



**NOAA  
FISHERIES**

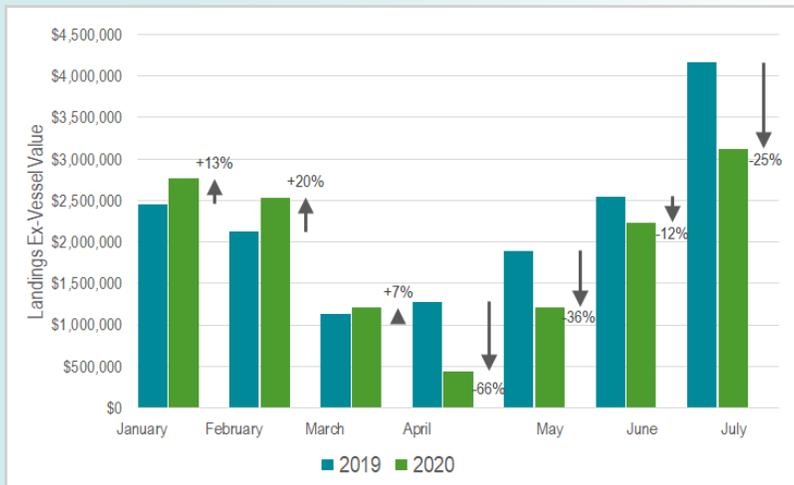
*In April 2020, NOAA Fisheries prepared its first national report on the regional impacts of COVID-19 on the commercial, recreational and aquaculture sectors. This report updates that initial assessment, capturing economic changes experienced by the fishing industry as the country began its phased reopening along with infusion of Federal funding through the CARES Act. NOAA Fisheries will continue to use this information to identify economic hardship where it exists and identify pathways for enhancing the resilience of the U.S. seafood and fisheries industries.*

## Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fisheries Impacts from COVID-19

The Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) fishery is a high-value fishery comprised of seven key species and species groups: bluefin tuna, BAYS tunas (bigeye, albacore, yellowfin, and skipjack), swordfish and sharks. All of the HMS species/species groups are harvested year-round (within open seasons) but most species typically have lower average monthly landings revenue (\$1.8 million per month) from February through April as compared to other months (\$3.2 million per month) throughout the year. All high-end products, particularly bluefin, bigeye and yellowfin tunas, that are typically sold to restaurants suffered major price declines in March and April as restaurant restrictions were implemented domestically and air travel restrictions slowed global shipping of exports.

### Commercial Fisheries Landings Trends and Impacts through July 2020

Overall, Atlantic HMS ex-vessel revenue was 11.4% lower in the first half of 2020 as compared to 2019. COVID-19 impacted landings starting in the second half of March and resulted in second quarter landings decreasing 36.3% as compared to 2019. To date, April experienced the steepest monthly decline in Atlantic HMS landings value with a 66% decrease as compared to April of 2019. Since the April low of \$439,000 in ex-vessel landings of Atlantic HMS, commercial landings have improved significantly. July landings exceeded \$3.1 million, but they were still 25% lower than landings for July of 2019.

