

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This 2015 Stock Assessment and Fisheries Evaluation (SAFE) Report is produced by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management Division. It contains a review of the current status of Atlantic HMS stocks (tunas, swordfish, billfish, and sharks) and describes the year's accomplishments in managing Atlantic HMS. Atlantic HMS SAFE Reports provide the public with information on the latest developments in Atlantic HMS management and fulfill Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requirements.

Since the 2014 HMS SAFE Report, the HMS Management Division: held two HMS Advisory Panel meetings; published several rules regarding HMS fisheries, including proposed and final rules (Amendment 6; 80 FR 2648 and 50074, respectively) to implement a range of management measures for the commercial shark quotas and fisheries, proposed and final rules (80 FR 33467 and 52198) to adjust the baseline annual U.S. bluefin tuna quota and other bluefin tuna fishery provisions, proposed and final rules to adjust the 2015 North and South Atlantic swordfish quotas (80 FR 8838 and 25609), proposed and final rules to adjust the 2016 shark quotas (80 FR 49974 and 74999), a proposed rule (80 FR 61146) to implement the electronic bluefin tuna catch documentation system (eBCD), and a final rule (Amendment 9) (80 FR 73128) for smoothhound shark management measures including modifications to shark gillnet requirements; published the final Essential Fish Habitat 5-Year Review (80 FR 37598), and enacted several inseason actions for HMS. The HMS Management Division also assisted the Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment Trustee Council with the Deepwater Horizon Pelagic Longline Bycatch Reduction Project that is part of the Final Phase IV Early Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessments for the Deepwater Horizon National Resource Damage Assessment. NMFS also published a final rule (79 FR 77339) that established technical and other requirements for vessel monitoring system type approval.

In November 2015, the 24th Regular Meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) was held, during which the United States helped develop recommendations to promote the conservation, management, and rebuilding of Atlantic HMS stocks. At this meeting, ICCAT adopted recommendations regarding Atlantic bigeye tuna, Atlantic porbeagle sharks, and Atlantic blue and white marlins; adopted a recommendation on the implementation of the electronic bluefin tuna catch document (eBCD) system; evaluated the reporting and conservation and management measures of the 50 Contracting Parties; and adopted the recommendation on the use of alternative biological reference points in SCRS stock assessments on a stock-by-stock basis.

Several stocks of HMS underwent stock assessments in 2015: Atlantic bigeye tuna and blue sharks underwent international stock assessments, and the Atlantic smooth dogfish shark and the Gulf of Mexico smoothhound shark complex underwent domestic assessments. NMFS continued shark nursery grounds research and EFH studies through two programs (COASTSPAN and GULFSPAN) along the U.S. Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean.

Much of the data in this report is based on final reports of 2014 data that were completed and/or published in 2015. Domestic fishery landings and bycatch data are presented from the U.S. Annual Report to ICCAT, and directly from NMFS program databases including

commercial landings from the HMS and Coastal Fisheries Logbook Programs, the Pelagic Longline and Southeast Gillnet and Bottom Longline Observer Programs, the Electronic Dealer Reporting Program (eDealer), the online catch reporting system at [hmspermits.noaa.gov](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov), and the Commercial Bluefin Tuna Landings Database; and recreational landings from the Large Pelagics Survey, the Recreational Billfish Survey, and the HMS Recreational Reporting Program. NMFS permits data are presented from the Office of Science and Technology's International Trade Permit Database, the Northeast and Southeast Regional Permits Offices' Databases, the HMS Permits Database, the HMS Exempted Fishing Permits, Display Permits, and Scientific Research Permits Database, and the HMS Tournament Registration Database.

International landings data are presented from the ICCAT Standing Committee on Research and Statistics' annual report. International trade data are presented from the National Seafood Inspection Laboratory's Bluefin Tuna Catch Document and Swordfish Statistical Document Programs, the U.S. Census Bureau, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Community profiles of the HMS fisheries from the 2010 national census were presented in the 2011 and 2012 SAFE Reports. Impacts to these communities from the major storms in 2014 are presented in this report. Finally, the NMFS Office of Science and Technology has developed tools for social impact analyses, from which the vulnerability or resilience to potential economic disruptions resulting from regulations, social changes, or natural disasters, assessed in 2013, are presented for twenty-five HMS fishing communities.

Feedback and comments on this SAFE Report are encouraged and should be sent to the HMS Management Division F/SF1, 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910, phone: (301) 427-8503, fax: (301) 713-1917.

