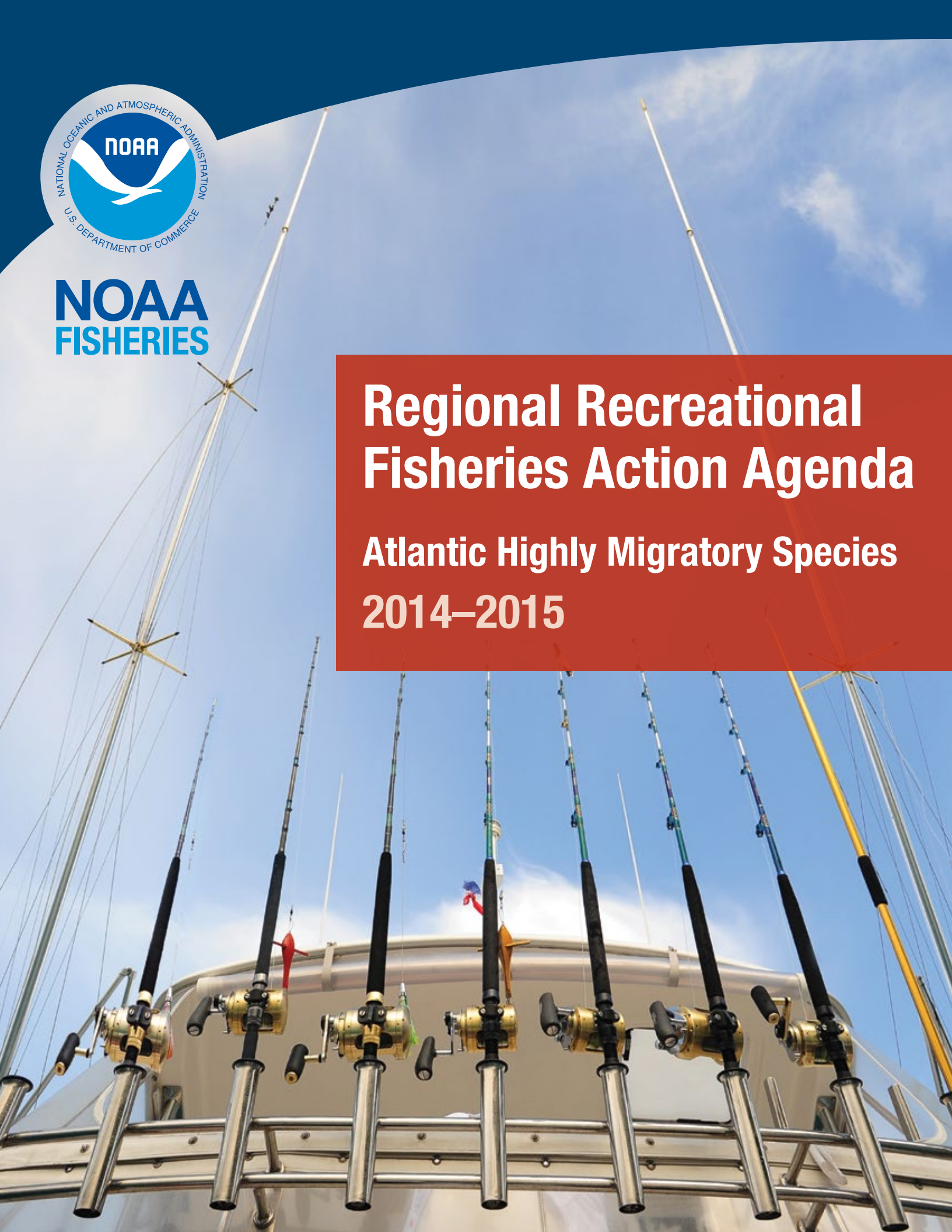


**NOAA  
FISHERIES**

# Regional Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda

**Atlantic Highly Migratory Species  
2014–2015**



# Regional Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda

**2014–2015**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
National Marine Fisheries Service**



**NOAA  
FISHERIES**



# A Message from the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

I am proud to present NOAA Fisheries' Regional Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Action Agendas for 2014–2015. These Action Agendas are the culmination of an important collaborative dialogue with recreational fisheries constituents and signify our continuing commitment to anglers. They were prepared by NOAA Fisheries staff in our Regional Offices and Science Centers and will be implemented for, with, and by people in your community.

