

NOAA Fisheries Announces Public Hearings for the Proposed Rule Regarding Atlantic Sharks and Amendment 1 to the HMS FMP

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) announces six public hearings, scheduled during August and September 2003, to receive comments from interested constituents and members of the public on the proposed rule regarding Atlantic shark management. The proposed rule, which published on August 1, 2003 (68FR45196), and Amendment 1 to the Fishery Management Plan for Tunas, Swordfish and Sharks are necessary to ensure that shark regulations are based on the results of the 2002 stock assessments for large coastal sharks (LCS) and small coastal sharks (SCS). The results of these stock assessments indicate that the LCS complex continues to be overfished, and overfishing is occurring; that sandbar sharks are not overfished, but overfishing is occurring; that blacktip sharks are rebuilt and healthy; that the SCS complex is healthy; and that finetooth sharks are not overfished, but overfishing is occurring.

Based on these results, NMFS proposes to revise the rebuilding timeframe for LCS to 27 years from 2004, to change the commercial regulations, to change the recreational regulations, to remove the deepwater/other sharks from the management unit, to establish criteria regarding adding or removing sharks from the prohibited species group, and to establish a display permit for fishermen who wish to harvest sharks only for public display. In Amendment 1, NMFS also proposes updates to essential fish habitat (EFH) identifications for sandbar, blacktip, finetooth, dusky, and nurse sharks.

NOAA Fisheries will hold six public hearings (see below for dates, times, locations) and consider written comments regarding the proposed actions. Comments must be received by 5 pm on September 30, 2003.

Tuesday, August 26, 2003 - New Orleans, LA, 7-9 p.m.
New Orleans Airport Hilton Hotel, 901 Airline Drive, Kenner, LA

Thursday, September 4, 2003 - Madeira Beach, FL, 7-9 p.m.
300 Municipal Dr., Madeira Beach, FL 33708

Monday, September 8, 2003 - Montauk, NY, 7-9 p.m.
Montauk Fire House, 12 Flamingo Avenue, Montauk, NY 11954

Wednesday, September 17, 2003 - Pawleys Island, SC, 7-9 p.m.
Waccamaw Neck Branch Library, 24 Commerce Dr., Pawleys Island, SC 29585

Monday, September 22, 2003 - Manteo, NC, 7-9 p.m.
North Carolina Aquarium, Roanoke Island, Airport Road, Manteo, NC 27954

Thursday, September 25, 2003 - Atlantic Beach, FL, 7-9 p.m.
City of Atlantic Beach, Atlantic Beach City Chambers, 800 Seminole Rd., Atlantic Beach, FL 32233

This FAX notice is a courtesy to Atlantic Shark Fisheries interests to keep you informed about your fishery. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register. For further information contact Karyl Brewster-Geisz, Heather Stirratt, or Chris Rilling at (301) 713-2347 or Greg Fairclough at (727) 570-5447.

Richard Surdi for
John H. Dunnigan
Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

August 7, 2003

Date