

History of Management for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery off the Atlantic States

History of management

The Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery off the Atlantic States was partially approved on December 23, 2003. The FMP represents a proactive approach to maintaining healthy stocks of dolphin and wahoo, with action intended to cap participation, effort, and landings in the fishery. Approved actions provide equitable harvesting restrictions to the recreational and commercial sectors, and maintain the historical participation by both user groups. The intended effects of the FMP are to conserve and manage dolphin and wahoo off the Atlantic states (Maine through the east coast of Florida), and to ensure that no new fisheries for dolphin and wahoo develop.

The following regulations were effective on June 28, 2004: (1) a 20-inch fork length minimum size limit for dolphin off the coasts of Georgia and Florida with no size restrictions elsewhere; (2) prohibition of longline fishing for dolphin and wahoo in areas closed to the use of such gear for highly migratory pelagic species; and (3) allowable gear to be used in the fishery (hook-and-line gear including manual, electric, and hydraulic rods and reels; bandit gear; handlines; longlines; and spearfishing (including powerheads) gear. In addition, other approved portions of the FMP were also effective on this date, including (1) the management unit and designations of stock status criteria for the unit; (2) a fishing year of January 1 through December 31; (3) a 1.5 million pound (or 13% of the total harvest) cap on commercial landings; (4) establishment of a framework procedure by which the SAFMC may modify its management measures; and (5) designations of Essential Fish Habitat and Essential Fish habitat-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern.

The following regulations were effective on September 24, 2004: (1) owners of commercial vessels and/or charter vessels/headboats must have vessel permits and, if selected, submit reports; (2) dealers must have permits and, if selected, submit reports; (3) longline vessels must comply with sea turtle protection measures; (4) a recreational bag limit of 10 dolphin and 2 wahoo per person per day, with a limit of 60 dolphin per boat per day (headboats are excluded from the boat limit); (5) prohibition on recreational sale of dolphin and wahoo caught under a bag limit unless the seller holds the necessary commercial permits; and (6) a commercial trip limit of 500 pounds for wahoo.

The following regulations were effective on November 23, 2004: (1) operators of commercial vessels, charter vessels and headboats that are required to have a federal vessel permit for dolphin and wahoo must display operator permits.