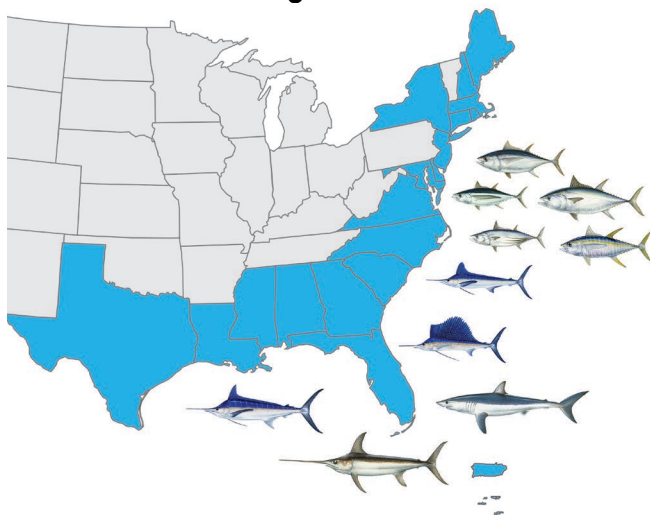


HMS Compliance Guide: Recreational Fishing

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



Published April 2025

Office of Sustainable Fisheries
Atlantic Highly Migratory Species
Management Division

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



Introduction to Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management

This guide provides a summary of the Federal recreational fishing regulations for Atlantic HMS (tunas, swordfish, sharks, and billfishes).

Fishery rules change frequently. It is **your responsibility** to be familiar with the latest regulatory updates and to comply with the current official regulations.

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

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.**

NEW in 2024:

Effective on February 2, 2024, it is unlawful to possess or retain oceanic whitetip sharks in or from the U.S. EEZ. It is also unlawful to possess or retain great, smooth and scalloped hammerhead sharks in the EEZ in the U.S. Caribbean. These prohibitions apply to HMS permit holders regardless of where they fish (e.g., state/territorial waters or federal waters). For more information see: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/retention-prohibition-oceanic-whitetip-sharks-us-atlantic-waters-and-hammerhead-sharks-us>

Executive Order 14172, “Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness” (Jan. 20, 2025), directs that the Gulf of Mexico be renamed the Gulf of America. Gulf of America references in this document refer to the same area as the Gulf of Mexico in the applicable regulations under 50 CFR part 635. The name change did not result in any changes to, and had no effect on the applicability or enforceability of, any existing regulations.



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This guide replaces and supersedes all previous guides and is consistent 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

Each vessel owner will need a permit to fish recreationally in federal waters for any authorized Atlantic tunas, swordfish, billfishes, and sharks. Additionally, the vessel owner will need a permit to fish recreationally for tunas within the waters of coastal states (excluding Connecticut and Mississippi), and territories. 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.

There are four types of permits, described below. Each permit is issued to a vessel owner for a specific vessel and for a specific calendar year. Only one of these four permits can be issued to a vessel in a calendar year, except an Atlantic Tunas General category permit and a Swordfish General Commercial permit can be held in combination. All passengers onboard a vessel with a valid HMS permit may recreationally fish for Atlantic HMS consistent with the regulations described elsewhere in this guide.

Buy or Renew an HMS Open-Access Permit:

<https://hmspermits.noaa.gov>

(888) 872-8862

HMS Angling

Required for private vessels that are fishing recreationally for HMS and that do not intend to sell any fish. A shark endorsement is required on the permit to fish for sharks.

HMS Charter/Headboat

Required for vessels taking for-hire passengers fishing for Atlantic HMS. The operator of the vessel must have a valid Merchant Marine License or Uninspected Passenger Vessel License as applicable, issued by the U.S. Coast Guard; such license must be carried on board the vessel. A commercial sale endorsement is required to sell any HMS but other permits may also be required before commercial sale is allowed. A shark endorsement is required on the permit to fish for sharks. See Section VIII for detailed information.

Atlantic Tunas General category

Commercial fishing permit for Atlantic tunas that can also be used for fishing recreationally for all HMS **only** when participating in a registered HMS tournament. 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. 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.

II. GEARS

Depending on the species and type of permit, the following gears, hook types, and fishing techniques may be used:

Bandit gear

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.

Rod and reel

A handheld fishing rod with a manually or electronically operated reel attached.

Handline

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.

Speargun

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 may free dive, use SCUBA, or other underwater breathing devices.

Greenstick

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.