Our vision for the future is thriving fish stocks, healthy fish habitats, vibrant coastal communities, and world-class fisheries. Achieving this goal requires a foundation of trust—built through sustained action—between NOAA and the recreational saltwater fishing community. In 2009, NOAA pledged to improve relations with the recreational fishing community and announced the Recreational Fisheries Engagement Initiative. We have now made many improvements and completed dozens of important projects in every region and nationally. Responding to the requests of fishermen, we created a new opportunity for angler input, by establishing recreational fisheries working group associated with the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee, and we are improving recreational catch data through the Marine Recreational Information Program and socio-economic information through a number of surveys. We also are enhancing conservation by working with anglers to improve the survival of recreationally released fish. These updated Agendas build on our progress and put us on a path for continued success.

Our track record of measured, significant progress has helped us establish a firm foundation on which we can build as we turn our attention toward evolving issues. Looking forward, some of the issues and challenges we will face include: the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act; continued implementation of improved methods for recreational data collection and reporting; and increased demand for fishing opportunities as coastal populations grow and oceans warm.

An open and honest dialogue with the recreational community is critical. As we head toward our next Recreational Saltwater Fisheries Summit, planned for April 1–2, 2014, we'll look for new opportunities to engage about the future of recreational saltwater fishing. As our budgets continue to be a challenge, partnership becomes even more critical. Please take a few minutes to review this document and share it with others in your community. Follow our progress through our e-newsletter FishNews and through regional recreational fisheries websites. I look forward to continuing the conversation and I will see you on the water.

Eileen Sobeck  
*Assistant Administrator for Fisheries*



# Background

The marine recreational and non-commercial fishing community is NOAA Fisheries' largest single constituency. In 2011 alone, an estimated 11 million anglers took 70 million fishing trips, which contributed roughly \$56 billion to the national economy in sales impacts, \$29 billion in value-added impacts, and supported 364,000 jobs. Recognizing that partnership is the best approach to effectively address the interests of anglers, NOAA embarked on the Recreational Fisheries Engagement Initiative, in 2009. The goal of this focused effort was to establish a stronger and more trusting partnership with the recreational fishing community. To implement this Initiative, a National Policy Advisor for Recreational Fisheries was appointed, and a National Recreational Fisheries team was created.

In 2010, NOAA Fisheries convened a National Saltwater Recreational Fishing Summit near Washington, DC, that gathered over 100 participants from all regions, representing a broad range of saltwater fishing backgrounds and experience. The direct result of the Summit was the development of a National Recreational Saltwater Fisheries Action Agenda.

The need for external engagement and input on recreational fisheries management and science at the regional scale was recognized, and hence the NOAA Fisheries Regional Recreational Fisheries Coordinator Network was created. This team works in concert with a National Recreational Fisheries Team to help develop and implement the Engagement Initiative through national and regional action agendas. These agendas are aligned with five broad goals to improve recreational fisheries identified at the national Summit and outlined in NOAA's 2010 National Saltwater Action Agenda:

- Improved recreational fishing opportunities.
- Improved recreational catch, effort, and status data.
- Improved social and economic data on recreational fisheries.
- Improved communication.
- Improved institutional orientation.

Nearly four years have passed since the 2010 Summit and much has been accomplished. It is time to update the regional Action Agendas to reflect the evolving priorities of constituents and changing fishery conditions as stocks rebuild. Spring 2013 included many opportunities to work with anglers on developing the way forward and identify priorities for 2014 and 2015, such as the roundtable discussions hosted in each NOAA Fisheries region and the Managing Our Nation's Fisheries III Conference. Building on input from these events and others, the regional Action Agendas serve as public roadmaps detailing region specific priorities and objectives for addressing recreational fishing issues. The input obtained during the development of these documents will also be used to inform the focus of a planned April 2014 National Saltwater Recreational Fishing Summit.

# Atlantic Highly Migratory Species

## Regional Overview

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) fisheries are managed by the Secretary of Commerce, as delegated to NOAA Fisheries, under the dual authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA). The Magnuson-Stevens Act authorizes the Secretary to conserve and manage fishery resources found off the coasts of the United States, while ATCA authorizes the Secretary to promulgate regulations necessary to carry out recommendations of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). The Atlantic HMS Management Division of NOAA Fisheries oversees all aspects of recreational and commercial management, implements regulations, and initiates operational actions, such as permitting, quota implementation and monitoring, and data collection.

