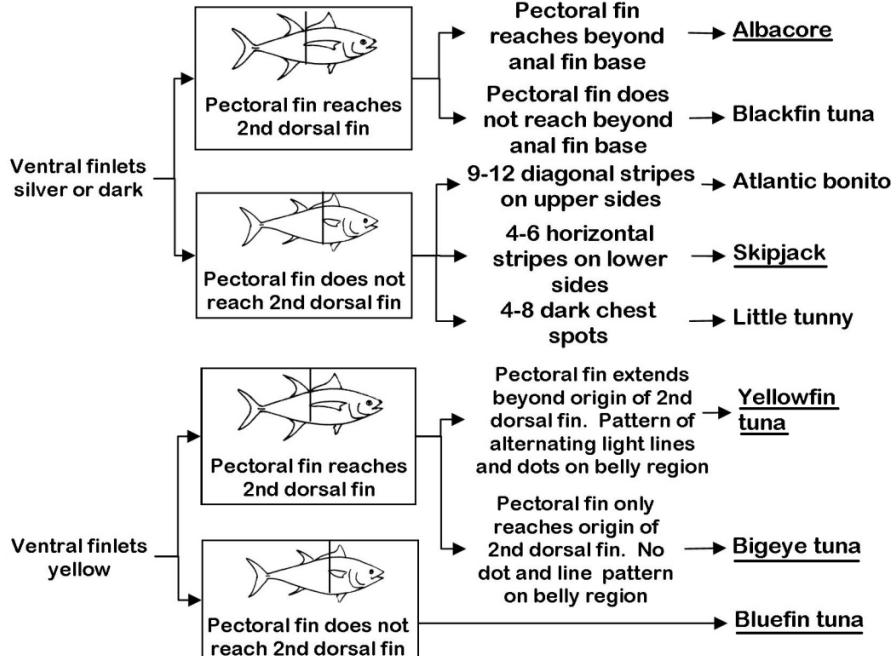
## VII. TUNAS

### ANATOMY OF ATLANTIC TUNAS



**CFL measurement** – use if the head is attached.<sup>77</sup> CFL is measured from the tip of the upper jaw, tracing the contour (i.e., curve) of the body along the dorsal insertion of the pectoral fin and dorsal side of the caudal keel to the fork of the tail.<sup>78</sup> **PFCFL measurement** – use if head is removed from bluefin tuna. PFCFL is measured from the dorsal insertion of the pectoral fin, tracing the contour of the body along the outer surface of the pectoral fin to the fork of the tail.<sup>79</sup>

### IDENTIFICATION OF ATLANTIC TUNAS



This guide covers regulations for the tuna species that are underlined.

## AUTHORIZED SPECIES

Bigeye, Albacore, Yellowfin, and Skipjack (BAYS) tunas | Bluefin tuna

## PERMITS AND GEARS

Species	Gear <sup>80</sup>	Permits <sup>81</sup>
BAYS and Bluefin tunas	Bandit	1. HMS Charter/Headboat <b>OR</b> 2. Atlantic Tunas General category <b>ONLY</b> if participating in registered Atlantic HMS tournament.
	Handline and Rod and reel	1. HMS Angling, <b>OR</b> 2. HMS Charter/Headboat, <b>OR</b> 3. Atlantic Tunas General category <b>OR</b> Swordfish General Commercial <b>ONLY</b> if participating in a registered Atlantic HMS tournament.
	Greenstick	1. HMS Charter/Headboat <b>OR</b> 2. Atlantic Tunas General category <b>ONLY</b> if participating in registered Atlantic HMS tournament.
BAYS tunas only	Speargun*	1. HMS Angling <b>OR</b> 2. HMS Charter/Headboat

\*Only free-swimming BAYS tunas; not those restricted by fishing lines or other means.<sup>82</sup>

