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**FISHERIES**

Atlantic Highly  
Migratory  
Species

# Consideration of the Circle Hook Requirement in Atlantic Billfish Tournaments

Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel Meeting  
Fall 2017

September 6, 2017

# Existing Circle Hook Requirement

Anglers fishing from Atlantic HMS permitted vessels and participating in Atlantic billfish tournaments must use only non-offset circle hooks when deploying natural bait or natural bait/artificial lure combinations

- Requirement implemented in 2008
- Purpose – reduce post-release mortality for all billfishes
- Initially received much negative feedback
- Much of the billfish fishery has adapted to the requirement

# Why Circle Hooks?

## Billfish Stock Status (ICCAT SCRS)

	Overfished?	Overfishing Occurring?
Blue marlin	Yes	Yes
White marlin	Yes	Not likely
West Atlantic sailfish	Not likely	Not likely

# Why Circle Hooks?

## Post Release Hooking Mortality Rates

- **White marlin:** J-hooks - 35%; C-hooks – 1.7% (Horodysky and Graves 2005; Graves and Horodysky 2008)
- **Blue marlin:** J-hooks – 6.7%; C-hooks – 0% (Graves and Horodysky 2010)

In 2006, estimated white marlin post-release hooking mortality in directed fishery was approximately 65% lower with circle hooks

## Comparison of Catch Rates – C-Hooks vs J-Hooks

- Circle Hooks 1.8X More Likely to Hook Sailfish (Prince *et al.* 2002)
- Once Hooked, Catch Percentage Almost Identical (Prince *et al.* 2007, Prince *et al.* 2002)
- Since then, additional studies help understand comparable catch rates for billfishes and coastal pelagics

# 10 Years Later...Two Issues Keep Coming Up!

## 1. Exempt trolling for blue marlin from the circle hook requirement

- Most frequently heard from GOM tournament operators and anglers
- Argument is that:
  - Blue marlin fishing techniques in the GOM don't utilize a drop-back, thus circle hooks have no benefit
  - Circle hooks reduce hooking rates compared to J-hooks, thus anglers don't like the C-hook requirement
- This comment heard at recreational roundtable discussion during spring 2017 HMS AP meeting and at tournament operator meetings

# 10 Years Later...Two Issues Keep Coming Up!

## 2. Exempt lures with natural component encased in a hard, synthetic material from the circle hook requirement

- Argument is that the hard synthetic material (e.g.; acrylic) does not allow any natural scent, taste, or texture of the natural component to be sensed by the fish.
- This comment heard at recreational roundtable discussion during spring 2017 HMS AP meeting and in phone calls from constituents



## For Discussion...

Should NMFS consider changing the way that the C-hook requirement applies in billfish tournaments?

Are there fishing techniques for blue marlin where C-hooks should be required (i.e.; when using live bait)

What modifications to the regulation can be made that maintain benefits of C-hooks for reducing post-release mortality for billfishes?

Can modifications to the regulation be enforced?

# If you have additional questions/comments...

Randy Blankinship

727-824-5399

[randy.blankinship@noaa.gov](mailto:randy.blankinship@noaa.gov)