

ATLANTIC WHITE MARLIN

Frequently Asked Questions

2007 Status Review

WHAT ARE ATLANTIC WHITE MARLIN?

White marlin are billfish of the Family Istiophoridae, which includes striped, blue, and black marlin; several species of spearfish; and sailfish. White marlin inhabit the tropical and temperate waters of the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas. They generally eat other fish (e.g., jacks, mackerels, mahi-mahi), but will feed on squid and other prey items. White marlin grow quickly and can reach an age of at least 18 years, based on tag recapture data (SCRS, 2004). Adult white marlin can grow to over 9 feet (2.8 meters) and can weigh up to 184 lb (82 kg).

WHY ARE ATLANTIC WHITE MARLIN IMPORTANT?

Atlantic white marlin are apex predators that feed at the top of the food chain. Recreational fishers seek Atlantic blue marlin, white marlin, and sailfish as highly-prized species in the United States, Venezuela, Bahamas, Brazil, and many countries in the Caribbean Sea and west coast of Africa. White marlin, along with other billfish and tunas, are managed internationally by member nations of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). In the United States, Atlantic blue marlin, white marlin, and Atlantic sailfish can be landed only by recreational fishermen fishing from either private vessels or charterboats.

WHAT IS A STATUS REVIEW?

A status review is the process of evaluating the best available scientific and commercial information on the biological status of a species and the threats it is facing to support a decision whether or not to list a species under the ESA or to change its listing. Status review documents incorporate the best scientific and commercial data available on species considered for listing under the ESA. NOAA Fisheries Service conducts status reviews for the following: 1) Any species which it believes may warrant a listing under the ESA; 2) Species of Concern for which enough information has been gathered; 3) Species that have been petitioned for listing under the ESA by any citizen, provided that the petition presents substantial information indicating that listing may be warranted; 4) Species already listed under the ESA on a periodic basis to ensure that the listing status is appropriate, usually done through 5-Year Reviews. As part of the process, NOAA Fisheries Service often prepares status review documents, which are comprehensive summaries of the published and unpublished literature about the species' biology and threats. Status review documents are often written by a group of experts, chosen by NOAA Fisheries Service and known as a Biological Review Team (BRT).

DIDN'T NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE ALREADY CONDUCT A STATUS REVIEW OF ATLANTIC WHITE MARLIN?

YES. In 2002 NOAA Fisheries Service determined that an ESA listing for the species was not warranted. Concerns remained, though, about the white marlin population, and NOAA considered white marlin a Species of Concern. NOAA Fisheries Service committed to conducting a new status review for the white marlin after the conclusion of the 2006 ICCAT stock assessment.



HAS THE STATUS OF ATLANTIC WHITE MARLIN CHANGED SINCE 2002?

YES. A 2006 ICCAT stock assessment for the white marlin showed a population increase since 2002, likely due to improved compliance with ICCAT requirements to reduce catch. Population estimates indicate the number of white marlin in the size range vulnerable to the commercial longline fishery is between 100,000 and 2,000,000, but likely around 200,000. Estimates also show that the current stock of white marlin is on the order of 20% carrying capacity or greater. Total Atlantic-wide white marlin landings from longline fisheries have declined annually between 2000 and 2004, from 1,242 mt to 610 mt. The United States accounts for about 3% of that total.

WHAT IS NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE'S DETERMINATION?

Based on the status review document and an examination of the ESA's five causal listing factors, NOAA Fisheries Service determined that Atlantic white marlin is not in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range, nor is it likely to become so in the foreseeable future. NOAA Fisheries Service believes that Atlantic white marlin does not meet the ESA definition of an endangered or threatened species and that listing the species as endangered or threatened is not warranted.

DOES THIS DETERMINATION AFFECT CURRENT REGULATIONS?

NO. The decision not to list Atlantic white marlin as "threatened" or "endangered" will not affect current fishing regulations. The existing prohibition on commercial retention and sale of Atlantic billfish, including white marlin, will remain in effect. The recreational minimum legal size limit, tournament circle hook requirement, reporting requirements, and all other regulations governing Atlantic billfish will remain in effect unchanged. This includes the United States' combined annual landing limit of 250 recreationally caught Atlantic blue and white marlin, as established by ICAAT.

WHO DO I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?

A copy of the Atlantic white marlin status review document may be downloaded from the following Web address: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>. Requests for a hard copy of the status review document should be addressed to:

Dr. Stephania Bolden
NOAA Fisheries Service
Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

E-mail: Stephania.Bolden@noaa.gov
Tel.: 727.824.5312