## SIZE/BAG LIMITS AND SEASONS

Species	Minimum Size (CFL) <sup>83,84</sup>	Bag Limit <sup>85</sup>	Season
Albacore	None	None	Jan. 1-Dec. 31
Bigeye	27"	None	
Skipjack	None	None	
Yellowfin	27"	3 per person per day. Regardless of the length of a trip, no more than 3 yellowfin tuna per person may be possessed on board a vessel.	Jan. 1-Dec. 31 (or when quota is met)
Bluefin	27" to less than 47" <i>School</i>	Bluefin tuna retention limits may change throughout the season. Call (888)-872-8862 or (978)-281-9260 or visit <a href="https://hmspermits.noaa.gov">https://hmspermits.noaa.gov</a> for current limits.	
	47" to less than 73" <i>Large school or Small medium</i>	1 per vessel per year ("Trophy") see page 8 for trophy regions	
	73" or greater <i>Large medium or Giant</i>		

## LANDING RESTRICTIONS

All Atlantic tunas may be landed round with fins intact, or eviscerated with the head removed, as long as the fish remains within the specified minimum size (described below) and both the tail and at least one pectoral fin remain attached through landing (all other fins may be removed).<sup>86</sup> The upper and lower lobes of the tuna tail may be removed for storage purposes as long as the fork of the tail remains intact (see tail trimming).<sup>87</sup>

If a bigeye and/or yellowfin tuna carcass has been damaged (i.e., bitten) by a shark or another marine species, it may be retained and landed but the remainder of the fish must still meet the minimum size of 27 inches (69 cm) CFL. No tissue may be cut away from or other alterations made to the damaged area of the fish.<sup>88</sup>

A vessel that has been issued an Atlantic Tunas General category permit may be used to fish recreationally for Atlantic tunas during a registered Atlantic HMS tournament, applying the General category regulations, including authorized gears, techniques, and size limits (see the HMS Commercial Compliance Guide).<sup>89</sup> Bluefin tuna less than 73" may not be retained aboard Atlantic Tunas General category permitted vessels.<sup>90</sup> Note that if the tournament occurs on a restricted fishing day, a vessel that has been issued an Atlantic Tunas General category permit cannot fish (including catch-and-release and tag-and-release fishing), possess, retain, land, or sell a bluefin tuna of any size class. These vessels can fish for other tunas under the General category permit restrictions.

Similarly, a vessel issued an HMS Charter/Headboat permit cannot *commercially* fish for or land a bluefin tuna on a restricted fishing day. However, such vessels can fish for, possess, retain, or land bluefin tuna *recreationally* on a restricted fishing day under the applicable HMS Angling category rules.

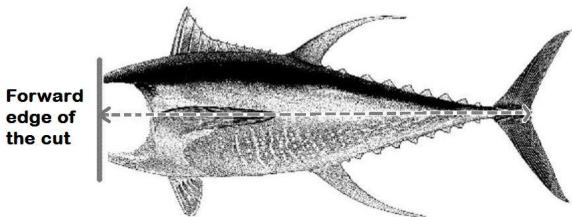
A vessel that has been issued only a Swordfish General Commercial permit may fish recreationally for Atlantic tunas during a registered Atlantic HMS tournament; however, HMS Angling category regulations for Atlantic tunas, including those addressing authorized gears, techniques, and size limits apply.<sup>91</sup>

Any Atlantic tuna that is caught but not kept must be released immediately without removing it from the water to improve its chances of survival.<sup>92</sup>

### Tunas with heads removed

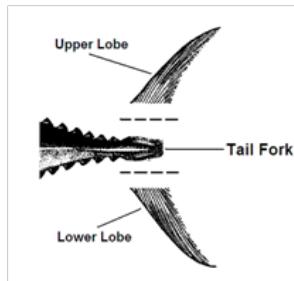
**Bluefin tuna** must be at least 20 inches (51 cm) pectoral fin curved fork length (PFCFL) if the head is removed.<sup>93</sup> Multiplying the PFCFL by 1.35 gives the CFL ( $20'' \text{ PFCFL} \times 1.35 = 27'' \text{ CFL}$ ).<sup>94</sup>

