

Account 5230, Directory revenue, with other miscellaneous revenue accounts into Account 5200, Miscellaneous revenue; and the consolidation of the depreciation and amortization expense accounts (Accounts 6561 through 6565) into Account 6562, Depreciation and amortization expenses. The Commission believes that further consideration of these changes by the Joint Conference is reasonable and defers the implementation of the following accounting and reporting requirement rule changes for six months: (1) The consolidation of Accounts 6621 through 6623 into Account 6620, with subaccounts for wholesale and retail; (2) the consolidation of Account 5230, Directory revenue, into Account 5200, Miscellaneous revenue; (3) the consolidation of the depreciation and amortization expense accounts (Accounts 6561 through 6565) into Account 6562, Depreciation and amortization expenses; and (4) the revised "Loop Sheath Kilometers" data collection in Table II of ARMIS Report 43-07. The effective date for the rule changes to Accounts 5200, 6562, and 6620 had earlier been extended to January 1, 2003, published on April 24, 2002, at 67 FR 20052, and now are further extended to July 1, 2003. The change affecting ARMIS Report 43-07 is extended to July 1, 2003.

Federal Communications Commission.

Jane E. Jackson,

Associate Chief, Wireline Competition Bureau.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 635

[I.D. 121202A]

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fisheries; Atlantic Bluefin Tuna

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

ACTION: General category closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS has determined that the 2002 fishing year Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) General category quota will be attained by December 15, 2002. Therefore, the General category fishery will be closed effective 11:30 p.m. on December 15, 2002. This action is being taken to prevent overharvest of the total

adjusted General category quota of 882.0 metric tons (mt).

DATES: Effective 11:30 p.m. local time on December 15, 2002, through May 31, 2003.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Brad McHale or Dianne Stephan, 978-281-9260.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Regulations implemented under the authority of the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.*) and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*) governing the harvest of BFT by persons and vessels subject to U.S. jurisdiction are found at 50 CFR part 635. Section 635.27 subdivides the U.S. BFT quota recommended by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas among the various domestic fishing categories. The General category landings quota, including time-period subquotas and the New York Bight set-aside, are specified annually as required under § 635.27(a)(1). The 2002 fishing year General category quota and effort control specifications were issued on October 1, 2002 (67 FR 61537).

General Category Closure

NMFS is required, under § 635.28 (a)(1), to file with the Office of the **Federal Register** for publication, notification of closure when a BFT quota is reached, or is projected to be reached. On and after the effective date and time of such closure notification, for the remainder of the fishing year, or for a specified period as indicated in the notification, fishing for, retaining, possessing, or landing BFT under that quota category is prohibited until the opening of the subsequent quota period, or until such date as specified in the notification.

Adjustments to the 2002 fishing year BFT quota specifications issued pursuant to § 635.27 (FR cites on 67 FR 68045 Nov. 8 '02 adjustments and 67 FR 71487 Dec. 2 '02) set a total coastwide General category quota of 882.0 mt of large medium and giant BFT to be harvested from the regulatory area during the 2002 fishing year. Based on reported landings and effort, NMFS projects that this quota will be reached by December 15, 2002. Therefore, fishing for, retaining, possessing, or landing large medium or giant BFT intended for sale by persons aboard vessels in the General or Charter/Headboat categories must cease at 11:30 p.m. local time December 15, 2002. The intent of this closure is to prevent overharvest of the adjusted quota established for the General category.

General category permit holders may tag and release BFT while the General category is closed, subject to the requirements of the tag-and-release program at § 635.26.

Vessels permitted in the HMS Charter/Headboat category may continue to fish for and retain BFT under the Angling category regulations. The current Angling category daily retention limit, effective from November 1, 2002 through May 31, 2003 (67 FR 39869, June 11, 2002) is one large school or small medium BFT (measuring from 47 to less than 73 inches (from 119 to less than 185 cm) curved fork length). In addition, HMS Charter/Headboat category vessels may continue to retain one large medium or giant "trophy" BFT, measuring 73 inches (185 cm) or greater, per fishing year (June 1 through May 31). Trophy BFT can not be sold and all BFT landed under the Angling category quota must be reported by calling 1-888-872-8862 or by using the Internet at www.nmfspermits.com, unless there is a landing tag requirement in the state of landing.

Classification

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds for good cause that providing prior notice and public comment for this action, as required under 5 U.S.C. 553 (b) (B), is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This closure is intended to prevent the overharvest of the adjusted BFT quota established for the coastwide General category. The fishery is currently underway and any delay in closure could cause the fishery to exceed the quota and be inconsistent with domestic and international requirements and objectives. For these reasons the AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effective date pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553 (d) (1) and (3). NMFS provides as much advance notification of the closure as possible by publishing the closure notice in the **Federal Register**, faxing notification to individuals on the HMS FAX Network and to known fishery representatives, announcing the notice on the Atlantic Tunas Information Line, and announcing the closure notice over NOAA Weather and Coast Guard radio channels. This action is required under 50 CFR 635.28(a) (1) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

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

Dated: December 13, 2002.

