



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 635

[Docket No. 220919-0193; RTID 0648-XF881]

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species; Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Fisheries; Harpoon

Category Quota Transfer

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; quota transfer.

SUMMARY: NMFS is transferring 6.4 metric tons (mt) of Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) quota from the Reserve category to the Harpoon category resulting in an adjusted Harpoon category quota 65.6 mt and a Reserve category quota of 1 mt. This action is intended to provide further harvest opportunities for Harpoon category fishermen, based on consideration of the regulatory determination criteria regarding inseason adjustments and applies to Atlantic Tunas Harpoon category (commercial) permitted vessels. The Harpoon category fishery will remain open until November 15, 2026, or until the adjusted Harpoon quota is reached, whichever comes first.

DATES: The quota transfer is effective July 14, 2026, through November 15, 2026.

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Atlantic BFT fisheries are managed under the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and its amendments, pursuant to 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.*). HMS implementing regulations are at 50 CFR part 635. Section 635.27(a) divides the U.S. BFT quota, established by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (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.

As described in § 635.27(a), the current baseline U.S. BFT quota is 1,316.14 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 baseline quotas for the Harpoon and Reserve categories are 59.2 mt and 38.2 mt, respectively. To date, NMFS has published one action that adjusted the Reserve category quota (91 FR 5855, February 10, 2026). The current adjusted Reserve category quota is 7.4 mt. As described under § 635.27(a)(4), the Harpoon category quota is available from June 1 through November 15 of each year.

Separate from this action, NMFS published a proposed rulemaking that would implement the 2025 ICCAT recommendation (Recommendation 25-05) regarding western BFT management (91 FR 24789, May 7, 2026). Consistent with that recommendation, that proposed rule, would increase the baseline U.S. BFT quota from 1,316.14 mt to 1,509.98 mt and adjust all the subquotas accordingly. In that proposed rule, the Harpoon category baseline quota would increase from 59.2 mt to 67.9 mt and the Reserve category baseline quota would increase from 38.2 mt to 43.8 mt. The comment period on that proposed rule ended on June 8, 2026. Any final rule implementing ICCAT Recommendation 25-05 would likely be effective in mid-2026 or later.

Transfer from the Reserve Category to the Harpoon Category Fishery

Under § 635.27(a)(8), NMFS has the authority to transfer quota among fishing categories or subcategories after considering the determination criteria provided under § 635.27(a)(7). This section focuses on the calculations involved in transferring quota currently available from the 2026 Reserve category to the 2026 Harpoon category quota; the consideration of the determination criteria can be found below after this section.

As stated above, the baseline Harpoon category quota and adjusted Reserve category quota are 59.2 mt and 7.4 mt, respectively. Transferring 6.4 mt from the Reserve category to the Harpoon category, results in an adjusted Harpoon category quota of 65.6 mt ($59.2 \text{ mt} + 6.4 \text{ mt} = 65.6 \text{ mt}$), and an adjusted Reserve category quota of 1 mt ($7.4 \text{ mt} - 6.4 \text{ mt} = 1 \text{ mt}$). The Harpoon category quota is available for use by Atlantic Tunas Harpoon category permitted vessels.

In summary, this transfer results in an adjusted Harpoon quota of 65.6 mt and an adjusted Reserve quota of 1 mt. The Harpoon category fishery will remain open until November 15, 2026, or until the adjusted Harpoon quota is reached, whichever comes first.

Consideration of the Relevant Determination Criteria

NMFS has considered all of the relevant determination criteria and their applicability to this inseason quota transfer (§ 635.27(a)(7)). These criteria include, but are not limited to, the following:

Regarding the usefulness of information obtained from catches in the particular category for biological sampling and monitoring of the status of the stock (§ 635.27(a)(7)(i)), biological samples collected from BFT landed by Harpoon category fishermen and provided by BFT dealers continue to provide NMFS with valuable parts and data for ongoing scientific studies of BFT age and growth, migration, and reproductive status. Additional opportunity to land BFT in the Harpoon category would

support the continued collection of a broad range of data for these studies and for stock monitoring purposes.

NMFS also considered the catches of the Harpoon category quota to date and the likelihood of closure of the Harpoon category fishery if no adjustment is made (§ 635.27(a)(7)(ii)), as well as daily landing trends and the availability of BFT on fishing grounds (§ 635.27(a)(7)(ix)). To date, preliminary landings data indicate that the Harpoon category has landed approximately 63.1 mt for the Harpoon category. Without a quota transfer at this time, the Harpoon category would very likely exceed the available quota and NMFS would have to stop BFT fishing activities even though commercial-sized BFT remain available in the areas where Harpoon category permitted vessels operate. A quota transfer at this time provides limited additional opportunities to harvest the U.S. BFT quota while avoiding exceeding it.