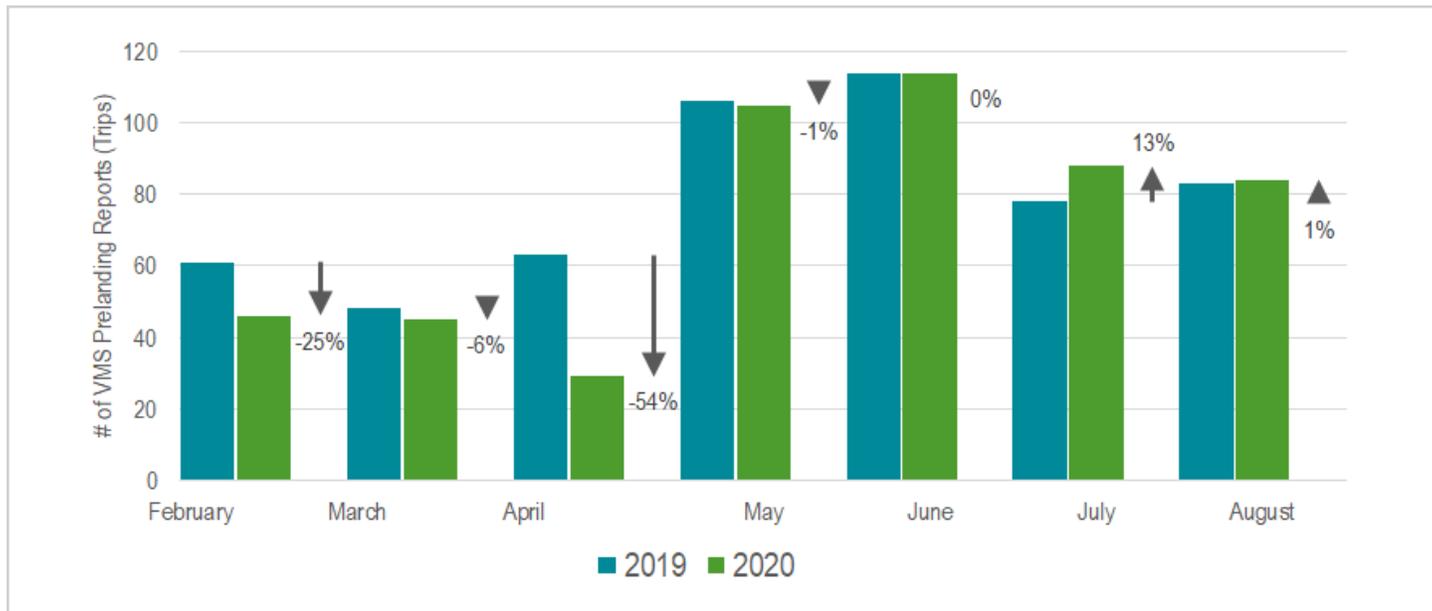


**Figure 1.** Atlantic HMS commercial landings (ex-vessel value).

In terms of species, bluefin tuna landings have been most impacted. April landings value declined by 69.2%, May landings value declined by 87.5%, June landings value declined by 49.1%, and July landings value declined by 57.4% as compared to the same months in 2019. This decline is primarily due to a decrease in demand for high end sushi and a decrease in the availability of shipping to the international market. The average ex-vessel price per pound dressed weight for bluefin tuna declined by 19.5% (\$5.30/lb compared to \$6.58/lb in 2019) in the second quarter of 2020 as compared to the second quarter of 2019. The average ex-vessel price per pound dressed weight for yellowfin tuna declined by 24.8% (\$3.17/lb compared to \$4.22/lb in 2019) in the second quarter of 2020 as compared to the second quarter of 2019. The average ex-vessel price per pound dressed weight for bigeye tuna declined by 2.8% (\$5.80/lb compared to \$5.96/lb in 2019) in the second quarter of 2020 as compared to the second quarter of 2019. However, the average ex-vessel price per pound dressed weight for swordfish increased by 20.2% (\$5.31/lb compared to \$4.41/lb in 2019) in the second quarter of 2020 as compared to the second quarter of 2019. There have been some indications that there has been an increase in demand for swordfish by the domestic retail market and some decreases in swordfish imports, which could have contributed to the price increase. Regardless of the price increase, the overall value of swordfish landings decreased 65.9% in April, 36.9% in May, and 12.0% in June as compared to those months in 2019. In July, the value of swordfish landings recovered substantially and far exceeded the weak July 2019 harvest.