Secondary gears

(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.

HOOK TYPES

Circle hook

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.

Offset circle hook

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.

J-hook

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

Surface trolling

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.

Downrigger

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

While most federal waters are open, there are some areas that are closed to fishing or fishing for certain species. A description of some of these areas is below, followed by a map. There are also 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/>.

Gulf of America Bluefin Tuna

Anglers may not target bluefin tuna at any time in the Gulf of America. 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 America, if it is caught incidentally while targeting other species, and provided the “trophy” category subquota in the Gulf of America is available at the time of harvest (see Section VII).

South Atlantic Swordfish (South of 5° N. latitude)

Recreational anglers may not fish for or land swordfish south of 5° N. latitude.

Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps Closed Areas

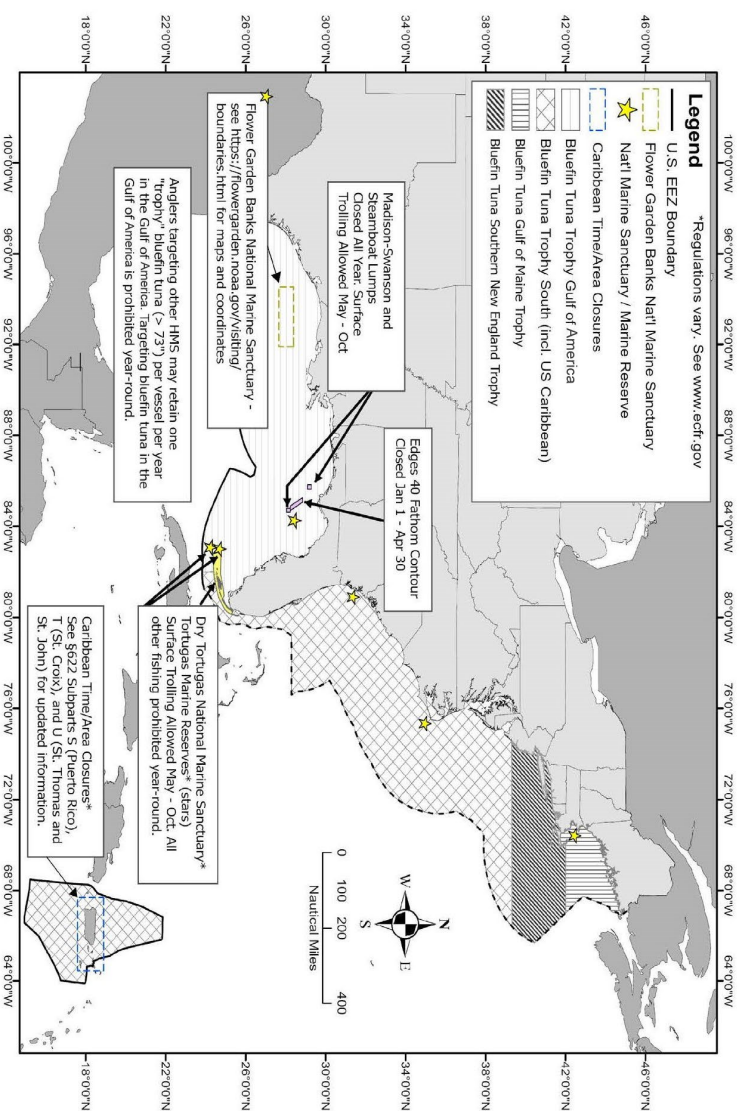
Surface trolling is allowed from May-October, but fishing by any other method is prohibited year-round.

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

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.; 28°51' N. lat., 85°04' W. long.; 28°14' N. lat., 84°42' W. long.; 28°14' N. lat., 84°54' W. long.



This map is for illustrative purposes only. Consult the CFR for coordinates of closed areas.

IV. HANDLING AND RELEASE OF HMS

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. 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>

Some tips for safe handling and release of HMS:

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.

V. REPORTING

The Large Pelagics Survey (LPS) or Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) may survey anglers at the dock, by phone, or by mail regarding all recreational HMS. If contacted, HMS permitted anglers are required to participate in these surveys; however, participation does not fulfill all reporting obligations and vessel owners/operators must still report all billfish, swordfish, and bluefin tuna as described below.