**Bigeye and yellowfin tuna** must be at least 27 inches (69 cm) from the forward edge of the cut to the fork of the tail (see image below) if the head is removed.<sup>95</sup>



### Tail trimming

The upper and lower lobes of the tuna tail may be removed for storage purposes as long as the fork of the tail remains intact.<sup>96</sup>



### REPORTING REQUIREMENTS<sup>97</sup>

- Vessel owners/operators must report all recreational bluefin tuna landings and dead discards.
  - Vessel owners/operators in Maryland and North Carolina must report at a state-operated reporting station (state contact information is in Section XI).
  - All other vessel owners/operators must report to NMFS within 24 hours by accessing [hmspermits.noaa.gov](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov) or using the HMS Catch Reporting App. After going to [hmspermits.noaa.gov](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov), click on "Fish Reporting" or "Mobile app download." Vessel owners/operators can also report by calling customer service at 888-USA-TUNA (888-872-8862) Monday through Friday 8 am to 5 pm EST.
- The Large Pelagic Survey (LPS) or Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) may survey anglers at the dock, by phone, or by mail. If contacted, anglers are required to participate in these surveys.

### RESTRICTED AREAS<sup>98</sup>

- Targeting bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico is prohibited year-round. HMS Angling or Charter/Headboat permit holders may retain one "trophy" bluefin tuna (greater than 73" CFL) per vessel per year from the Gulf of Mexico if it is caught incidentally while targeting other species, provided the Gulf of Mexico "trophy" category subquota is still available at the time of harvest.<sup>99</sup>
- Tortugas Marine Reserves (year-round)
- Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps closed areas (year-round)

- (except for surface trolling allowed May-October)
- Edges 40 Fathom Contour closed area (closed January-April)<sup>100</sup>

Updates on **Atlantic tunas**, such as bluefin tuna quota monitoring or retention limits, are posted under “What’s New” at <https://hmpermits.noaa.gov>

Atlantic Tunas Information Line at (888) 872-8862  
HMS Management Division (Gloucester, MA): (978) 281-9260

## **VIII. CHARTER/HEADBOATS**

Vessels fishing with an HMS Charter/Headboat permit may take for-hire passengers who are recreational fishing for HMS.<sup>101</sup> These vessels have different requirements than vessels fishing under an HMS Angling, Atlantic Tunas General category, or Swordfish General Commercial permit. The operator of the vessel must also possess a Merchant Marine License or Uninspected Passenger Vessel License.<sup>102</sup> Regulations may vary further among Charter/Headboat permit holders based on the following two vessel types:

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**Charter:** A vessel less than 100 gross tons (90.8 metric tons) that meets the requirements of the U.S. Coast Guard to carry six or fewer passengers on a for-hire trip.

**Headboat:** A vessel that holds a valid Certificate of Inspection issued by the U.S. Coast Guard to carry passengers on a for-hire trip.<sup>103</sup>

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A “**for-hire**” trip is a recreational fishing trip carrying a fee-paying passenger; or a trip having more than three persons for a vessel licensed to carry six or fewer people; or a trip having more persons aboard than the number of crew specified on the vessel’s Certificate of Inspection for a U.S. Coast Guard inspected vessel.<sup>104</sup>

### **COMMERCIAL SALE RESTRICTIONS<sup>105</sup>**

Atlantic HMS Charter/Headboat permit holders that wish sell HMS must obtain a commercial sale endorsement on the permit. When a Charter/Headboat permit has a commercial sale endorsement, there are instances when the catch may be commercially sold; however, this depends on the species and other types of commercial fishing permits that are held. Below is a list of HMS permit combinations, the type of charter/headboat trip, and the species that may be commercially sold in that situation. Atlantic HMS may only be sold by federally-permitted vessels to federally-permitted dealers.<sup>106</sup>

