

ACTION: Notice of public hearings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS will hold four public hearings to receive comments from fishery participants and other members of the public regarding proposed amendments to regulations governing the Atlantic tuna fisheries. The proposed rule would amend regulations governing the Atlantic tuna fisheries to: Divide the large school-small medium size class quota and the large medium-giant quotas of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna (ABT) into north and south regional subquotas; establish a new tuna permit program to provide for category changes, annual renewals and the collection of fees; establish authority for self-reporting for ABT landed under the Angling category; prohibit the retention of ABT less than the large medium size class by vessels permitted in the General category; prohibit all fishing by persons aboard vessels permitted in the General category on designated restricted-fishing days; and prohibit the use of spotter aircraft except in purse seine fisheries. The proposed regulatory amendments are necessary to achieve domestic management objectives for the Atlantic tuna fisheries.

DATES: See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for dates, times, and locations of the public hearings. Written comments on the proposed rule must be received on or before March 31, 1997.

ADDRESSES: See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for the public hearing locations. Written comments should be sent to Rebecca Lent, Acting 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 "Atlantic Tuna Comments."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mark Murray-Brown at 508-281-9260 for the Gloucester, MA, hearing or Christopher Rogers at 301-713-2347 for other hearings, or for general information.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed regulatory amendments that are the subject of the hearings are necessary to improve management and monitoring of the U.S. Atlantic tuna fisheries, to implement the 1996 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.

A complete description of the measures, and the purpose and need for the proposed action, is contained in the

proposed rule published March 4, 1997 (62 FR 9726) and is not repeated here. Copies of the proposed rule may be obtained by writing (see **ADDRESSES**) or calling one of the contact persons (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**).

The proposed rule provided a comment period of 30 days duration ending on March 31, 1997.

The public hearing schedule is as follows:

Tuesday, March 18, 1997, Gloucester, MA, 7-9 p.m. Milton Fuller School (on Blackburn Circle) 4 School House Rd. Gloucester, MA 01930

For information call: (508) 281-9260
Thursday, March 20, 1997, Manteo, NC, 7-9 p.m. North Carolina Aquarium Airport Road Manteo, NC 27954
For information call: (301) 713-2347

Tuesday, March 25, 1997, Toms River, NJ, 7-9 p.m. Holiday Inn 290 State Highway 37 East Toms River, NJ 08753
For information call: (301) 713-2347

Thursday, March 27, 1997, Silver Spring, MD, 9 a.m. - 12 noon NOAA/NMFS

1305 East-West Highway, Room 1W611

Silver Spring, MD 20910
For information call: (301) 713-2347

The purpose of this notice is to alert the interested public of hearings and provide for public participation. These hearings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Rebecca Lent by March 14, 1997 (see **ADDRESSES**).

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

Dated: March 6, 1997.

Bruce Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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50 CFR Part 648

[I.D. 022897B]

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council; Public Hearings

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

ACTION: Public hearings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) will

hold public hearings to allow for input on Amendment 10 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fisheries (FMP).

DATES: Written comments on Amendment 10 will be accepted until April 25, 1997. The public hearings are scheduled to be held from March 25 to April 10, 1997. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for specific dates and times.

ADDRESSES: Send comments to David R. Keifer, Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Room 2115 Federal Building, 300 South New Street, Dover, DE 19904.

The hearings will be held in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for locations of the hearings.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: David R. Keifer, Executive Director, 302-674-2331.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Amendments 2 through 9 to the FMP, as adopted by the Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and approved by NMFS, established procedures for setting annual catch specifications, including recreational harvest limits and commercial quotas, for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass, established minimum fish sizes, required that commercial vessels and party and charter boats obtain permits, established overfishing definitions for the three species, established limited entry of additional vessels into the fisheries for the three species, implemented minimum mesh net regulations in the three fisheries and developed a dealer and vessel reporting system.

The preferred management measures for Amendment 10 adopted by the Council for hearings are:

1. Modify the commercial minimum mesh regulations such that the minimum mesh provisions (currently 5.5-inch (13.10 cm) diamond mesh) apply to the entire net;

2. Continue the moratorium on entry of additional commercial vessels into the summer flounder fishery;

3. Remove the requirement that a vessel with a moratorium permit must land summer flounder at some point during a 52-week period to retain the moratorium permit;

4. Require that states document all summer flounder commercial landings in their state that are not otherwise

included in the Federal monitoring of permit holders;

5. Implement a provision such that any state could be granted *de minimus* status if commercial summer flounder landings during the last preceding calendar year were less than 0.1 percent of the total coastwide quota;

6. Prohibit transfer of summer flounder at sea; and

7. Establish a special state permit for party/charter vessels to allow the possession of summer flounder parts smaller than the minimum size.

In addition, proposed Amendment 10 will reconsider the vessel replacement criteria and commercial quota system implemented by Amendment 2.

Public Hearings

All hearings will begin at 7 p.m., except the New York hearings, which will begin at 7:30 p.m. The dates and locations of the hearings are scheduled as follows:

1. Tuesday, March 25, 1997—Dunes Manor Hotel, 28th Street and the Ocean, Ocean City, MD.

2. Monday, April 7, 1997—North Carolina State Aquarium, Airport Road, Manteo, NC.

3. Monday, April 7, 1997—Massachusetts Maritime Academy, 101 Academy Drive, Buzzards Bay, MA.

4. Monday, April 7, 1997—Marine and Academic Center, Kingsborough Community College, Manhattan Beach, NY.

5. Tuesday, April 8, 1997—Cornell Coop Extension Office, 246 Griffing Avenue, Riverhead, NY.

6. Tuesday, April 8, 1997—Holiday Inn, Routes 1 and 138, S. Kingston, RI.

7. Tuesday, April 8, 1997—Joslyn Hall, Carteret Community College, 3505 Arendell Street, Morehead City, NC.

8. Wednesday, April 9, 1997—Cape May Extension Office, Dennisville Road, Cape May Courthouse, NJ.

9. Wednesday, April 9, 1997—Quality Inn Lake Wright, 6280 Northampton Boulevard, Norfolk, VA.

10. Wednesday, April 9, 1997—Holiday Inn, I-95 and Thames Road, New London, CT.

11. Thursday, April 10, 1997—Holiday Inn, 290 State Highway, 37 East, Toms River, NJ.

The hearings will be tape recorded with the tapes filed as the official transcript of the hearings.

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

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

Dated: March 5, 1997.

Bruce Morehead,

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