### Atlantic HMS Commercial Fleet

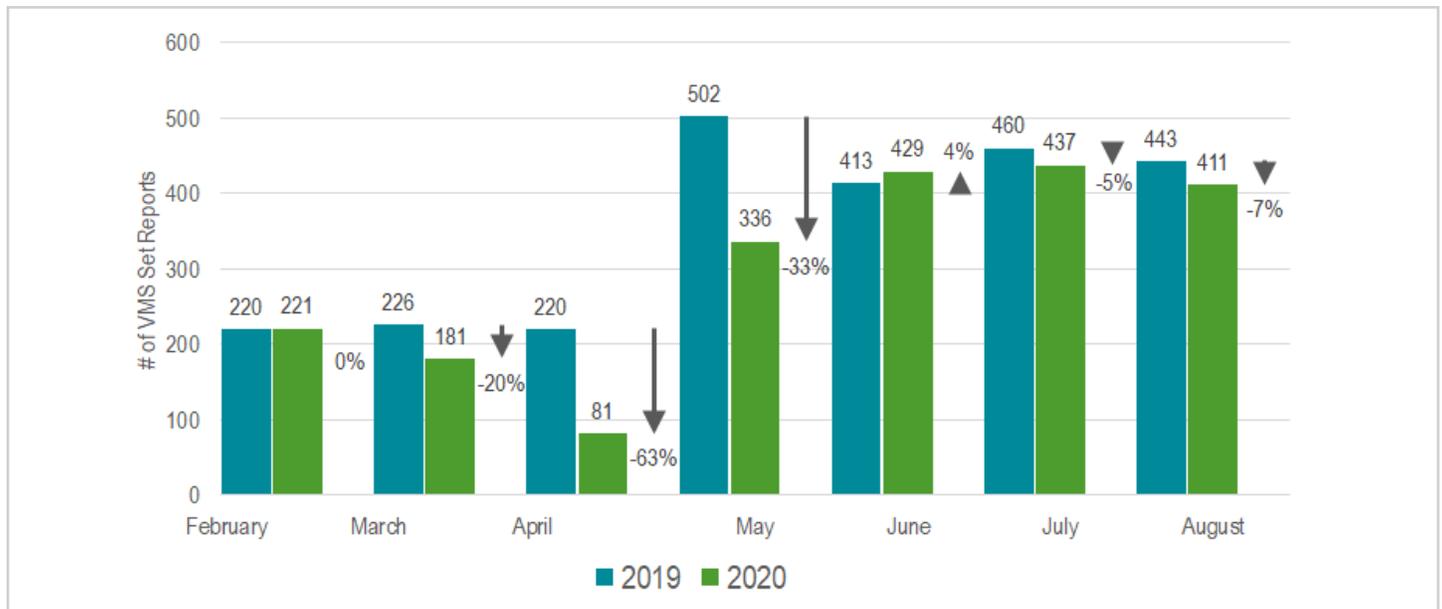
One high frequency indicator of fleet activity available to NOAA Fisheries is the number of hail outs reported by Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS). VMS is required by vessels equipped with pelagic longline onboard; bottom longline vessels fishing off South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia from January through July 31st; gillnet vessels issued a directed shark limited access permit operating near the Southeast U.S. Monitoring Area from December to March 31; and purse seine vessels. The number of trips taken by the Atlantic HMS vessels equipped with VMS decreased by 54% in April. However, by May, vessels resumed taking trips that were comparable to 2019 levels and continued doing so for the remainder of the summer. However, the distance, length, and level of fishing effort were likely reduced as a result of the market shifts associated with COVID-19.



**Figure 2. HMS commercial vessel activity (trips).\***  
 \*Based on VMS hail outs for Atlantic HMS vessels.

## Atlantic Pelagic Longline Fleet

Pelagic longline vessels are also required to report on each gear set via their VMS unit. That data can be used to measure the fishing effort of this fleet in real time. Effort in the Atlantic pelagic longline fleet decreased by 20% in March and by 63% in April as compared to the same months in 2019. By June, effort had recovered substantially and actually exceeded June 2019 effort by 4%. July effort was just 5% below 2019 and August was just 5% below 2019 effort levels.



**Figure 3.** Pelagic longline fleet effort for 2020.

## Seafood Dealers

While there were 153 seafood dealers that handled Atlantic HMS product in 2019, to date in 2020, there have been 150 dealers that handled Atlantic HMS product. There have only been two or three Atlantic HMS dealers that contacted the agency stating that they shut down due to COVID-19.