Atlantic HMS recreational fishing provides positive social experiences for recreational fishermen as well as significant positive economic impacts to coastal communities that include angler expenditures, recreational charters, tournaments, and shore-side supporting businesses. Atlantic HMS recreational fisheries occur in waters of the western Atlantic Ocean including the Caribbean Sea (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) and the Gulf of Mexico. Currently, recreational fishing for Atlantic HMS requires one of two vessel permits. In 2012, the Atlantic HMS Management Division issued approximately 25,000 HMS Angling permits and more than 4,000 HMS Charter/Headboat permits. Additionally, there are an average of 259 Atlantic HMS Tournaments per year (2003–2012), which play a significant role in the recreational fisheries for several HMS, especially blue and white marlin, sailfish, and yellowfin tuna. In 2011, in the region from Maine to North Carolina alone, preliminary data indicate that private HMS angling trips for tunas, billfish, and sharks had an estimated total economic impact of \$8.9 million, \$7.5 million, and \$4.7 million, respectively.

The goal of improving recreational fishing opportunities is largely supported through protecting the health of target stocks, which in turn ensures availability of fish. The North Atlantic swordfish stock is fully rebuilt and both recreational and commercial fisheries are undergoing revitalization efforts by NOAA Fisheries to encourage further utilization of the U.S. swordfish quota.



## Setting the Stage

The Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel provides important ideas and feedback about HMS fishery management measures and strategies. The Advisory Panel includes representation from diverse constituencies including private anglers, charter/headboat operators, tournament operators, state and Council representatives, and non-governmental organizations. The Atlantic HMS Management Division regularly seeks out the opinion of constituents to inform the decision making process and distributes fisheries news bulletins via e-mail through “Atlantic HMS News” and the Atlantic HMS webpage. To solicit input on updating the Atlantic HMS Recreational Fishing Action Agenda, a public webinar and conference call was conducted on May 15, 2013, with participants from the Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel, the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee Recreational Fisheries Working Group, and the general public. Webinar participants expressed their support for NOAA Fisheries’ efforts to improve collection of catch and fishing effort data, but expressed concern about the potential to underestimate landings of trips originating from private boat docks and marinas. Participants were also greatly interested in efforts to estimate the economic impact of HMS private angling and for-hire trips. Over the next 2 years, NOAA Fisheries will work to address these and other issues via the Large Pelagics Survey re-design, and the analysis and implementation of general economic studies on private HMS anglers and the HMS for-hire fleet.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See webinar presentation at [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/rec/05-15-13\\_hms\\_rec\\_action\\_agenda\\_webinar\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/rec/05-15-13_hms_rec_action_agenda_webinar_presentation.pdf) and call transcript at [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/rec/transcript\\_hms\\_rec\\_fishing\\_agenda\\_webinar\\_5-15-13.pdf](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/rec/transcript_hms_rec_fishing_agenda_webinar_5-15-13.pdf).



