



## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### 50 CFR Part 635

[Docket No. 220919-0193; RTID 0648-XE733]

### Atlantic Highly Migratory Species; Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Fisheries; Closure of the Angling Category Gulf of America Trophy Fishery for 2025

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

**ACTION:** Temporary rule; closure.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS closes the Angling category Gulf of America fishery for large medium and giant (“trophy” (*i.e.*, measuring 73 inches (185 centimeters (cm)) curved fork length or greater)) Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT). This action applies to Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Angling and HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels when fishing recreationally.

**DATES:** Effective 11:30 p.m., local time, April 23, 2025, through December 31, 2025.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Larry Redd, Jr.,

*larry.redd@noaa.gov*, or Becky Curtis, *becky.curtis@noaa.gov*, by email, or by phone at 301-427-8503.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Atlantic BFT fisheries are managed under the 2006 Consolidated Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan (HMS FMP) and its amendments, pursuant to the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act; 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*) and consistent with the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA; 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.*). ATCA is the implementing statute for binding recommendations of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). The HMS FMP and its amendments are

implemented by regulations at 50 CFR part 635. Section 635.27(a) divides the U.S. BFT quota, established by ICCAT and as implemented by the United States among the various domestic fishing categories, per the allocations established in the HMS FMP and its amendments. NMFS is required under the Magnuson-Stevens Act at 16 U.S.C.

1854(g)(1)(D) to provide U.S. fishing vessels with a reasonable opportunity to harvest quotas under relevant international fishery agreements such as the ICCAT Convention, which is implemented domestically pursuant to ATCA. On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order (E.O.) 14172 (Restoring Names that Honor American Greatness). As part of the order, the Gulf of Mexico is renamed as the Gulf of America. NMFS recognizes that the Magnuson-Stevens Act contains several explicit references to the Gulf of Mexico, including at 16 U.S.C. 1852(a)(3) regarding authority to regulate HMS within the geographical area of the “Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council” (“Gulf Council, established at 16 U.S.C. 1852(a)(1)(E)). Consistent with the order, this action uses Gulf of America for all references to the area known as the Gulf of Mexico in the specific regulations at 50 CFR part 635. Regulatory changes to incorporate the name “Gulf of America” in 50 CFR part 635 are pending.

Under § 635.28(a)(1), NMFS files a closure notice with the Office of the Federal Register for publication when a BFT quota (or subquota) is reached or is projected to be reached. Retaining, possessing, or landing BFT under that quota category is prohibited on and after the effective date and time of a closure notice for that category, for the remainder of the fishing year, until the opening of the subsequent quota period or until such date as specified.

Every year, the BFT fishing year starts on January 1 and ends on December 31. The Angling category opens on January 1 and continues through December 31 or until the applicable quota or subquota is reached or projected to be reached, whichever comes first. As described in § 635.27(a), the current baseline U.S. BFT quota is 1,316.14 metric

tons (mt) (not including the 25 mt ICCAT allocated to the United States to account for bycatch of BFT in pelagic longline fisheries in the Northeast Distant Gear Restricted Area per § 635.27(a)(3)). The Angling category baseline quota is 297.4 mt, of which 9.2 mt (3.1 percent of the annual Angling category quota) is sub-allocated for the harvest of large medium and giant (trophy) BFT by vessels fishing under the Angling category quota, with 2.3 mt (25 percent of the annual large medium and giant BFT Angling category quota) allocated for each of the following areas: north of 42° N. latitude (lat.) (the Gulf of Maine area); south of 42° N. lat. and north of 39°18' N. lat. (the southern New England area); south of 39°18' N. lat. and outside of the Gulf of America (the southern area); and the Gulf of America. NMFS notes, when the Gulf of America trophy fishery is open, no large medium or giant BFT may be retained, possessed, landed, or sold in the Gulf of America, except one per vessel per year may be landed if caught incidentally to fishing for other species as specified at § 635.23(b)(1)(i) while the fishery is open. Trophy BFT measure 73 inches (185 cm) curved fork length or greater. This closure action applies to the Gulf of America.

### **Angling Category Trophy Bluefin Tuna Gulf of America Fishery Closure**

Based on landings data from the NMFS Automated Catch Reporting System, as well as average catch rates and anticipated fishing conditions, NMFS has determined the Angling category Gulf of America trophy BFT subquota of 2.3 mt is projected to be reached and exceeded shortly. Therefore, retaining, possessing, or landing large medium or giant (*i.e.*, measuring 73 inches (185 cm) curved fork length or greater) BFT in the Gulf of America by persons aboard HMS Angling and HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels (when fishing recreationally) must cease at 11:30 p.m. local time on April 23, 2025. This closure will remain effective through December 31, 2025. This action applies to HMS Angling and HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels when fishing recreationally for BFT, and is taken consistent with the regulations at § 635.28(a)(1). This

action is intended to prevent further overharvest of the Angling category Gulf of America trophy BFT subquota.

If needed to ensure available quotas or subquotas are not exceeded or to enhance fishing opportunities, subsequent Angling category adjustments or closures will be published in the **Federal Register** per § 635.27(a)(7) and § 635.28(a)(1). Information regarding the Angling category fishery for Atlantic tunas, including daily retention limits for BFT measuring 27 inches (68.5 cm) to less than 73 inches (185 cm), and any further Angling category adjustments, is available at <https://hmspermits.noaa.gov>. During a closure, fishermen aboard HMS Angling and HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels when fishing recreationally may continue to catch and release (or tag and release) BFT of all sizes, subject to the requirements of the catch-and-release and tag-and-release programs at § 635.26. All BFT that are released must be handled in a manner that will maximize survival, and without removing the fish from the water, consistent with requirements at § 635.21(a)(1). For additional information on safe handling, see the “Careful Catch and Release” brochure available at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/outreach-and-education/careful-catch-and-release-brochure/>.

### **Monitoring and Reporting**

NMFS will continue to monitor the BFT fisheries closely. Per § 635.5(c)(1), HMS Angling and HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessel owners are required to report the catch of all BFT retained or discarded dead, within 24 hours of the landing(s) or end of each trip, by accessing <https://hmspermits.noaa.gov>, using the HMS Catch Reporting app, or calling (888) 872-8862 (Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.).

### **Classification**

NMFS issues this action pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1855(d)) and regulations at 50 CFR part 635, and this action is exempt from

review under Executive Order 12866.

The Assistant Administrator for NMFS (AA) finds that pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), there is good cause to waive prior notice of, and an opportunity for public comment on, this action because it is impracticable and contrary to the public interest for the following reasons. Specifically, the regulations implementing the HMS FMP and its amendments provide for inseason retention limit adjustments and fishery closures to respond to the unpredictable nature of BFT availability on the fishing grounds, the migratory nature of this species, and the regional variations in the BFT fishery. Providing for prior notice and opportunity to comment is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as this fishery is currently underway and, based on the most recent landings information, the Angling category Gulf of America trophy BFT fishery subquota is projected to be reached and exceeded shortly. Delaying this action could result in further excessive trophy BFT landings that may result in future potential quota reductions for the Angling category, depending on the magnitude of a potential Angling category overharvest. NMFS must close the Gulf of America trophy BFT fishery before additional landings of these sizes of BFT occur. Taking this action does not raise conservation and management concerns, and would support effective management of the BFT fishery. NMFS notes that the public had an opportunity to comment on the underlying rulemakings that established the U.S. BFT quota and the inseason adjustment criteria.

For all of the above reasons, the AA also finds that pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d), there is good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effectiveness.

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

Dated: April 22, 2025.

**Karen H. Abrams,**  
*Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,*  
*National Marine Fisheries Service.*