



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 635

[Docket No. 220919-0193; RTID 0648-XF885]

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species; Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Fisheries; Closure of the Harpoon Category Fishery for 2026

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS closes the Harpoon category fishery for large medium and giant (*i.e.*, measuring 73 inches (185 centimeters (cm)) curved fork length (CFL) or greater Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) for the remainder of the 2026 fishing year. This closure applies to Atlantic Tunas Harpoon category permitted vessels.

DATES: Effective 11:30 p.m., local time, July 17, 2026, through December 31, 2026.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Larry Redd, Jr.,

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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 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.

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.

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 Harpoon category baseline quota is 59.2 mt. On July 14, 2026, NMFS adjusted the Harpoon category quota to be 65.6 mt (91 FR 43571, July 16, 2026). 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 the recommendation, that proposed rule would increase the baseline U.S. BFT quota from 1,316.14 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 to 67.9 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.

Closure of the 2026 BFT Harpoon Category Fishery

To date, reported landings for the Harpoon category total approximately 72.8 mt. Based on that consideration and the current landings data, as well as average catch rates and anticipated fishing conditions, NMFS has determined that the Harpoon category adjusted quota of 65.6 mt has been reached and exceeded, and that the Harpoon category should be closed. Therefore, retaining, possessing, or landing large medium or giant (*i.e.*, measuring 73 inches (185 cm) CFL or greater) BFT by persons aboard vessels permitted in the Harpoon category must cease at 11:30 p.m. local time on July 17, 2026. At this time, NMFS is closing the Harpoon category BFT fishery for the remainder of the Harpoon category season, which ends November 15, 2026, and thus for the year. Should NMFS determine that reasonable fishing opportunities are available at a later date, NMFS may reopen the fishery. The Harpoon category will reopen automatically on June 1, 2027, for the 2027 fishing year. This action applies to Atlantic Tunas Harpoon category (commercial) permitted vessels, and is taken consistent with the regulations at § 635.28(a)(1).

Monitoring and Reporting

NMFS will continue to monitor the BFT fisheries 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 § 635.5(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 or to enhance scientific data collection from, and fishing opportunities in, all geographic areas. If needed, subsequent adjustments will be published in the **Federal Register**. In addition, fishermen may access <https://hmspermits.noaa.gov>, 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 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 2026 adjusted quota for the Harpoon category has been reached and exceeded. Delaying this action could result in BFT landings which would further exceed the 2026 Harpoon category adjusted quota, which may result in future potential quota reductions for other BFT categories or the 2027 Harpoon category quota, depending on the magnitude of a potential Harpoon category overharvest. 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 and closure criteria.

For all of the above reasons, the AA also finds that pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), 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: July 16, 2026

Shannon Bettridge,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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