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#### **Sharks**

Silky, oceanic whitetip, and great, smooth, and scalloped hammerhead sharks cannot be possessed or retained on vessels that have both a Charter/Headboat and commercial shark permit (directed or incidental) when tunas, swordfish, or billfishes are onboard, offloaded, or being offloaded from the vessel.<sup>107</sup> Vessels issued an HMS Charter/Headboat permit are required to release unharmed, to

the extent practicable, porbeagle sharks that are alive at the time of haulback, if swordfish, tuna, or billfish are retained or possessed on board, or offloaded from, the vessel during the trip.<sup>108</sup> Shortfin mako sharks must remain in the water and be released at haulback whether being dead or alive.<sup>109</sup>

### **HMS Charter/Headboat Permit with Commercial Sale Endorsement AND Shark Directed Limited Access Permit**

- For-hire: May sell up to the recreational size and bag limits as long as the commercial fishery is open. When the commercial fishery is closed, may keep, but not sell, up to the recreational size and bag limits.<sup>110</sup>
- Non-for-hire: May sell up to the commercial size (no minimum size) and bag limits (ranges from 0 to 55 non-sandbar LCS per vessel per trip, no limit for SCS and Pelagic sharks, 8 Atlantic blacknose sharks per vessel per trip) as long as the commercial fishery is open. When the commercial fishery is closed, may not keep any sharks from that fishery.<sup>111</sup>

### **HMS Charter/Headboat Permit with Commercial Sale Endorsement AND Shark Incidental Limited Access Permit**

- For-hire: May sell up to the recreational size and bag limits as long as the commercial fishery is open. When the commercial fishery is closed, may keep, but not sell, up to the recreational size and bag limits.<sup>112</sup>
- Non-for-hire: May sell up to the commercial size (no minimum size) and bag limits (3 non-sandbar LCS per vessel per trip, 16 SCS and Pelagic sharks combined per vessel per trip, 8 Atlantic blacknose sharks per vessel per trip) as long as the commercial fishery is open. When the commercial fishery is closed, may not keep any sharks from that fishery.<sup>113</sup>

### **HMS Charter/Headboat Permit with Commercial Sale Endorsement AND Smoothhound Shark Permit**

- For-hire: May sell up to the recreational size and bag limits as long as the commercial fishery is open. At this time, there is no recreational size limit or bag limit for smoothhound sharks. When the commercial fishery is closed, may keep, but not sell, up to the recreational size and bag limits.<sup>114</sup>
- Non-for-hire: May sell up to the commercial size and bag limits as long as the commercial fishery is open. At this time, there is no commercial size or bag limit for smoothhound sharks. When the commercial fishery is closed, may not keep any smoothhound sharks.<sup>115</sup>

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### **Tunas**

#### **HMS Charter/Headboat- with Commercial Sale Endorsement permit only** Bigeye, Albacore, Yellowfin, and Skipjack (BAYS)

- For-hire: May sell BAYS tunas up to the recreational size and bag limits.<sup>116</sup>
- Non-for-hire: There are no limits on the number of BAYS tunas that may be retained and sold, but size limits do apply.<sup>117</sup>

#### **Bluefin**

HMS Charter/Headboat category vessels may fish under either the Angling or Atlantic Tunas General category retention limits. The size

class of the first bluefin tuna retained will determine the fishing category of all persons aboard the vessel for a given day. If fish >73" CFL are retained, they may be sold in accordance with the General category seasons and retention limits.<sup>118,119</sup> HMS Charter/Headboat vessels may not target or sell bluefin tuna while fishing in the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>120</sup> On a restricted fishing day, HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels cannot *commercially* fish for or land a bluefin tuna. However, on a restricted fishing day, HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels can fish for, possess, retain, or land bluefin tuna *recreationally* under applicable HMS Angling category rules.

