



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Silver Spring, MD 20910

MAY 17 2011

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is responsible for managing U.S. marine fish resources. Of particular interest are the Atlantic highly migratory species (tunas, billfish, swordfish, sharks) caught in offshore waters. NMFS closely monitors fishing effort and catch of these species as they support socially and economically important recreational and commercial fisheries. Information collected about the fisheries for these species is used to adjust management measures to sustain fish stocks and the fisheries that depend on them.

Accurate information is vital to NMFS' efforts to manage highly migratory species (HMS). One of the methods NMFS uses to collect information on catch rates and effort is the Large Pelagics Survey (LPS). The LPS dockside interviewers collect catch information from boat captains upon their return from offshore fishing trips. Effort information (boat trips per week) is collected in a telephone survey of HMS permit holders. Vessel owners issued an HMS Charter/headboat permit will be asked to provide detailed trip information through the For-Hire Survey (FHS). Additional questions have been added to the FHS specifically to gather data on HMS fishing trips and reduce the reporting burden of vessel owners.

NMFS has contracted with QuanTech, Inc. to contact HMS permit holders by phone and conduct the FHS interviews. QuanTech phone interviewers will interview permit holders about offshore oceanic fishing trips taken over a specific one week period which targeted large pelagic species such as tunas, billfish, sharks, or other similar species. Permit holders will be asked a series of questions about their fishing effort, target species, catch, and by-catch for trips completed during the reporting week.

The collection of catch information for Atlantic highly migratory species fulfills U.S. obligations to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas and provides the basis for stock assessments and management of these valuable species in U.S. territorial waters and international waters. The authority for NMFS to collect information from recreational and commercial fishermen comes from the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Under this authority, boat captains returning from offshore fishing trips and permitted vessel owners are required to provide catch and effort information to NMFS. Vessel owners issued an HMS permit are reminded that as a condition of accepting such permit, they are required to cooperate with any data collection survey if contacted. Responses to survey questions are classified as confidential and are maintained by NMFS consistent with the confidential fisheries statistics provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and NOAA Administrative Order 216-100. Once collected, data may be released only in accordance with the Privacy Act.

For more information about the LPS and the activities of the QuanTech interviewers, please call or write:

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NMFS greatly appreciates the cooperation of offshore anglers in providing important management information by participating in the Large Pelagics Telephone Survey.

Sincerely,

Margo Schulze-Haugen, Chief
Highly Migratory Species Management Division