## Atlantic Highly Migratory Species: Goals and Objectives

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	PROJECT(S)	DETAILS
<b>GOAL 1 - Improve Recreational Fishing Opportunities</b>	Objective 1: Provide for and, where practical, improve recreational opportunities for Atlantic HMS through management practices that ensure healthy stocks are available to anglers (Action Items as listed do not represent priority ranking).	<p>Project 1: Support Recreational HMS Fisheries Interests at ICCAT.</p> <p>NOAA Fisheries will vigorously advocate for the fair and equitable treatment of U.S. recreational interests at ICCAT by opposing reductions in opportunities for U.S. anglers to participate in HMS recreational fisheries (e.g., reductions in landings allowances).</p>	<p>Deliverable: Continued representation of U.S. recreational interests at ICCAT.</p> <p>Timing: Annual ICCAT meeting in November.</p>
		<p>Project 2: Investigate Methods of Measuring HMS Angler Satisfaction Proposal.</p> <p>Valuation of recreational opportunities is challenging because many HMS fisheries are catch-and-release. A survey that measures angler satisfaction with respect to available fishing opportunities would provide an important feedback mechanism for the largest category of HMS permit holders. The Atlantic HMS Management Division will develop a proposal for a research project to measure angler satisfaction with HMS recreational fishing resources and management.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Development of a research proposal.</p> <p>Timing: Proposal and questionnaire will be completed in FY 2014.</p>
		<p>Project 3: Address Opportunities to Land "Trophy" Bluefin Tuna Throughout their Temporal/Geographic Range.</p> <p>Examine through rulemaking (Draft Amendment 7 to the 2006 Consolidated HMS Fishery Management Plan (published on August 21, 2013) opportunities to land trophy bluefin tuna throughout their temporal/geographic change. Specifically, consider splitting the trophy quota into equal thirds for the trophy north (New England), trophy south (southern mid-Atlantic bight, south Atlantic, and Caribbean), and Gulf of Mexico regions to better account for timing of migration.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Complete rulemaking process considering public comment on the proposed action.</p> <p>Timing: Publication of the final rule in 2014.</p>
<b>GOAL 2 - Improve Recreational Catch, Effort, and Status Data</b>	Objective 1: Evaluation and improvement of "rare event" recreational fisheries surveys (which included HMS fisheries).	<p>Project 1: Redesign of the Large Pelagics Survey.</p> <p>Collaborate with the Office of Science and Technology in the redesign and re-estimation of HMS recreational catch and effort estimates derived from the Large Pelagics Survey to produce improved estimates for stock assessments in support of management. This project directly addresses many public comments for improving fisheries data that were received during the May 2013 public recreational HMS fisheries conference call and webinar.</p>	<p>Deliverable: An improved survey design that will produce more accurate catch estimates.</p> <p>Timing: Phase I (evaluation of estimation methodology and survey design) 2014.</p>
		<p>Project 2: Puerto Rico HMS Angling Phone Survey.</p> <p>Publish an analysis of the HMS Angling phone survey project in Puerto Rico. This report will assist NOAA Fisheries in designing improved methods of collecting catch and effort data in Puerto Rico.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Final report.</p> <p>Timing: 2014.</p>
		<p>Project 3: Evaluate Non-response Bias in Large Pelagics Telephone Survey.</p> <p>The NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology is testing for non-response bias in the Large Pelagics Telephone Survey to improve catch and effort data for HMS fisheries.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Final report.</p> <p>Timing: 2014.</p>

## Atlantic Highly Migratory Species: Goals and Objectives

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	PROJECT(S)	DETAILS
<b>GOAL 2 - Improve Recreational Catch, Effort, and Status Data</b>	Objective 2: Support the operation of Atlantic HMS tournaments and provide opportunities to obtain recreational catch and biological data on a variety of HMS species.	Project 1: Improve HMS Tournament Registration.  Provide mechanisms for tournament operators to more quickly and efficiently register Atlantic HMS tournaments online.	Deliverable: Number of tournament registrants <sup>9</sup>  Timing: 2015.
	Objective 3: Facilitate quick reporting of catch information by anglers through internet and phone reporting.	Project 1: Collect Shortfin Mako Catch-and-Release Data on Phone Apps.  Promote live release of shortfin mako and collect data from the public on catch and release location through shortfin mako webpage <sup>10</sup> ) and Android and iPhone applications of live release maps.	Deliverable: Increased number of hits on website, number of data submissions  Timing: Ongoing.
		Project 2: Investigate Use of Smart Phone Apps for Collecting Catch Data.  Investigate technological improvements for electronic reporting for billfish and swordfish via smart phone apps.	Deliverable: Informal feasibility analysis and cost estimates for various potential improvements.  Timing: 2015.
<b>GOAL 3 - Improve Social and Economic Data on Recreational Fisheries</b>	Objective 1: Develop contemporary analyses of the socio-economic impacts of rules on recreational and commercial fishing communities.	Project 1: Cooperate on Research to Update HMS Socio-economic Studies.  Updated benchmark socio-economic analyses of HMS recreational anglers, for-hire sector, and fishing tournaments are a significant data priority for HMS recreational fisheries management, as they are needed to assess the economic effects of proposed regulations. The Atlantic HMS Management Division will develop proposals and execute research projects (if funded) to collect data on the socio-economics of HMS recreational fisheries.	Deliverable: The development of research proposals and survey questionnaires, targeted toward appropriate funding sources, and initiation of research projects if funding is secured.  Timing: Proposals and questionnaires will be completed in 2014 with study execution targeted for 2015 if funding is secured.
	Objective 2: Collect updated social and economic data from recreational anglers.	Project 1: HMS Recreational Expenditure Survey.  Analyze and report on data from 2011 Marine Recreational Expenditure Survey in order to assess economic impacts.	Deliverable: Completion of project and report.  Timing: 2014.
	Objective 3: Collect social and economic data from Charter/Headboat owners/captains in order to improve the development of fisheries regulations and understand impacts.	Project 1: HMS Charter/Headboat Cost-Earnings Study.  Conduct a For-Hire Cost & Earnings Survey of HMS Charter/Headboat fleet in 2013 fishing season.	Deliverable: Completion of project and report.  Timing: 2014.
<b>GOAL 4 - Improve Communication</b>	Objective 1: Conduct on-the-ground communication efforts with constituents.	Project 1: Improve Constituent Communications.  Identify constituents and constituent groups through Atlantic HMS tournament registration for distribution of outreach materials, which will facilitate biological data collection on landed HMS; provide on-the-ground outreach to anglers.	Deliverable: Increased awareness of regulations is measurable by the number of registered tournaments, number of tournaments submitting landings reports, and number of tournaments sampled.  Timing: Ongoing through 2015.