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### Swordfish

#### HMS Charter/Headboat with Commercial Sale Endorsement permit only

- For-hire: May **not** sell swordfish. Recreational retention limits apply.<sup>121</sup>
- Non-for-hire: May sell swordfish as long as the commercial fishery is open.<sup>122</sup> Swordfish General Commercial permit regional retention limits apply (see the HMS Commercial Compliance Guide for more information).<sup>123</sup>

#### HMS Charter/Headboat with Commercial Sale Endorsement AND Swordfish Handgear Limited Access Permit<sup>124</sup>

- For-hire: May **not** sell swordfish. Recreational retention limits apply.<sup>125</sup>
- Non-for-hire: May sell commercial size fish with no bag limit as long as the commercial fishery is open.<sup>126</sup>

#### HMS Charter/Headboat with Commercial Sale Endorsement AND Swordfish Directed or Incidental LAPs

- In this combination, the Swordfish Directed or Incidental permits are not valid because they must be held in combination with an Atlantic Tunas Longline permit.<sup>127</sup>

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### Billfishes

Sale of any Atlantic billfish (marlins, spearfishes, or sailfish) is **prohibited**.<sup>128</sup>

## REPORTING REQUIREMENTS<sup>129</sup>

### Recreational Landings

- **Bluefin tuna:** All HMS Charter/Headboat vessel owners/operators\* **must report all recreational landings** (i.e., fish kept) **and dead discards** of Atlantic bluefin tuna to NOAA Fisheries within 24 hours of landing at the dock by accessing hmspermits.noaa.gov or using the HMS Catch Reporting App. After going to hmspermits.noaa.gov, click on "Fish Reporting" or "Mobile app download." Vessel owners/operators can also report bluefin tuna by calling customer service at 888-USA-TUNA (888-872-8862) Monday through Friday 8 am to 5 pm EST.
- **Billfishes and Swordfish:** All HMS Charter/Headboat vessel owners/operators\* **must report all recreational landings** (i.e., fish kept) of blue marlin, white marlin, roundscale spearfish, sailfish, and swordfish

to NOAA Fisheries within 24 hours of landing at the dock by accessing [hmspermits.noaa.gov](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov) or using the HMS Catch Reporting App. After going to [hmspermits.noaa.gov](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov), click on "Fish Reporting" or "Mobile app download." Vessel owner/operators can also report billfish or swordfish by calling (800) 894-5528.

\* In Maryland and North Carolina, HMS Charter/Headboat vessel owners must report their HMS landings (including sharks) at state-operated reporting stations (not via the web or phone number reported above). For additional information on these states' reporting stations, please call (410) 213-1531 (MD) or (800) 338-7804 (NC).

### **Atlantic HMS Tournament Landings<sup>130</sup>**

Vessel owners that land and enter billfish or swordfish in a registered Atlantic HMS tournament do not need to report these landings to NOAA Fisheries. However, if the fish are not reported to the tournament operator, it is the responsibility of the vessel owner to report the fish to NOAA Fisheries.<sup>131</sup>

### **NMFS Recreational Surveys**

Recreational anglers may be contacted on the dock, by phone, or by mail and asked to participate in the Large Pelagic Survey (LPS) or Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). If contacted, anglers must participate in these surveys to facilitate scientific research and catch monitoring on these species. Participation in the LPS or MRIP does not fulfill reporting obligations and vessel owners/operators must still report all Atlantic bluefin tuna, billfish, and swordfish as instructed above.

### **Commercial Landings of Swordfish, Sharks, and Tunas**

If a vessel owner that has an HMS Charter/Headboat permit also has a permit issued in a fishery that is required to report (e.g., NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Region Multispecies logbook (VTR) or NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Coastal Fisheries logbook), then commercial landings must be reported through that logbook program. If the vessel owner only holds an HMS Charter/Headboat permit, NOAA Fisheries will notify the owner if they are selected to report commercial landings and cost earnings information in a logbook program.<sup>132</sup>

### **NOAA FISHERIES OBSERVER PROGRAM**

HMS Charter/Headboat vessels are not required to carry a fishery observer on board, but may participate in a voluntary Charter/Headboat observer program.<sup>133</sup> To participate in the voluntary observer program, call (301) 427-8503.

