

BLUEFIN TUNA, BILLFISH, SWORDFISH, AND SHARK — Recreational Reporting

What is being considered?

The department would like to make it easier for recreational anglers to comply with the catch card census program's reporting and tag requirements. The department is considering the following changes:

- 1) Allow a shark caught from shore to be moved from the point of landing to the nearest catch card census reporting station where a catch card must be returned and exchanged for a tag.
- 2) When a catch card census reporting station is closed, allow an angler to retain the receipt from the completed catch card instead of obtaining a tag.

Why is this change necessary?

The National Marine Fisheries Service requires all recreational anglers to report bluefin tuna, billfishes, and swordfish. Additionally, all landed sharks (except spiny dogfish) are required to be reported in Maryland. To fulfill this requirement, the National Marine Fisheries Service works with the department by providing technical support and funding to implement a catch card census program.

Anglers are required to complete a catch card when they return to port for each bluefin tuna, billfish, swordfish, or shark on board the vessel. The angler returns the catch card to a reporting station and a tag is provided for each completed catch card. The angler is required to place this tag around the tail of the fish before removing it from the vessel. Trailered boats cannot be pulled from the water until the tag is in place. Shore-based shark anglers must turn in the catch card and tag the shark prior to moving it from the point of landing.

Catch cards are available from the department's website, reporting stations, and kiosks. Tags can only be obtained by returning the completed catch card at an open reporting station.

When reporting stations are closed, anglers must use a self-serve kiosk. Anglers must complete the catch card and the attached receipt. The angler retains the receipt, which replaces the tag, and deposits the catch card into the locked box at the kiosk. This is inconsistent with the current regulatory requirement, but is necessary for reporting purposes. This information needs to be added to the regulation since it is not possible to obtain a tag after hours. Making the change in regulation will align the regulatory requirements with current practice.

The requirement for shore-based anglers to tag the shark prior to moving it from the point of landing creates many issues for anglers. The drive to the nearest reporting station or self-serve kiosk can be long and burdensome requiring all gear to be put away, airing up tires, finding someone to attend to their catch, and on busy park days, possibly not being allowed back on the beach until capacity allows. Allowing shore-based anglers to transport the shark to the nearest reporting station or self-serve kiosk will make it easier for anglers.

Who will this affect?

Recreational anglers who fish for bluefin tuna, billfishes, swordfish, or sharks.

When will this be effective?

The department expects the changes to be effective by the spring of 2021; however, the exact date cannot be determined. The department will follow our normal scoping and proposal procedures.

This idea is in the scoping process (October 19—November 3). The goal of scoping is to identify issues, potential impacts, and reasonable alternatives associated with the issues so that management actions can be developed. After the public has had an opportunity to comment on possible management actions during the scoping process, the department considers these comments and develops an appropriate management strategy.

If the action is necessary and appropriate, the rules will be promulgated following the Administrative Procedures Act described in Title 10, Subtitle 1 of the State Government Article Annotated Code of Maryland.

- The General Assembly's Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review Committee reviews the regulatory proposal for fiscal and legal analysis.
- The proposal is printed by the Division of State Documents in the Maryland Register.
- A 30 day public comment period begins on the day of publication.
- After review of the comments, the department may adopt the changes.
- If the department adopts the changes, they become effective after a notice is published in the Maryland Register that announces approval and the effective date.

Has this change been discussed with advisory commissions?

The idea was discussed with the Coastal Forums in September 2020 and the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission and Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission at their October 2020 meetings.