<sup>9</sup> (SAFE Report; online registration list at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/Tournaments/index.htm>),

<sup>10</sup> (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/shortfinmako/index.htm>)

## Atlantic Highly Migratory Species: Goals and Objectives

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	PROJECT(S)	DETAILS
<b>GOAL 4 - Improve Communication</b>	Objective 1: Conduct on-the-ground communication efforts with constituents.	Project 2: Recruit Recreational Participation in Shark Stock Assessments.  Identify and recruit recreational constituents to participate in non-ICCAT shark stock assessments to ensure recreational interests and knowledge are represented in the assessment process.	Deliverable: Increased number of knowledgeable recreational constituents participating in future stock assessments.  Timing: Ongoing through 2015.
	Objective 2: Communicate information regarding major NOAA initiatives with constituents, tournaments, and various associations that represent fishermen.	Project 1: Collaborative Communication of MRIP Studies.  Explore collaborations with the MRIP Communications and Education Team to increase awareness of MRIP projects among the fishing community.	Deliverable: Distribute information on MRIP projects to constituents, tournaments, and various HMS fishing organizations.  Timing: Ongoing.
		Project 2: Effectively Communicate HMS Recreational Fishing Regulations.  Prepare and distribute Compliance Guides for fishermen that detail updated recreational regulations. Create smaller compliance guides to highlight changes that are implemented through Amendments to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP.	Deliverable: 2014 and 2015 HMS Recreational Compliance Guides.  Timing: Annual release of HMS Compliance Guides and as new FMP amendments alter recreational fishing regulations.
<b>GOAL 5 - Institutional Orientation</b>	Objective 1: Balanced recreational and commercial representation on the Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel.	Project 1: Maintain Balanced HMS Advisory Panel Representation.  Ensure balanced constituent representation on the Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel according to specifications in the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS Fishery Management Plan.	Deliverable: Number of individuals in each sector on the HMS Advisory Panel.
	Objective 2: Improve institutional awareness of Atlantic HMS Management Issues.	Project 1: Maintain internal awareness of Current HMS Recreational Fishing Issues.  Conduct in-house planning sessions by the HMS Recreational Action Agenda coordination team in preparation for biennial updates of the Recreational Action Agenda. This will include soliciting feedback from NOAA Fisheries leadership and HMS team members who interact regularly with constituents.	Deliverable: Biennial updates to the HMS Action Agenda.  Timing: This will be completed prior to the HMS Advisory Panel meetings in which the Action Agenda will be discussed.
		Project 2: Communicate Recreational Issues to NOAA Fisheries Leadership.  HMS Regional Coordinators will coordinate with leadership within the NOAA Fisheries Office of Sustainable Fisheries to highlight recreational fisheries issues on an annual basis. This includes regular coordination with regional members of the MAFAC Recreational Fisheries Working Group for feedback.	Deliverable: Briefing/presentation for NOAA Fisheries Office of Sustainable Fisheries leadership.  Timing: Annually.