## **IX. TOURNAMENTS**

An Atlantic HMS tournament is any fishing competition in which participants must register, or otherwise enter, or in which a prize or award is offered for catching or landing HMS.<sup>134</sup> This includes fishing tournaments where the target species is not an Atlantic HMS, but where participants receive points, prizes, or awards for catching Atlantic HMS. The following regulations pertain to tournaments conducted from ports within any Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico coastal state, as well as the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

### **REGISTRATION**

Tournament operators are required to register their tournament with NOAA Fisheries at least four weeks prior to the start of the tournament.<sup>135</sup>

**To register a tournament**, go to <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/atlantic-highly-migratory-species-tournaments>.

A public list of registered Atlantic HMS tournaments is also available at the link above. Tournament participants are encouraged to check this list to comply with Atlantic HMS fishing authorizations and reporting requirements.

Please direct questions about tournament registration to (727) 824-5399.

### **CATCH REPORTING<sup>136</sup>**

NOAA Fisheries will notify tournament operators if their tournament is selected for catch reporting. Since January 1, 2019, **all Atlantic HMS tournaments** are required to report tournament catch and effort data to NOAA Fisheries within seven days of the tournament's conclusion.<sup>137</sup>

**To report tournament catch**, go to <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/atlantic-highly-migratory-species-tournaments>.

Please direct questions about tournament reporting to (305) 361-4214.

Participation in other NOAA Fisheries surveys, such as the Large Pelagics Survey or the Marine Recreational Information Program, does not fulfill reporting obligations and tournament operators must still report all catch and landings as instructed on the reporting form.

### **PARTICIPANTS**

To participate in a registered Atlantic HMS tournament, the vessel owner must have one of the following permits:

1. HMS Angling,
2. HMS Charter/Headboat, or
3. Atlantic Tunas General category\* permit, or
4. Swordfish General Commercial\*\*.<sup>138</sup>

Permit holders fishing in a tournament that wish to fish for, possess, retain, or land sharks must also have a shark endorsement on their permit.

**Make sure an HMS tournament is registered with NOAA Fisheries before**

**participating.** Registered Atlantic HMS tournaments are listed at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/atlantic-highly-migratory-species-tournaments>. HMS permit holders do not need to report their recreational North Atlantic swordfish or billfish landings to NOAA Fisheries if the fish are entered in a registered tournament. If billfish or swordfish are landed but not entered in a registered tournament, it is the permit holder's responsibility to report them to NOAA Fisheries (see billfish and swordfish sections for recreational reporting instructions).<sup>139</sup>

\* Atlantic Tunas General category permit holders may fish recreationally for billfish, swordfish, and sharks **only** if the vessel owner has registered for, has paid an entry fee to, and is fishing under the rules of a registered Atlantic HMS tournament. When fishing in a registered Atlantic HMS tournament, Atlantic Tunas General category permit holders must comply with HMS Angling category regulations for swordfish, sharks, and billfishes, and with General category regulations for Atlantic tunas (i.e., General category permit holders may not fish for or land bluefin tuna < 73" CFL under any circumstances).<sup>140</sup>

\*\* Swordfish General Commercial permit holders may fish recreationally for billfish, tunas, and sharks **only** if the vessel owner has registered for, has paid an entry fee to, and is fishing under the rules of a registered Atlantic HMS tournament. When fishing in a registered Atlantic HMS tournament, Swordfish General Commercial permit holders must comply with HMS Angling category regulations for tunas, sharks, and billfishes, and with Swordfish General Commercial regulations for swordfish (i.e., swordfish regional retention limits).

## **GENERAL RESTRICTIONS**

All Atlantic HMS recreational fishing regulations (size limits, bag limits, gear restrictions, and possession restrictions) apply to Atlantic HMS tournament participants.<sup>141</sup>

### **Billfish Tournaments**

Anglers fishing from Atlantic HMS permitted vessels and participating in Atlantic billfish tournaments must use only non-offset circle hooks when deploying natural bait or natural bait/artificial lure combinations. A billfish tournament is defined as any fishing tournament that awards points or prizes for billfishes, even if billfishes are not the main species targeted in the tournament. Billfish tournament anglers may deploy "J"-hooks only if they are fishing with artificial lures.<sup>142</sup> NOAA Fisheries encourages the use of circle hooks by non-tournament anglers to reduce post-release mortality of Atlantic billfishes.

