

**NOAA Fisheries Announces Public Hearings for a Proposed Rule
to Implement a Recreational Atlantic Marlin Landing Limit and
to Clarify Recreational HMS Reporting Requirements**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) announces five public hearings, scheduled during October 2003, to receive comments from interested constituents and members of the public on a proposed rule to implement a recreational Atlantic marlin landing limit and to clarify recreational highly migratory species (HMS) reporting requirements. The proposed rule would implement measures necessary to comply with recommendations of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), to help ensure conservation of Atlantic marlin, and to achieve consistent recreational reporting requirements for Atlantic HMS.

In 2000, ICCAT adopted a rebuilding program for overfished stocks of Atlantic blue and white marlin. As part of the recommendation, the United States agreed to limit domestic landings of these species to 250 fish, combined, annually through 2005. NOAA Fisheries proposes to codify the ICCAT-mandated annual recreational landing limit of 250 marlin, and to implement an adjustment mechanism to carryover underharvests or overharvests to subsequent years. Specifically, the rule proposes to increase the recreational minimum sizes for landing Atlantic blue and white marlin for the remainder of a fishing year when 80 percent of the U.S. landings limit is projected to be reached. NOAA Fisheries would retain the authority to close (catch & release) the marlin fishery for the remainder of a fishing year if the limit is projected to be exceeded. Overharvest would be deducted from the following fishing year, and underharvest could be added. Finally, this proposed rule would clarify requirements to report landings of certain HMS by specifying that vessel owners, not anglers, are required to report non-tournament recreational HMS landings.

NOAA Fisheries will hold five public hearings (see below for dates, times, and locations) and consider written comments regarding the proposed actions. Comments must be received by 5:00 p.m. E.S.T. on October 24, 2003.

Wednesday, October 1, 2003 - Destin, FL, 7 - 9 p.m.

Destin Community Center, 101 Stahlman Avenue, Destin, FL 32541

Tuesday, October 7, 2003 - Kill Devil Hills, NC, 7 - 9 p.m.

Ramada Inn/Outer Banks Resort and Conference Center, 1701 Virginia Dare Trail,
Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948

Wednesday, October 8, 2003 - Ocean City, MD, 7 - 9 p.m.

Ocean City Council Chambers, 301 Baltimore Avenue, Ocean City, MD 21842

Tuesday, October 14, 2003 - Miami, FL, 7 - 9 p.m.

University of Miami, Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences,
4600 Rickenbacker Causeway, Science and Administrative Building, Room 103,
Miami, FL 33149

Thursday, October 16, 2003 - Ponce, Puerto Rico 7 - 9 p.m.

Ponce Holiday Inn, 3315 Ponce By Pass, Ponce, PR 00728

This FAX notice is a courtesy to Billfish Fishery interests to keep you informed about your fishery. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register. For further information contact Russell Dunn or Richard A. Pearson at (727) 570-5447.

Bruce C. Morehead
for John H. Dunnigan
Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

September 16, 2003
Date