Additionally, all anglers must report all recreational billfish, swordfish, and bluefin tuna landings and all bluefin tuna dead discards as follows:

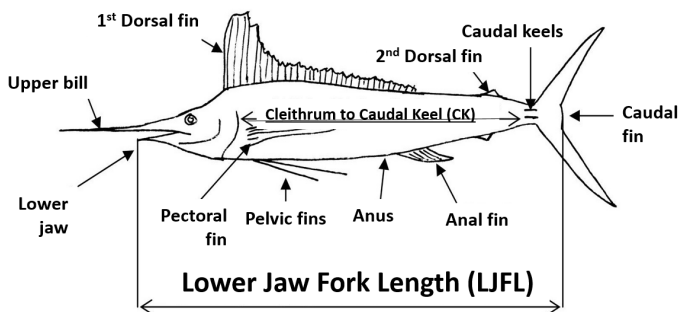
- Anglers in Maryland must report at a state-operated reporting station (state contact information is in Section XI). North Carolina discontinued its HMS reporting program effective April 1, 2025. HMS permit holders in the state are now required to report their billfish, swordfish, or bluefin tuna landings via one of the options below.
- All other anglers must report to NMFS within 24 hours via one of the following methods: online at <https://hmspermits.noaa.gov>, 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." 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.
- SAFIS eTrips Mobile version 2 or SAFIS eTrips Online may also be used to meet HMS reporting requirements if the fisherman is already using those applications to meet federal or state vessel reporting requirements. Trips landing HMS reported via SAFIS eTrips must still be submitted within 24 hours of landing, and each landing must be reported individually and in pounds.



- If the angler enters (reports) an HMS in a registered HMS tournament, the tournament operator must report that fish.

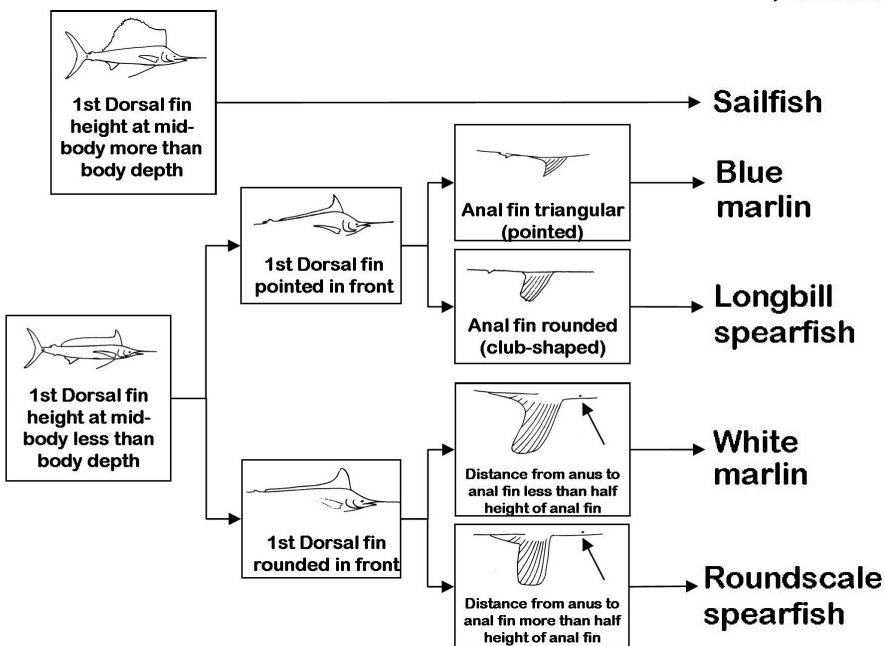
VI. BILLFISHES

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

Blue marlin | White marlin | Roundscale spearfish | Sailfish

PROHIBITED SPECIES

Longbill spearfish

AUTHORIZED GEARS AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS

- Rod and Reel

While fishing in a tournament:

- If you are using natural bait or a natural/artificial bait combination you must use non-offset circle hooks.
- If you are using artificial bait, you may use J-hooks, offset circle hooks, or non-offset circle hooks.

SIZE/BAG LIMITS

Species	Minimum Size (LJFL)	Bag Limit
Blue marlin*	99"	No limit**
White marlin*	66"	No limit**
Roundscale spearfish*	66"	No limit**
Sailfish	63"	No limit**

* 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>.

