

The Billfish Foundation

April 2016 Update - HMS Advisory Meeting

Twice a year representatives from recreational, commercial and academia convene just outside of Washington DC for Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Advisory Panel meetings to discuss issues surrounding management of billfish, tuna, and sharks here in US Atlantic waters. Important topics including regulations for both commercial and recreational fishing, new research findings, potential regulations and research needs are all discussed. This diverse group of advisory members all brings different perspectives, knowledge and experiences to the table, but together are vital in working towards establishing the best management practices for important HMS species.

During the recent March meetings hosted by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) TBF's Science & Policy Specialist, Michael Kelly was present to represent billfish conservation and the sportfishing community. As always, the management of bluefin tuna was a hotly debated topic and many important issues were raised that have significant implications for not just anglers that target for bluefin, but all offshore anglers. Those of you who have been keeping up with the domestic management of bluefin tuna know TBF was very active in seeing that recently established regulations for bluefin tuna kept longline fishing out of important closed zones including the Desoto Canyon and established additional time-area closures in the Gulf for longline fishing. In both of these zones, there have been high rates of billfish bycatch when they were previously open to longline fishing. In a separate, but related issue, TBF was active in the discussion of the National Bycatch Reduction Strategy (currently in draft form) to see that more efforts will be taken to reduce billfish bycatch both domestically and internationally. One action taken here in the states that was presented was the Deepwater Horizon Pelagic Longline Project that with restoration funds aims to compensate longline vessels for staying at the docks or switching over to alternative gear (green-stick and buoy gear) as a way to reduce bluefin tuna and billfish bycatch.

Perhaps the most important topic for anglers that was presented was an update to the HMS Recreational Tournament Surveys. In recent years, NMFS has been making strides to quantify the economic importance of HMS recreational fishing in the Gulf and Atlantic waters. Studies have been done on the charter and private sectors, but now NMFS is focusing on HMS tournaments and are planning on distributing surveys to both tournament directors and participants. 50% of all HMS tournament directors will be solicited to participate in the survey and collaborate with NMFS by distributing information to encourage tournament anglers to fill out the survey. TBF strongly urges everyone to participate when the survey becomes available and can't stress enough the importance of doing so. It is only by knowing the full economic importance of HMS recreational fishing that NMFS can better manage HMS recreational fishing in a way that reflects its true significance.

Please keep up with TBF by following our newsletter and checking in at our website for updates on important HMS matters and especially the HMS tournament surveys. As soon as the online surveys become available this summer we will be the first to let you know. For more information on the most recent HMS meeting and the tournament survey, please contact Michael Kelly at

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