## Additional Activity Supporting Recreational Fisheries

In addition to the work outlined in the goals and objectives above, the Atlantic HMS Management Division will strive to provide fair and equitable access to recreational Atlantic HMS fisheries consistent with legal obligations, stock health, and the goals and objectives of the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP and its amendments. The size of species quotas allocated to HMS Angling and Charter/Headboat permit holders may change as stock health fluctuates, but NOAA Fisheries is committed to providing fair access across stakeholder groups as allowable. Following are several ongoing projects that NOAA Fisheries considers valuable for the recreational fishery.

The Atlantic HMS Management Division will provide continued access to swordfish, Atlantic tunas, and sharks through: 1) continued revitalization efforts for the North Atlantic swordfish fishery; 2) issuance of HMS Angling and Charter/Headboat permits to vessels that would target these species; 3) management activities (i.e., quota specification processes, in-season adjustments, etc.) that promote balanced access for recreational and commercial sectors for these species; and 4) consideration of Atlantic tunas measures under Draft Amendment 7 of the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP that would provide continued access for all categories (including recreational) to Atlantic tunas that are currently managed under rebuilding programs.

NOAA Fisheries' Office of Science and Technology will implement the updated Access Point Angler Intercept Survey, which will improve catch and effort data for HMS fisheries by eliminating potential sources of bias and expanding sampling coverage to fishing tournaments and 24-hour-a-day sampling.

NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Fisheries Science Center will support stock assessments of HMS species to provide a better picture of stock health and improve management of the fishery for recreational and commercial uses.

The Atlantic HMS Management Division recognizes the significance of tournaments in Atlantic HMS recreational fisheries, and will continue to administer tournament registration and reporting in order to quantify the extent and impact of these events. NOAA Fisheries' Office of Science and Technology will also continue to support state-based efforts to collect catch and effort data on HMS fisheries, such as the shark catch card program recently implemented by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

Finally, the Atlantic HMS Management Division will continue to enhance constituent awareness and understanding of Agency actions through regular communication efforts to recreational fisheries stakeholders. These include briefings and discussions with the HMS Advisory Panel about recreational fisheries issues as well as regular web-based efforts to update and distribute HMS news releases and informational material such as the Recreational Compliance Guide, Tuna Identification Guide, MRIP Large Pelagics Survey flier, and a shark identification placard. Atlantic HMS Management Division staff also continue to conduct regular on-the-ground outreach efforts at boating, recreational, and species-specific events to provide information to and receive feedback from recreational constituents beyond our Advisory Panel members.

The Atlantic HMS Management Division is actively involved with LPS redesign and re-estimation efforts. MRIP program priorities include improvements to recreational fishing survey design for "rare event" fisheries, such as Atlantic HMS, and should provide improved data on landings and effort by the recreational sector. The Atlantic HMS Management Division will explore the feasibility of updating benchmark socio-economic data used to identify impacts of rulemaking on coastal communities. The Atlantic HMS Management Division will continue to actively share information with stakeholders through a variety of mechanisms, including the HMS webpage, list-servs, email notifications, internet live-release reporting for mako sharks, information to tournament operators, and HMS Advisory Panel meetings. The Atlantic HMS Management Division recognizes the need for balanced communication and HMS Advisory Panel representation across sectors, and will continue to seek the input of both recreational and commercial sectors.

## Summary

The actions listed above will enable progress in achieving the plan's objectives and goals for Atlantic HMS recreational fisheries in keeping with the NOAA Fisheries Recreational Saltwater Fisheries Action Agenda. Some projects have specific timeframes (e.g., MRIP initiatives to improve data collection for recreational fisheries), and others are expected to continue throughout the effective time period of this action plan update (2013–2015). Dates listed above indicate expected timeframes for each action. Outcomes from the actions above will enable the Atlantic HMS Management Division to better address the needs of the Atlantic HMS recreational fishery. The Atlantic HMS Management Division will continue to integrate recreational considerations into the management of tunas, sharks, swordfish, and billfish and provide for recreational fishing opportunities.



**U.S. Secretary of Commerce**  
Penny Pritzker

**Administrator of National Oceanic and Atmospheric  
Administration and Undersecretary of Commerce**  
Dr. Kathy Sullivan

**Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries**  
Eileen Sobeck

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