

**NMFS ANNOUNCES THE RECEIPT OF A REQUEST FOR EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS FOR TUNA PURSE SEINE VESSELS TO TRANSFER PURSE SEINE CAUGHT BLUEFIN TUNA TO A TOWED CAGE FOR THE PURPOSE OF GATHERING INFORMATION ON HOW DELAYING LANDINGS WOULD IMPACT MARKET PRICES**

Several operators of permitted Atlantic tuna purse seine vessels, a transfer vessel, and a holding vessel have requested Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) to transfer purse seine caught bluefin tuna to a towed cage for the purpose of gathering information on how delaying landings would impact market prices. Specifically, the applicants propose to transfer purse seine caught BFT to a towed cage, harvest fish from the cage using a speargun, and bring harvested fish to port via a transfer vessel other than the permitted purse seine vessel. Delayed landing of the harvested fish could enhance marketing opportunities and prices by coordinating landings with strong market activity. If authorized, these operations may benefit all U.S. commercial BFT fishing categories by avoiding the market gluts experienced in recent years.

The applicants also request an exemption to allow permitted Atlantic tuna purse seine vessels to exceed the 15-percent tolerance level for incidental catch of bluefin tuna between 73 and 81 inches (185 to 206 cm). In their request, the applicants state that the current 15 percent tolerance for fish below 81 inches (206 cm) could be a restrictive factor limiting the success of the experiment.

NMFS invites written comments from interested parties on potential concerns should these EFPs be issued. Comments must be received on or before July 12, 2004, and should be submitted to Christopher Rogers, Chief, Highly Migratory Species Management Division (F/SF1), Office of Sustainable Fisheries, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Comments also may be sent via facsimile (FAX) to 301-713-1917 or by email at [ID061604D@noaa.gov](mailto:ID061604D@noaa.gov). Please include in the subject line of the email the following identifier: I.D. 061604D.

This FAX notice is a courtesy to Atlantic HMS 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 or a copy of the proposed rule, contact Heather Stirratt, 301-713-2347.

Alan D. Risenhoover for  
John H. Dunnigan  
Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

June 24, 2004  
Date

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