



NOAA
FISHERIES

Atlantic Highly
Migratory
Species

Consideration of the Circle Hook Requirement in Atlantic Billfish Tournaments

Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel Meeting

March 8, 2018

Existing Circle Hook Requirement

Anglers fishing from Atlantic HMS permitted vessels and participating in Atlantic billfish tournaments must use only non-offset circle hooks when deploying natural bait or natural bait/artificial lure combinations

- Requirement implemented in 2008
- Purpose – reduce post-release mortality for all billfishes
- Initially received much negative feedback
- Much of the billfish fishery has adapted to the requirement

Why Circle Hooks?

Billfish Stock Status (ICCAT SCRS)

	Overfished?	Overfishing Occurring?
Blue marlin	Yes	Yes
White marlin	Yes	Not likely
West Atlantic sailfish	Not likely	Not likely

Why Circle Hooks?

Post Release Hooking Mortality Rates

- **White marlin:** J-hooks - 35%; C-hooks – 1.7% (Horodysky and Graves 2005; Graves and Horodysky 2008)
- **Blue marlin:** J-hooks – 6.7%; C-hooks – 0% (Graves and Horodysky 2010)

In 2006, estimated white marlin post-release hooking mortality in directed fishery was approximately 65% lower with circle hooks

Comparison of Catch Rates – C-Hooks vs J-Hooks

- Circle Hooks 1.8X More Likely to Hook Sailfish (Prince *et al.* 2002)
- Once Hooked, Catch Percentage Almost Identical (Prince *et al.* 2007, Prince *et al.* 2002)
- Since then, additional studies help understand comparable catch rates for billfishes and coastal pelagics

10 Years Later...Two Issues Keep Coming Up!

1. Exempt trolling for blue marlin from the circle hook requirement

- Most frequently heard from GOM tournament operators and anglers
- Argument is that:
 - Blue marlin fishing techniques in the GOM don't utilize a drop-back, thus circle hooks have no benefit
 - Circle hooks reduce hooking rates compared to J-hooks, thus anglers don't like the C-hook requirement
- This comment heard at recreational roundtable discussion during spring 2017 HMS AP meeting and at tournament operator meetings

10 Years Later...Two Issues Keep Coming Up!

2. Exempt lures with natural component encased in a hard, synthetic material from the circle hook requirement

- Argument is that the hard synthetic material (e.g.; acrylic) does not allow any natural scent, taste, or texture of the natural component to be sensed by the fish.
- This comment heard at recreational roundtable discussion during spring 2017 HMS AP meeting and in phone calls from constituents



For Discussion...

Should NMFS consider changing the way that the C-hook requirement applies in billfish tournaments?

Are there fishing techniques for blue marlin where C-hooks should be required (i.e.; when using live bait)

What modifications to the regulation can be made that maintain benefits of C-hooks for reducing post-release mortality for billfishes?

Can modifications to the regulation be enforced?

If you have additional questions/comments...

Randy Blankinship

727-824-5399

randy.blankinship@noaa.gov