

## **HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES & SHARKS – Catch Cards and Creel Limits**

### **What was proposed?**

The Department proposed to:

- 1) Remove the State reporting and tagging requirements for bluefin tuna, white marlin, blue marlin, roundscale spearfish, sailfish, swordfish, and sharks.

The proposed action removes the requirements for completing a catch card and affixing a plastic tail tag prior to removing a bluefin tuna, white marlin, blue marlin, roundscale spearfish, sailfish, swordfish, or shark caught for recreational purposes from a boat or removing a boat containing one of those species from the water.

The action also removes the requirement for shore-based anglers to tag their shark prior to moving it from the point of landing.

- 2) Transition the reporting of highly migratory species (bluefin tuna, white marlin, blue marlin, roundscale spearfish, sailfish, and swordfish) to a federal reporting program.

The proposed action requires reporting in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), which means that federal highly migratory species (HMS) angling, HMS charter/headboat, and Atlantic tunas permit holders would report their landings and dead discards directly to the National Marine Fisheries Service using one of their electronic options.

- 3) Update the creel limit for oceanic whitetip and shortfin mako sharks.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Coastal Sharks established a zero creel limit for oceanic whitetip and shortfin mako sharks.

### **Why are the changes necessary?**

The proposed changes:

- Provide consistency with NOAA Fisheries requirements for HMS permit holders;
- Provide consistency with neighboring states;
- Remove duplicate reporting requirements;
- Comply with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's requirements for sharks; and
- Are expected to improve compliance because anglers will have electronic reporting options.

Currently, anglers are required to report their catch through a State-run reporting and tagging program that was adopted by the Department to help with federal data collection. At the time the program was developed, there was not a federal electronic reporting system. The program requirements are often difficult, especially for shore-based anglers, and duplicative for charters and headboats. Today, however, there is a federal electronic reporting system, and it is much more efficient than the current program. The number of sharks caught in Maryland waters has significantly declined over the past few years and there are no longer enough landings to warrant the continuation of the reporting requirement for sharks caught in state waters.

Anglers will still be required to hold a valid Atlantic Highly Migratory Species permit to fish for or keep Atlantic tunas, billfishes, swordfish, and sharks in federal and state waters.

Implementing the zero creel limit is necessary to implement the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Coastal Sharks. The shark limits have been in place by public notice (shortfin mako since 2022 and oceanic whitetip since 2024), but since they are not anticipated to change in the foreseeable future, having the limits in regulation will be clearer, since all of the rules will be in one location.

### **Who will this affect?**

- All individuals who catch sharks recreationally or commercially.
- Anyone who fishes recreationally for bluefin tuna, billfish, or swordfish.
- This affects individuals fishing from shore, from a vessel, or in tournaments.

### **Definitions**

"Billfish" means the following species:

- (1) Atlantic Blue Marlin (*Makaira nigricans*);
- (2) Atlantic White Marlin (*Kajikia albidus*);
- (3) Atlantic Sailfish (*Istiophorus platypterus*); and
- (4) Roundscale Spearfish (*Tetrapturus georgii*)

"Sharks" includes the following species:

Smoothhound, Atlantic sharpnose, Bonnethead, Finetooth, Blacknose, Tiger, Blacktip, Spinner, Bull, Lemon, Nurse, Shortfin mako, Porbeagle, Common thresher, Oceanic whitetip, Blue, Scalloped hammerhead, Great hammerhead, and Smooth hammerhead.

### **Current Regulations**

Bluefin Tuna [COMAR 08.02.05.23](#)

Billfish [COMAR 08.02.05.26](#)

Sharks [COMAR 08.02.22.02](#) (Recreational) and [COMAR 08.02.22.03](#) (Commercial)

Swordfish [COMAR 08.02.05.27](#)

### **What is the specific regulatory action?**

Amend Regulations .23, .26, and .27 under COMAR 08.02.05 Fish; and

Amend Regulations .02 and .03 under COMAR 08.02.22 Sharks.

### **Has this change been discussed with advisory bodies or other interested individuals?**

- The changes were discussed at the Coastal Recreational and Commercial Fisheries Forums in October 2024, April 2025, and October 2025.
- Some of the ideas were scoped with the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission and the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission at their meetings in October 2024 and others were scoped in January 2025.
- The ideas were scoped with the general public in October 2024 and February 2025.

## **Regulatory Process**

The Department will follow our normal [procedures](#) as this concept moves forward.

At the conclusion of the scoping process, the Department determined that the action is necessary and appropriate. The rules are being promulgated following the Administrative Procedures Act described in Title 10, Subtitle 1 of the State Government Article Annotated Code of Maryland.

- The General Assembly's Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review Committee reviews the regulatory proposal for fiscal and legal analysis.
- The proposal was printed by the Division of State Documents in the Maryland Register on October 17, 2025.
- A 30 day public comment period began on the day of publication. The comment period ends November 17, 2025.
- After review of the comments, the Department may adopt the changes.
- If the Department adopts the changes, they become effective after a notice is published in the Maryland Register that announces approval and the effective date.

## **When will this be effective?**

The Department projects that this change could be effective January 1, 2026, however the exact date cannot be determined at this time.