## **X. NATIONAL SALTWATER ANGLER REGISTRY**

If you have a saltwater recreational fishing license or registration from any state or U.S. territory *except* Hawaii, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands, you are *automatically* registered and do not need to take further action.

For more information about the Angler Registry, please go to <https://www.countmyfish.noaa.gov/register/> or call the toll-free registration line

at 1-888-MRIP411 (1-888-674-7411) from 4:00 am to 12 midnight EST daily.

Following are several points of clarification about the relationship between anglers/vessels with Atlantic HMS permits and the Angler Registry:

- Individuals who fish exclusively on state- or NOAA Fisheries-licensed for-hire vessels (e.g., on a charter or headboat) are exempted from registering because fishing data can be obtained from the vessel operator.
- In the case of HMS Angling permit holders, only the individual permit holder is exempt. Other anglers fishing aboard the vessel will need to register, unless otherwise exempt.
- Individuals who hold a commercial or subsistence fishing license or permit issued by NOAA Fisheries or a state/territory will need to register if they intend to fish recreationally. These individuals do not need to register while fishing pursuant to their commercial or subsistence fishing license or permit.

## **XI. CONTACTS**

**NOAA Fisheries  
Atlantic HMS Management Division**

*Chief: Randy Blankinship  
(301) 427-8503*

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species>

### **Office Contact Information:**

Atlantic HMS Headquarters: Phone: (301) 427-8503

NMFS/SF1  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Atlantic HMS Gloucester Phone: (978) 281-9260

NMFS/SF1  
55 Great Republic Drive  
Gloucester, MA 01930-2298

Atlantic HMS St. Petersburg Phone: (727) 824-5399

NMFS HMS  
263 13th Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

### **Fishing permits and reporting links:**

To obtain an Atlantic tunas General category, Atlantic HMS Charter/headboat, Atlantic HMS Angling, or Swordfish General Commercial permits please visit: <https://hmpermits.noaa.gov/> or call (888) 872-8862 and dial “0” to speak with a person.

To report your non-tournament bluefin tuna, swordfish, or billfish landings please visit: <https://hmpermits.noaa.gov/catchReports> OR use the mobile app: <https://hmpermits.noaa.gov/mobileApp>

## **24-Hour Law Enforcement Hotline: (800) 853-1964**

The NMFS Office of Law Enforcement maintains a 24-hour hotline for the public to report potential violations of Atlantic HMS regulations. This number should be used only to report potential violations, not for general information, concerning Atlantic HMS.

### **NMFS LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICES (for general information only)**

FL	Key West Niceville St. Petersburg Sunrise	(305) 809-4734 (850) 729-8628 (727) 824-5344 (954) 746-4160	MD ME NJ	Salisbury Portland Northfield Wall	(443) 736-7158 (207) 780-3241 (609) 415-2941 (732) 280-6490
LA	Slidell	(985) 643-6232	NH	New Castle	(603) 427-0832
MA	East Falmouth Gloucester New Bedford Scituate	(508) 495-2147 (978) 281-9213 (508) 992-7711 (781) 545-8026	SC VA NY	Charleston Newport News Bellport	(843) 740-1228 (757) 595-2692 (631) 776-1734

### **U.S. COAST GUARD**

*Commercial vessels are subject to the Fishing Vessel Safety Act of 1988.*  
Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Program: [www.fishsafe.info](http://www.fishsafe.info)

Local Coast Guard offices:

Maine to New York	(617) 223-8440
New Jersey to North Carolina	(757) 398-6552
South Carolina to Florida	(305) 415-6868
Gulf of Mexico	(504) 671-2154

### **COOPERATIVE TAGGING PROGRAMS**

For tuna, billfish, or swordfish tagging kits or to report a recovered tag:  
(800) 437-3936    E-mail: [tagging@noaa.gov](mailto:tagging@noaa.gov)

For a shark tagging kit or to report a recovered tag:

