



NOAA NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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NOAA issues Atlantic tuna management measures

Amendment 7 aims to reduce bycatch discards

NOAA Fisheries today announced final regulations that will help protect Atlantic bluefin tuna by reducing dead discards and providing measures to help ensure compliance with international quotas. These regulations were developed through a comprehensive process that included input from the public, states, industry, and others.

The measures include areas in the Gulf of Mexico where gear is restricted in April and May—a time of year when the species spawns in that area—as well as off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, a prime bluefin feeding ground from December through April. The new restrictions also include a cap on Atlantic surface longline incidental catch of bluefin, both at the vessel level as well as at the fleet level.

Atlantic bluefin tuna is regarded as one of the most important and prized species in the ocean. Weighing upwards of 1,000 pounds and reaching more than six feet long, bluefin tuna are near the top of the ocean food chain, giving them an important role in the marine ecosystem. They are also extremely valuable on the commercial market, which makes them particularly vulnerable to unreported and unregulated fishing internationally.

“The United States is committed to protecting Atlantic bluefin tuna using sustainable, science-based management, and we will continue to be an international leader in its management,” said Eileen Sobeck, assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA Fisheries. “These measures allow fishermen to continue fishing for their target species using alternate gear. We are balancing the needs of the fishermen with the recovery of bluefin tuna.”

Amendment 7 includes measures to reduce the dead discard of bluefin tuna and improve discard accounting through individual transferable quotas in the pelagic longline fishery, as well as enhanced monitoring and reporting requirements in all fishing categories.

Under the new regulations, fishermen will have a strong incentive to avoid catching bluefin tuna incidentally when pursuing swordfish and other Atlantic tunas, since bluefin tuna catch (landings and dead discards) will be counted against individual longline vessel quotas.

Longline fishing for bluefin will cease when the combined landings and discard catch hit the quota.

NOAA Fisheries has identified bluefin tuna as a species of concern, but it is not listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. NOAA scientists remain concerned about the status of the Atlantic bluefin tuna, and will continue to monitor this species closely.

NOAA Fisheries held more than 15 public meetings for this action along the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts during the public comment period for the proposed regulations, which closed on January 10.

The [environmental impact statement](#) includes the ecological and socioeconomic analyses of the amendment:

During the recent International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) meeting in Italy, the U.S. delegation for ICCAT worked to reach agreement on science-based management measures for shared stocks. ICCAT members approved an increase to the Total Allowable Catch for the western Atlantic as well as the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean stocks of bluefin tuna. The changes are in line with scientific advice and the western Atlantic Total Allowable Catch will allow that stock to continue to increase.

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