John H. Dunnigan,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 635

[Docket No. 020325070-2296-03; I.D.
071299C]

RIN 0648-AM91

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishing Vessel Permits; Charter Boat Operations

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

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: Under the framework provisions of the Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish, and Sharks (HMS FMP), NMFS amends the consolidated regulations governing the Atlantic HMS fisheries to define operations and regulations for HMS Charter/Headboats (CHBs), require an Atlantic HMS recreational permit, adjust the time frame for permit category changes for Atlantic HMS and Atlantic tunas permits, clarify the regulations regarding the retention of Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) in the Gulf of Mexico by recreational and HMS CHB vessels, and allow NMFS to set differential BFT retention limits by vessel type (e.g., charter boats, headboats).

DATES: Effective March 1, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Copies of supporting documents, including the HMS FMP, are available from the Highly Migratory Species Management Division, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. The supporting documents will also be posted on the e-Comments Web site listed under <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov> and the HMS Web site <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hmsgpg.html>. Comments on the burden-hour estimates or other aspects of the collection of information that are part of this rulemaking can be submitted to NMFS, but must also be mailed to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Washington, DC 20503 (Attention: NOAA Desk Officer).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Brad McHale at (978) 281-9260.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Atlantic tunas, swordfish, and billfish are managed under the dual authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) and the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA). ATCA authorizes the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) to implement binding recommendations of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). The authority to issue regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and ATCA has been delegated from the Secretary to the Assistant Administrator (AA) for Fisheries, NOAA. Sharks are managed solely under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Background

Background information about the need for revisions to the HMS regulations was provided in the preamble to the proposed rule (67 FR 20716, April 26, 2002), and is not repeated here. By this final rule, NMFS defines operations and regulations for HMS CHBs; requires an Atlantic HMS recreational permit; adjusts the time frame for permit category changes for Atlantic HMS and Atlantic tunas permits; and clarifies the regulations regarding the retention of BFT in the Gulf of Mexico by recreational and HMS CHB vessels. This final rule also amends the regulatory text to clarify the authority to set differential BFT retention limits by vessel type (e.g., charter boats, headboats) which was restated less clearly when the HMS regulations were consolidated under 50 CFR part 635 (64 FR 29090, May 28, 1999).

Changes from the Proposed Rule

This final rule changes some of the proposed revisions to the regulatory text and some paragraphs have been consolidated. In § 635.4, several proposed revisions to paragraphs (b) and (d) have been revised, the references to certain other permit requirements in the proposed revisions to paragraphs (b) and (d) have been consolidated into paragraph (a), and paragraph (c) has been added. These changes were made to clarify the intent of the regulatory text, to reduce duplication and to facilitate enforcement of the regulations.

Comments and Responses

NMFS conducted three public hearings on the proposed rule and received written, oral, and electronic comments (through the NMFS e-

Comments pilot project website at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>) over a 30-day comment period. The majority of the comments were in support of the proposed actions. Responses to specific comments on the issues contained in the proposed rule are provided here.

Comment 1: NMFS has received comments stating that applying the recreational yellowfin tuna (YFT) retention limit to HMS CHB vessels at all times precludes legitimate commercial activity when the vessels are not carrying fee-paying anglers. Commenters have also indicated that some HMS CHB vessels have historically conducted commercial fishing trips for YFT when not operating as a for-hire vessel. Some commenters stated that the HMS FMP did not specifically address commercial fishing by the for-hire fleet and the impacts of prohibiting such commercial fishing on this segment of the fishery. Other commenters stated that HMS CHB vessels should not have the ability to land as many YFT as they can on commercial vessels because the stock is currently defined as fully exploited and an increase in fishing mortality could have adverse effects.

Response: NMFS agrees that applying the recreational YFT retention limit to HMS CHB vessels at all times precludes legitimate commercial activity when the vessels are not carrying fee-paying passengers. The HMS CHB permit is considered a commercial tuna permit in that tunas caught by vessels possessing the permit may be sold. Prior to July 1, 1999, CHB vessels had the ability to retain and sell all YFT that were caught, as long as they met the minimum size requirements. In 2000, commercial handgear landings of YFT totaled 283.7 metric tons (mt), amounting to approximately 4 percent of total U.S. YFT landings, or 9 percent of all commercial landings. Dealer whout data reported to NMFS included 839 handgear trips that sold YFT from 1998 through 2000, and about 10 percent of these trips were reported by CHBs. Thus, although commercial YFT landings by CHB vessels may be significant to individual vessel operators, they represent less than 1 percent of total U.S. YFT landings.

NMFS has determined that allowing HMS CHB vessels to retain YFT under the commercial limits when not engaged in for-hire activities would not adversely affect the YFT stock. NMFS recognizes the dual nature of the operations of certain vessels issued the HMS CHB permit. Thus, the final rule defines for-hire fishing in a way that would allow such vessels to fish under commercial limits when not engaged in