** Billfish cannot be retained if a hammerhead 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.

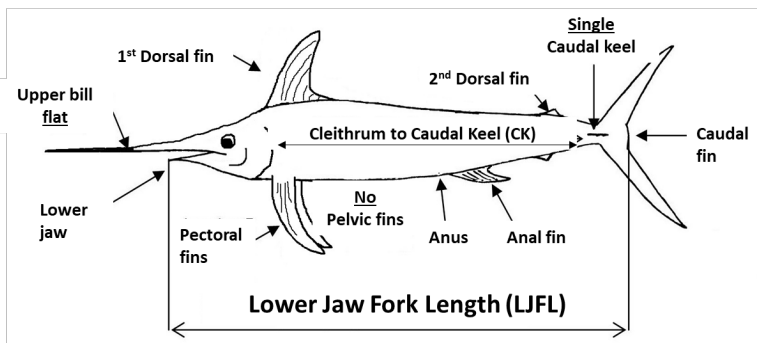
An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately without removing it from the water to improve its chances of survival.



VII. 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. “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.

AUTHORIZED SPECIES

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

AUTHORIZED GEARS

- Handline
- Rod and Reel

SIZE/BAG LIMITS

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

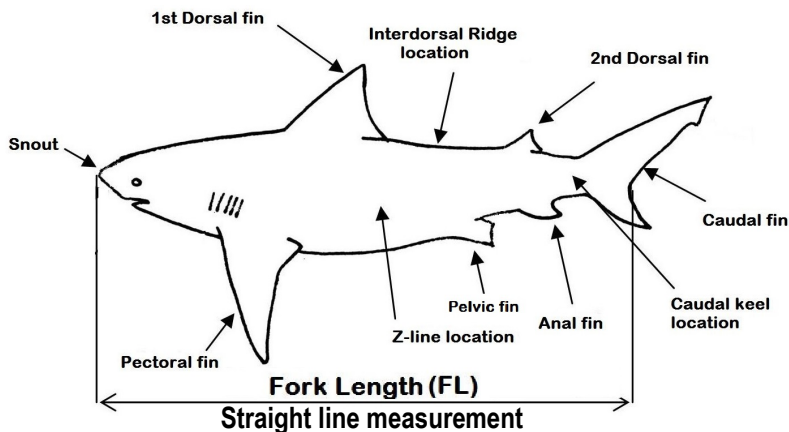
If a swordfish carcass has been bitten by a shark, the remainder of the fish must still meet the minimum LJFL or CK measurement.

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



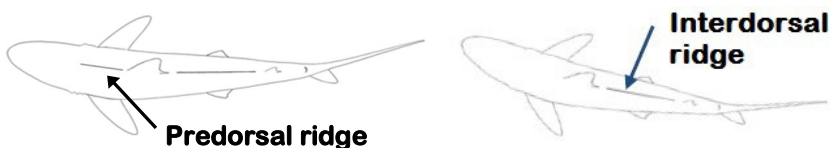
VIII. SHARKS

ANATOMY OF A SHARK

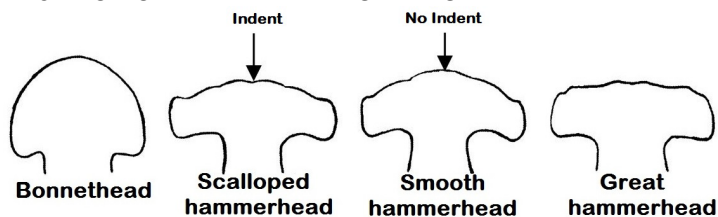


Fork length - Refers to the **straight line measurement** of a fish from the midpoint of the anterior edge of the fish to the fork of the caudal fin.

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 is 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->



[identification-placard](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/outreach-and-education/prohibited-shark-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 (retention allowed)

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

+ 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.

Additionally, possession and retention of great, scalloped, and smooth hammerhead sharks is prohibited in or from the EEZ in the U.S. Caribbean, as defined at 50 CFR § 622.2, and in or from territorial waters if the vessel holds an HMS permit.

** 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.

RETENTION PROHIBITED (must be released)

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

* 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.

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

AUTHORIZED GEARS AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS

- Handline
- Rod and Reel

When fishing for sharks, non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks must be used, except when fishing with flies or artificial lures, for any line that is targeting sharks. 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.



SIZE/BAG LIMITS

Species	Minimum Size (FL)	Trip Bag Limit****
Atlantic sharpnose	None	1 per person
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*

** Possession and retention of great, scalloped, and smooth hammerhead sharks is prohibited in the U.S. Caribbean, as defined at 50 CFR § 622.2.

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

**** 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.

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

SHARK ENDORSEMENT

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 course and 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 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.