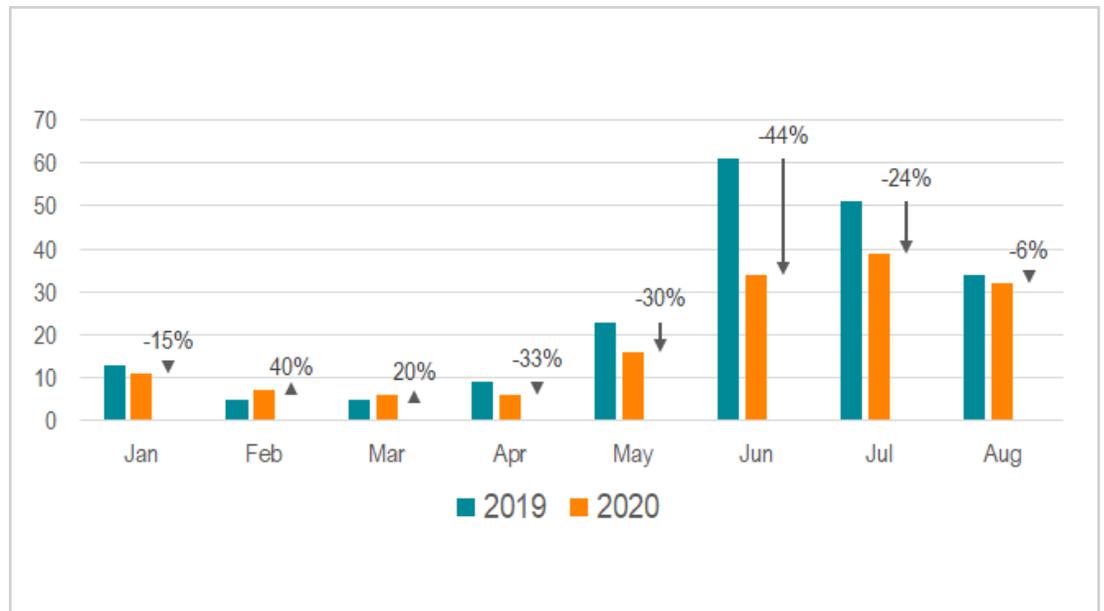
## Recreational Fishing

### CHARTER SECTOR

During the spring months when the COVID-19 pandemic first arose, the active HMS for-hire fishery was relegated to the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, as is typical for that time of the year. The primary targets of the HMS for-hire fishery at this time of year include tuna and sailfish. Atlantic HMS staff contacted 24 HMS charter/headboat permit holders in the South Atlantic (n = 13) and Gulf of Mexico (n = 11) states in the month of April. Of those contacted, 100 percent reported that their business had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated closures and social-distancing measures put in place by their states, with 19 vessels reporting that all of their April bookings had been cancelled. On average, vessel captains reported that 97 percent of their April bookings had been cancelled. Most captains reported additional cancellations extending into May with four reporting cancellations into June. NOAA Port Agents also canvassed the Southeast for-hire industry in late March, and reported reductions in effort ranging from 80-100 percent by state. Approximately 63 percent of those captains interviewed reported having to lay off or reduce the hours of their staff, with reductions in hours averaging 95 percent. (Most employees of for-hire operations are fishing mates that are technically classified as 1099 employees or independent contractors.) Those captains that did not report laying off staff either did not have any, or kept what little staff they had on to assist with boat maintenance projects. For-hire operators cited hotel and restaurant closures as among the primary factors impacting their business.

## TOURNAMENTS

A 2016 study conducted by NOAA Fisheries estimated that HMS tournaments conducted in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean contributed approximately \$129 million in annual economic impacts to the United States economy. Since 2009, an average of 259 HMS tournaments have registered with NOAA Fisheries each year. Atlantic HMS tournament registrations were almost unchanged in the first quarter of 2020 (24 versus 23 in 2019). Second quarter HMS tournament registrations were down 39.8% compared to 2019 (56 versus 93 in 2019). Overall, there are 24.9% fewer registered tournaments occurring through August 2020 compared to 2019 (151 versus 201). These numbers reflect the adjustments made for 8 tournaments that registered in 2020 but later reported cancelling their events and 5 postponements; however, it is likely additional events in the second quarter made such changes without reporting them to NOAA Fisheries. Compared to 2019, 50 fewer tournaments have been registered in 2020 through the month of August.



**Figure 4.** Number of Atlantic HMS tournament registrations.



U.S. Secretary of Commerce

**Wilbur Ross**

Acting Under Secretary of Commerce  
for Oceans and Atmosphere

**Dr. Neil Jacobs**

Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

**Chris Oliver**

January 2021

[www.fisheries.noaa.gov](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov)

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

National Marine  
Fisheries Service  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

## NOAA Fisheries Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

For more information, visit:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/noaa-fisheries-coronavirus-covid-19-update>