

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Parts 285 and 644**

[I.D. 040198B]

Atlantic Tuna Fisheries; Atlantic Billfishes; Public Hearings

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of public hearings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS will hold seven public hearings to receive comments from fishery participants and other members of the public regarding proposed Atlantic bluefin tuna (ABT) quota specifications and General category effort controls, tournament reporting for Atlantic billfishes, and an increase in minimum size limits for Atlantic blue marlin (BUM) and Atlantic white marlin (WHM). These management actions are necessary to achieve domestic management objectives for Atlantic highly migratory species (HMS).

DATES: The hearings will be held during April and May. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for dates, times, and locations of the public hearings. Written comments on the proposed ABT specifications must be received by May 4, 1998, and comments on the regulatory amendments for Atlantic billfishes must be received by May 22, 1998.

ADDRESSES: The hearings will be held in Massachusetts, Delaware, Florida, Maine, and North Carolina. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for dates, times, and locations of the public hearings. Written comments should be

sent to Rebecca Lent, Chief, Highly Migratory Species Management Division (F/SF1), National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Clearly mark the outside of the envelope "HMS Comments."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Mark Murray-Brown at 978-281-9260, Sarah McLaughlin at (301) 713-2347, or Buck Sutter at 813-570-5447.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The actions that are the subject of the hearings are necessary to improve management and monitoring of the U.S. Atlantic tuna and billfish fisheries, to implement 1996 and 1997 International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) recommendations, and to enhance collection of data to improve assessment of the environmental, economic, and social impacts of the fisheries.

Complete descriptions of the proposed ABT specifications and the interim billfish measures are contained in the proposed rule for ABT published April 2, 1998 (63 FR 16220) or in the interim rule for billfish published March 24, 1998 (63 FR 14030) and are not repeated here. Copies of these actions may be obtained by writing (see **ADDRESSES**) or calling one of the contact persons (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**). The public hearing schedule is as follows:

Thursday, April 16, 1998, Plymouth, MA, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Sheraton Inn Plymouth, 180 Water Street, Plymouth, MA 02360.

Tuesday, April 21, 1998, Wilmington, DE, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Wilmington Hilton, 630 Naamans Road, Wilmington, DE 19703.

Thursday, April 23, 1998, Panama City, FL, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

National Marine Fisheries Service, 3500 Delwood Beach Road, Panama City, FL 32408.

Monday, April 27, 1998, Brunswick, ME, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Atrium Inn and Conference Center, Cooks Corner, Brunswick, ME 04011.

Monday, April 27, 1998, Fort Lauderdale, FL, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Holiday Inn, 4900 Powerline Road/I-95 Exit 32, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309.

Tuesday, April 28, 1998, St. Petersburg, FL, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

NMFS Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive North, St. Petersburg, FL 33703.

Friday, May 1, 1998, Atlantic Beach, NC, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Sheraton Atlantic Beach, 2717 West Fort Macon Road, Atlantic Beach, NC 28512.

The purpose of this announcement is to alert the interested public of hearings and provide for public participation.

Special Accommodations

These hearings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Rebecca Lent at least 5 days prior to the hearing date (see **ADDRESSES**).

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.* and 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: April 3, 1998.

Gary C. Matlock,

Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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