

shark fisheries are similar to the issues mentioned above for the swordfish fisheries. During 1993–1995, the number of vessels permitted in the fishery has fluctuated between approximately 1,700 and 2,100 vessels. There are far more permitted vessels in the fishery than are necessary or probably desirable to harvest the available TAC. In April 1993, quotas were established to rebuild the stock. The entire 1993 TAC was harvested by approximately 250 vessels yet there were 1,706 vessels permitted in the fishery in 1993.

All of the factors relating to excessive harvesting capacity in the shark fisheries could be compounded by the potential need for additional reductions in TAC to achieve stock rebuilding. The most recent shark evaluation workshop (1994) and status update (1995) have been more pessimistic than earlier analyses summarized in the shark FMP. The analyses indicate that the biomass

of large coastal sharks has declined substantially and does not appear to be recovering. Reductions in quota may be necessary in the immediate future to rebuild the stock to levels that can support the maximum sustainable yield. Based on the assessment results and comments from the Shark Operations Team, NMFS is considering further reductions in allowable harvest levels. Such reductions would compound factors contributing to the “race for the quota” and underscore the importance of addressing controlled access to the fishery.

Request for Comments

NMFS announces the availability of a Concept Paper entitled “Towards Rationalization of Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species” and two Supplemental Papers outlining options for a permit moratorium in the Atlantic swordfish and Atlantic shark fisheries, respectively. NMFS is particularly

interested in receiving comments about eligibility criteria for participation in the fisheries for the duration of each permit moratorium, and the conditions under which the moratorium will operate. The options discussed are not all-inclusive; suggestions for alternative approaches are encouraged. After consideration of the comments, NMFS will decide whether to develop a moratorium for either or both fisheries, and will propose alternative features for each moratorium if adopted. Any moratorium would be implemented through rulemaking (a proposed rule and a final rule).

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.* and 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.*

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