



**NOAA  
FISHERIES**

# Weak Hooks in the Gulf of Mexico

Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel Meeting  
September 2017

# Background

- Weak hooks were implemented in 2011 to reduce the catches of bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico, a primary spawning ground
- In 2011, a large year class of bluefin was approaching maturity and was expected to enter the Gulf of Mexico to spawn for the first time
- At that time, the western Atlantic stock was overfished with overfishing occurring

# Weak Hook Research 2008-2010

- Weak hook research indicated that bluefin tuna catches could be reduced by more than 50%
- Results for other species were mixed - some target species catches would decline; white marlin catches would increase



Species	% Change in CPUE (# fish/1,000 hooks)
Bluefin tuna caught	-56.5 *
Wahoo caught	-26.6 *
Yellowfin tuna retained for sale	-7.0
Swordfish retained for sale	-41.2
White marlin/roundscale spearfish caught	52.7

# Where are we now...

- NMFS implemented weak hooks effective May 2011 to reduce catches of bluefin in the pelagic longline fishery
- In 2015, NMFS implemented the Gulf of Mexico Gear Restricted Areas and Individual Bluefin Quotas (IBQs) to reduce catches of bluefin; bluefin tuna must be reported via VMS after each set
- Fishermen report losing large marketable target catch, especially swordfish, as a result of weak hooks
- At the spring 2017 meeting, AP members noted NMFS should re-evaluate weak hook requirements
  - Specific suggestions were to remove the requirement as redundant to IBQs or require weak hooks only when bluefin are present in the Gulf of Mexico

# Next Steps?

- Should NMFS re-evaluate weak hook\* requirements?
  - First step would likely be a detailed evaluation of catches and catch rates of bluefin tuna, target species, non-target species, protected species for discussion at spring 2018 AP meeting
  - Could include consideration of seasonal impacts of bluefin presence in the Gulf of Mexico and the need for weak hooks in addition to Gulf of Mexico GRA and IBQ
  - Other factors to consider?
- Are there other management options NMFS should consider for weak hooks in the Gulf of Mexico?
- Should NMFS pursue non-regulatory options (e.g, EFPs)?

\*Any weak hook measures being considered in the Gulf of Mexico are outside of the options the Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Team is developing in the Atlantic Ocean.

# Questions? Comments?

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