Apex Predators Program    (401) 782-3320 or (877) 826-2612

NOAA/NMFS/NEFSC

28 Tarzwell Drive    E-mail: [sharkrecap@noaa.gov](mailto:sharkrecap@noaa.gov)

Narragansett, RI 02882-1152, USA

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/shark-research-northeast>

### **MARYLAND AND NORTH CAROLINA RECREATIONAL CATCH CARDS**

To report recreational landings of bluefin tuna, swordfish, or billfish in North Carolina or Maryland:

North Carolina Harvest Tagging Program:    (800) 338-7804

Maryland Department of Natural Resources:    (410) 213-1531

## STATE FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

<b>State</b>	<b>Agency and Website</b>	<b>Phone</b>
Maine	Department of Marine Resources <a href="http://www.maine.gov/dmr/">http://www.maine.gov/dmr/</a>	(207) 624-6550
New Hampshire	Fish and Game <a href="http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/">http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/</a>	(603) 868-1095
Massachusetts	Division of Marine Fisheries <a href="https://www.mass.gov/orgs/division-of-marine-fisheries">https://www.mass.gov/orgs/division-of-marine-fisheries</a>	(617) 626-1520
Rhode Island	Department of Environmental Management <a href="http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/marine-fisheries/">http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/marine-fisheries/</a>	(401) 222-4700
Connecticut	Department of Environmental Protection <a href="https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Fishing/Saltwater/Current-Recreational-Marine-Fisheries-Regulations">https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Fishing/Saltwater/Current-Recreational-Marine-Fisheries-Regulations</a>	(860) 424-3000
New York	Division of Marine Resources <a href="https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7755.html">https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7755.html</a>	(631) 444-0430
New Jersey	Fish and Wildlife <a href="http://dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/marine/">http://dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/marine/</a>	(609) 728-2020
Delaware	Division of Fish and Wildlife <a href="https://dnrec.alpha.delaware.gov/fish-wildlife/">https://dnrec.alpha.delaware.gov/fish-wildlife/</a>	(302) 739-9910
Maryland	Department of Natural Resources <a href="http://www.dnr.state.md.us/">http://www.dnr.state.md.us/</a>	(410) 260-8367 (877) 620-8367
Virginia	Marine Resources Commission <a href="https://mrc.virginia.gov/">https://mrc.virginia.gov/</a>	(757) 247-2200
North Carolina	Division of Marine Fisheries <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</a>	(252) 726-7021 (800) 682-2632
South Carolina	Department of Natural Resources <a href="http://www.dnr.sc.gov/">http://www.dnr.sc.gov/</a>	(843) 953-9312
Georgia	Department of Natural Resources <a href="http://www.gadnr.org/">http://www.gadnr.org/</a>	(912) 264-7218
Florida	Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission <a href="http://myfwc.com">http://myfwc.com</a>	(850) 488-4676
Alabama	Department of Conservation and Natural Resources <a href="http://www.outdooralabama.com/">http://www.outdooralabama.com/</a>	(251) 861-2882 (251) 968-7576
Louisiana	Department of Wildlife and Fisheries <a href="http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/">http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/</a>	(225) 765-2800
Mississippi	Department of Marine Resources <a href="https://dmr.ms.gov/">https://dmr.ms.gov/</a>	(228) 374-5000
Texas	Parks and Wildlife Department <a href="https://tpwd.texas.gov/">https://tpwd.texas.gov/</a>	(512) 389-4800 (800) 792-1112
Puerto Rico	Caribbean Fishery Management Council <a href="http://www.caribbeanfmc.com/">http://www.caribbeanfmc.com/</a>	(787) 766-5927
U.S. Virgin Islands	Caribbean Fishery Management Council <a href="http://www.caribbeanfmc.com/">http://www.caribbeanfmc.com/</a>	(787) 766-5927

## **XII. Citations in the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations**

The following links are references to the electronic Code of Federal Regulations (eCFR). Each endnote (1, 2, 3, etc.) within this guide directs you to this page. By clicking the links in this section, your internet browser will be directed to the specific location in the eCFR that states the regulations provided in this guide.

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