

## **Plan to Conduct a Reconsideration Process for the Spring Gulf of Mexico Monitoring Area**

The [Joint Explanatory Statement \(JES\)](#) that accompanied the 2021 Appropriations Act included text on “Western Atlantic Bluefin Tuna” directing NOAA Fisheries to reconsider the decision in the April 2, 2020 final rule (GRA-WH Rule) to open the Spring Gulf of Mexico Monitoring Area to pelagic longline fishing or to take additional monitoring action. The following is NOAA Fisheries’ plan for addressing the JES text prior to April 1, 2022, which is the beginning of next year's Spring Gulf of Mexico Monitoring Area.

NOAA Fisheries will conduct public sessions to request and gather any additional information that would inform the agency’s reconsideration of the Spring Gulf of Mexico Monitoring Area implemented under the GRA-WH Rule, including the monitoring process being used, consistent with the JES in the 2021 Appropriations Act.

**How:** NOAA Fisheries will publish a notice in the Federal Register to solicit information from the public about the Spring Gulf of Mexico Monitoring Area that may not have been considered in the final rule. Comments will be accepted for 30 days through regulations.gov and two public webinars. Discussion of the Spring Gulf of Mexico Monitoring Area will also occur at the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Advisory Panel (AP) spring meeting. The agency will review the information submitted and assess if it presents any relevant new information not already considered during development of the April 2, 2020 final rule and if any such new information merits further action related to the Spring Gulf of Mexico Monitoring Area.

**Who:** This request for information will be open to the public.

### **Timeline:**

- Atlantic HMS AP meeting May 25-27, 2021: Inform the Atlantic HMS AP of the request for information and accept comments from the Atlantic HMS AP.
- Early summer: Announce the request for information, 30 day comment period, and webinar schedule in the Federal Register.
- Mid-summer: Conduct two public webinars.
- Late summer: Review public comments and information received to assess whether any information not considered in the development of the GRA-WH Rule provides a basis for additional action related to the Spring Gulf of Mexico Monitoring Area. Communicate the agency’s conclusion via appropriate mechanisms.

## Bluefin Tuna Catch Data Reporting Process

- NOAA Fisheries will report the catch of bluefin tuna in both the Spring GOM Monitoring Area and the Northeast United States Monitoring Area by year (2020-2022) as consistently as possible with the JES language given other statutory requirements (see below) via an annual “Monitoring Area status table” such as the example below showing data from 2020. The tables will reside on the GRA/WH [rulemaking page](#).
- Data in the tables showing the weight of landed and discarded dead bluefin tuna will come from Individual Bluefin Quota Program data and vessel monitoring system set reports.
- To protect confidentiality consistent with Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements, bluefin tuna catch data will be shown only if fishing activity consists of three or more vessels.
- The data tables will be updated weekly, however updated information may have a time lag of more than a week due to data Quality Assurance/Quality Control processes.

Bluefin tuna catch in 2020 from within and outside the Monitoring Areas.

Longline Category Regional BFT Catch in pounds whole weight (Not Including NED)	Landings	Discards	Total	Monitoring Area Threshold*
Atlantic (June 1- 30, 2020)	10,748	6,631	17,379	
<b>Areas Outside the NE US Monitoring Area</b>	10,748	6,631	17,379	
<b>NE US Monitoring Area</b>	-	-	-	<b>150,519</b>
Gulf of Mexico (April 1 - May 31, 2020)	2,450	0	2,450	
<b>Areas Outside the Spring GOM Monitoring Area</b>	2,450	0	2,450	
<b>Spring GOM Monitoring Area</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>63,150</b>

(-) Denotes confidential data with less than three vessels consistent with MSA requirements

\*Denotes the amount (lb) of bluefin tuna that can be caught (landings and dead discards) during each monitoring area period before the monitoring area is closed, as established in the final rule.