If you have a shark endorsement and either an Atlantic Tunas General category or a Swordfish General Commercial permit, you may only fish for sharks when fishing in a registered tournament. Having a shark endorsement on the permit does not allow for fishing for sharks outside of an HMS tournament.



LANDING RESTRICTIONS

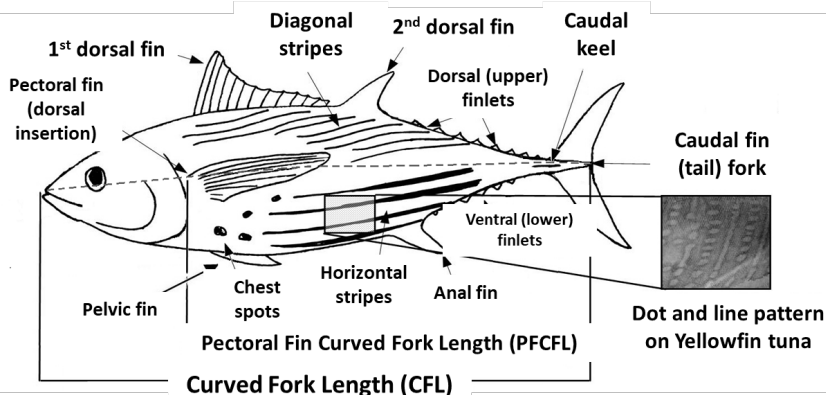
All sharks must be landed intact with the head, tail, and all fins naturally attached. The shark may be gutted and bled at sea (e.g., by making an incision at the base of the tail). “Naturally attached” means attached to the shark carcass by at least some portion of uncut skin.

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.



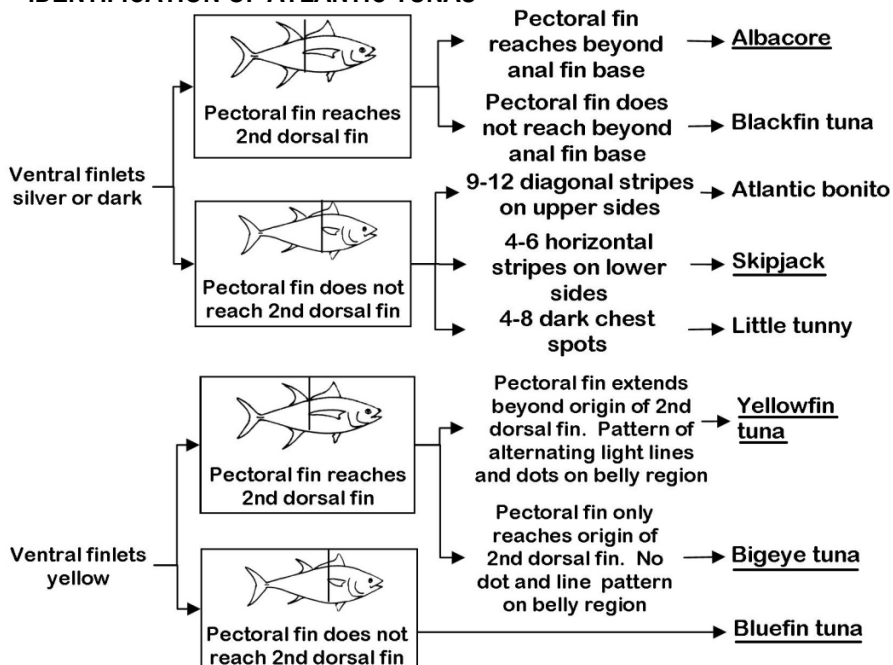
IX. TUNAS

ANATOMY OF ATLANTIC TUNAS



CFL measurement – use if the head is attached. 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. **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.

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

*Only free-swimming BAYS tunas; not those restricted by fishing lines or other means.

SIZE/BAG LIMITS

Species	Minimum Size (CFL)	Bag Limit
Albacore	None	None
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.
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 https://hmspermits.noaa.gov for current limits.
	47" to less than 73" <i>Large school or Small medium</i>	
	73" or greater <i>Large medium or Giant</i>	1 per vessel per year ("Trophy") see page Error! Bookmark not defined. for trophy regions

*The bluefin recreational fishery only remains open until the quota is met. Make sure the fishery is open before fishing.

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). 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).

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.

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). Bluefin tuna less than 73" may not be retained aboard Atlantic Tunas General category permitted vessels. 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.

