

Title: Highly Migratory Species Tournament Registration and Reporting
OMB Control Number: 0648-0323

Justification for Change Request

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is responsible for monitoring and managing U.S. marine fisheries resources. Highly migratory species (e.g., tunas, billfish, swordfish, and sharks) which are caught in offshore oceanic waters are of particular interest to NMFS as these species support socially and economically important recreational and commercial fisheries. NMFS closely monitors directed effort and catch for highly migratory species, and adjusts management measures as needed to maintain stocks and the fisheries that depend on them.

Tournaments comprise a very important component of the catch and effort directed at highly migratory species. Current regulations require that all tournaments selected by the NMFS must submit a report. All tournaments targeting billfish (approximately 70 percent of registered Highly Migratory Species (HMS) tournaments) are selected for reporting. However, tournaments targeting only tunas and/or sharks are not routinely selected. Valuable information for many of these non-billfish tournaments is currently not being collected by NMFS. In an effort to close this data gap, NMFS proposes implementing tournament reporting for all HMS tournaments. The increased burden on the public from this change will not be large. Most of the data required by NMFS for post-tournament reporting is already routinely collected by tournament directors for their own records and tournament administration. Many of the non-billfish tournament directors also run billfish tournaments and are therefore already familiar with reporting procedures and forms.

Data collected from tournament directors will also be useful for validating and improving the NMFS Large Pelagics Survey and comparing alternative data collection options. The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act (MSA), signed into law in January 2007 requires that the Secretary of Commerce, “establish a program to improve the quality and accuracy of information” on recreational fishing. The MSA requires that the Secretary implement an improved recreational fisheries data collection program not later than January 1, 2009. NMFS has organized a joint federal-state-community initiative to accommodate the requirements and timelines specified by MSA and the recommendations by the National Research Council in a 2006 report titled “Review of Recreational Fisheries Survey Methods.” This new initiative, called Marine Recreational Information Program or MRIP, established four work groups to address specific shortcomings identified with the current recreational program. The HMS Work Group has been specifically charged with improving and expanding existing recreational data collection programs for highly migratory species to meet management needs. Coverage of HMS tournaments, particularly non-billfish tournaments, is one of the areas the HMS Work Group has focused on for improving data quality. Results of this study will be used to improve the quality and accuracy of recreational fisheries data, thus contributing to fulfillment of the Congressional mandate specified in the reauthorized MSA.