Regarding the projected ability of the vessels fishing under the Harpoon category to harvest the additional amount of BFT quota transferred before the end of the fishing year (§ 635.27(a)(7)(iii)), NMFS considered Harpoon category landings over the last several years and landings to date this year. Landings are highly variable and depend on access to commercial-sized BFT and fishing conditions, among other factors. By allowing for the current quota transfer, NMFS anticipates that the Harpoon category quota would be used before the end of the fishing season. Additionally, this quota transfer would allow Harpoon category fishermen to take advantage of the current availability of BFT on the fishing grounds and provide a reasonable opportunity to harvest the available U.S. BFT quota.

NMFS also considered the estimated amounts by which quotas for other gear categories of the fishery might be exceeded (§ 635.27(a)(7)(iv)), the ability to account for all 2026 landings and dead discards (§ 635.27(a)(7)(xi)), and the ability to facilitate quota accounting (§ 635.27(a)(7)(xii)). With the exception of 2024, the total U.S. BFT landings

in recent years typically have been below the available U.S. quota such that the United States has carried forward the maximum amount of underharvest allowed by ICCAT from one year to the next. When total U.S. BFT landings are above the available U.S. quota, the United States reduces the next year's quota by the overharvest amount (including reducing the various fishing category subquotas by their respective overharvest amounts), as was necessary in 2025 to account for overharvest of the 2024 adjusted U.S. quota, consistent with ICCAT recommendations. NMFS will need to account for 2026 landings and dead discards within the 2026 adjusted U.S. quota, and anticipates having sufficient quota to do so.

NMFS also considered the effects of the transfer on the BFT stock and on accomplishing the objectives of the HMS FMP (§ 635.27(a)(7)(v) and (vi)). This transfer would be within established quotas and subquotas, which are implemented consistent with ICCAT recommendations, ATCA, and the objectives of the HMS FMP and amendments. In establishing these quotas and subquotas and associated management measures, ICCAT and NMFS considered the best scientific information available, objectives for stock management and status, and effects on the stock. This quota transfer is in line with the established management measures and stock status determinations. Another principal consideration is the objective of providing opportunities to harvest the available Harpoon category quota without exceeding the annual quota, based on the objectives of the HMS FMP and its amendments, including to achieve optimum yield on a continuing basis and to allow all permit categories a reasonable opportunity to harvest available BFT quota allocations (related to § 635.27(a)(7)(x)). Finally, we note that the amount remaining in the Reserve category is sufficient for anticipated exempted fishing and other permitted research needs.

In summary, this transfer results in an adjusted Harpoon quota of 65.6 mt and an adjusted Reserve quota of 1 mt. The Harpoon category fishery will remain open until

November 15, 2026, or until the adjusted Harpoon quota is reached, whichever comes first.

Monitoring and Reporting

NMFS will continue to monitor the BFT fishery closely. Per § 635.5(b)(2)(i)(A), dealers are required to submit landing reports within 24 hours of a dealer receiving BFT. Late reporting by dealers compromises NMFS' ability to timely implement actions such as quota and retention limit adjustments, as well as closures, and may result in enforcement actions. Additionally, and separate from the dealer reporting requirement, Harpoon category vessel owners are required per § 635.27(a)(4) to report their own 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. Eastern Time).

Depending on the level of fishing effort and catch rates of BFT, NMFS may determine that additional adjustments are necessary to ensure available subquotas are not exceeded in 2026 or to enhance scientific data collection from, and fishing opportunities in, all geographic areas as specified under § 635.27(a)(7). If needed, subsequent adjustments will be published in the **Federal Register**. In addition, fishermen may access <https://hmspermits.noaa.gov/home>, for updates on quota monitoring and inseason adjustments.

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 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 amendments provide for inseason adjustments and quota transfers 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 prior notice and an opportunity for public comment is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as this fishery is currently underway and, based on the most recent landings information, the 2026 Harpoon category quota is projected to be reached shortly. Delaying this action could result in BFT landings that exceed the Harpoon category quota. Additionally, a delay in implementing this action would preclude the fishery from harvesting BFT that are currently available on the fishing grounds and that might otherwise become unavailable. This action does not raise conservation and management concerns and would support effective management of the BFT fishery. This action does not affect the overall ICCAT-allocated U.S. BFT quota. 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 finds that pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), there is good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effective date.

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

Dated: July 14, 2026.

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