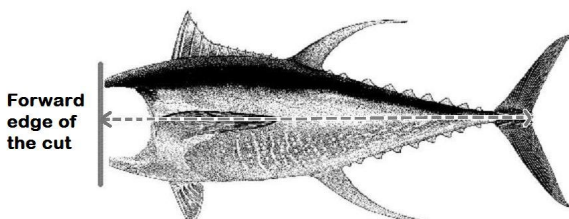
A vessel that has been issued only a Swordfish General Commercial permit may fish recreationally for Atlantic tunas during a registered Atlantic HMS tournament; however, HMS Angling category regulations for Atlantic tunas, including those addressing authorized gears, techniques, and size limits apply.

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.

Tunas with heads removed

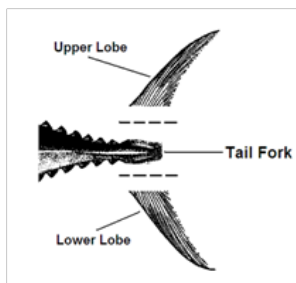
Bluefin tuna must be at least 20 inches (51 cm) pectoral fin curved fork length (PFCFL) if the head is removed. Multiplying the PFCFL by 1.35 gives the CFL ($20'' \text{ PFCFL} \times 1.35 = 27'' \text{ CFL}$).

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.



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.



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

X. CHARTER/HEADBOATS

Vessels fishing with an HMS Charter/Headboat permit may take for-hire passengers who are recreational fishing for HMS. 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. Regulations may vary further among Charter/Headboat permit holders based on the following two vessel types:

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.

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.

COMMERCIAL SALE RESTRICTIONS

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.

Sharks

Silky 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. 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. Shortfin mako sharks must remain in the water and be released at haulback whether being dead or alive. Possession and retention of great, scalloped, and smooth hammerhead sharks is prohibited in the U.S. Caribbean, as defined at 50 CFR § 622.2 (c)(9).

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.
- Non-for-hire: May sell up to the commercial 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.

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.
- Non-for-hire: May sell up to the commercial 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.

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

- For-hire or Non-for-hire: May sell 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.

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.
- Non-for-hire: There are no limits on the number of BAYS tunas that may be retained and sold, but size limits do apply.

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. HMS Charter/Headboat vessels may not target or sell bluefin tuna while fishing in the Gulf of America. 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.

Swordfish

HMS Charter/Headboat with Commercial Sale Endorsement permit only

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

HMS Charter/Headboat with Commercial Sale Endorsement AND Swordfish Handgear Limited Access Permit

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

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.

Billfishes

Sale of any Atlantic billfish (marlins, spearfishes, or sailfish) is **prohibited**.

XI. 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. 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 America 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.

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

All Atlantic HMS tournaments are required to report tournament catch and effort data to NOAA Fisheries within seven days of the tournament's conclusion.

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 follow all permitting requirements including endorsement requirements, gear restrictions including hook restrictions, size limits, and bag limits.

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 Section V –

Reporting).

* 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).

** 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).

XII. 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.

XIII. 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://hmspermits.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://hmspermits.noaa.gov/catchReports> OR use the mobile app: <https://hmspermits.noaa.gov/mobileApp>

Fishing regulations and links:

Fishing Regulations for Atlantic HMS: 50 CFR part 635

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-635>

Magnuson-Stevens Act General regulations and provisions: 50 CFR part 600
<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-600>

Fishing regulations for the Southeastern United States, including the South Atlantic, Gulf, and the Caribbean: 50 CFR part 622
<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-622>

Fishing regulations for the Northeastern United States 50 CFR part 648
<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-648>

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	(305) 743-3110	MD	Salisbury	(443) 736-7158
	Niceville	(850) 729-8628	ME	Portland	(207) 780-3241
	St. Petersburg	(727) 824-5344	NJ	Northfield	(609) 415-2941
	Sunrise	(954) 746-4160		Wall	(732) 280-6490
LA	Slidell	(985) 643-6232	NH	New Castle	(603) 427-0832
MA	Gloucester	(978) 281-9213	RI	Narragansett	(401) 782-3200
	New Bedford	(508) 992-7711	SC	Charleston	(843) 740-1228
	Scituate	(781) 545-8026	VA	Newport News	(757) 595-2692
			NY	Bellport	(631) 317-1271

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

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 America	(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

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

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 Maryland:

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

STATE FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

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

