

**SUPPORTING STATEMENT**  
**ATLANTIC HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES VESSEL AND GEAR MARKING**  
**OMB CONTROL NO. 0648-0373**

**A. JUSTIFICATION**

**1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.**

This Supporting Statement is submitted as part of a Paperwork Reduction Act information collection to meet regulatory vessel marking and gear marking requirements in fisheries for Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS). This request is for an extension of a currently approved collection and is a comprehensive collection for vessel and gear marking for all HMS vessels. The information collection regarding vessel marking would not apply to recreational fishing vessels.

**Enforcement:**

The success of fisheries management programs depends significantly on regulatory compliance. The ability to link fishing or other activity to a vessel owner or operator is crucial to enforcement of the regulations issued under the authority of the **Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act** to govern domestic and foreign fishing and under the authority of laws implementing international treaties. This collection of information specifically supports carrying out U.S. obligations under the **Atlantic Tunas Convention Act** (ATCA; 16 U.S.C. 971). ATCA requires the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) to promulgate regulations adopted by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). The authority to issue these regulations has been delegated from the Secretary to the Assistant Administrator for National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Section 971 d(c)(3) of ATCA provides the statutory authority to require the collection of information necessary to implement the recommendations of ICCAT. Regulations at **50 C.F.R. 635.6** describe vessel and gear marking requirements.

Vessel marking allows enforcement agents to monitor fishing activity and document fishery violations from the air, thus eliminating the need to board a vessel. This may protect finfish (both target and non-target species) as well as marine mammals and sea birds. Appropriate gear marking would reduce the need for enforcement agents to board vessels at sea and document the violation first hand by watching the gear being hauled. For example, if marked pelagic longline gear is in a closed area, an enforcement agent does not need to wait for a vessel to retrieve the gear in order to initiate enforcement action. This reduces costs for both the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and the NMFS, Office of Law Enforcement. There are also safety benefits of gear and vessel identification; for example it could help locate missing vessels.

Fishermen would likely mark their gear regardless of Federal requirements. Fishing gear is expensive, and if lost, could result in additional expense or the inability to complete fishing activities on a fishing excursion. Gear marking is an aid for fisherman to differentiate their gear from another fisherman's gear and would increase the likelihood of retention.

## Protected Species:

In order to monitor compliance with the [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#) and the [Endangered Species Act](#), it is necessary to identify entanglements of protected species with fishing gear. If an entanglement is reported while the gear is unattended, NMFS can investigate the details of the entanglement using the gear marking to identify the owner of the gear. The marking of fishing gear is also valuable in actions concerning damage, loss, and civil proceedings. Shark nets and longlines also interact with marine mammals and are subject to gear and vessel marking requirements.

**2. Explain how, by whom, how frequently, and for what purpose the information will be used. If the information collected will be disseminated to the public or used to support information that will be disseminated to the public, then explain how the collection complies with all applicable Information Quality Guidelines.**

The vessel identification number provides law enforcement personnel with a means to monitor fishing and other related activities to ascertain whether the vessel's observed activities are in accordance with those authorized for that vessel. Vessels that hold permits in specific fisheries are readily identified through a permit database, and this allows for more cost-effective enforcement (fly-overs vs. vessel boardings).

In handline, harpoon, and buoy gear fisheries for HMS, it is sometimes necessary to tie a fish off to a float for a short time before the fish can be retrieved by the vessel. In such cases, it is necessary to identify the vessel engaged in fishing, hence the requirement for float marking. In the pelagic longline fishery for HMS, radio beacons called high-fliers are used to locate the line upon retrieval. Shark nets and bottom longlines also use floats to control the fishing gear.

The regulations specify that fishing gear must be marked with the vessel's official number and how the gear is to be marked, e.g., location. Law enforcement personnel rely on this information to assure compliance with fisheries management regulations. Gear that is not properly identified may be confiscated. The identifying number on fishing gear is used by NMFS, the USCG, and other marine agencies in issuing violations, prosecutions, and other enforcement actions. Gear marking helps ensure that a vessel harvests fish only with its own gear and does not transfer gear to other vessels. It also helps to enforce closed areas. Gear violations are more readily prosecuted, and this allows for more cost-effective enforcement. Cooperating fishermen also use the number to report placement of gear in unauthorized areas, gear conflicts, lost gear, and protected species entanglements.

Fishermen who comply with the regulations ultimately benefit, as unauthorized and illegal fishing is deterred and more burdensome regulations are avoided. This information collection would not apply to recreational fishing gear or vessels.

**3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological techniques or other forms of information technology.**

This collection of information does not involve the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological techniques. The requirement that fishing vessels and fishing gear be marked with an identifying number does not lend itself to information processing technology. However, these and other HMS regulations will be available on the HMS website at [www.nmfs.noaa.sfa/hms/](http://www.nmfs.noaa.sfa/hms/).

**4. Describe efforts to identify duplication.**

There is no duplication with other collections.

**5. If the collection of information involves small businesses or other small entities, describe the methods used to minimize burden.**

Nearly all vessels in the HMS fisheries are categorized as small businesses. The collection will not have a significant impact on small businesses, and no special modifications of the requirements were considered necessary to accommodate the needs of small businesses.

**6. Describe the consequences to the Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently.**

NMFS would have to expend more resources on at sea boardings, aerial reconnaissance, or other enforcement tools if the collection were not conducted or were conducted less frequently.

**7. Explain any special circumstances that require the collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with OMB guidelines.**

No special circumstances require the collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidelines.

**8. Provide information on the PRA Federal Register Notice that solicited public comments on the information collection prior to this submission. Summarize the public comments received in response to that notice and describe the actions taken by the agency in response to those comments. Describe the efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.**

A Federal Register Notice published on March 4, 2008 (73 FR 11619) solicited public comment on this collection. No comments were received.

**9. Explain any decisions to provide payments or gifts to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.**

No payments or gifts are to be offered as part of this information collection.

**10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.**

There is no confidentiality, since this is a display requirement.

**11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private.**

No information of a sensitive nature is requested.

**12. Provide an estimate in hours of the burden of the collection of information.**

**Vessel marking**

Of the 8,643 commercial permit holders in the Atlantic tuna fishery, 1,934 also have NMFS Northeast Regional Office permits and thus are covered under that vessel marking collection (OMB Control No. 0648-0350). This leaves 6,709 Atlantic tuna permit holders that would need to be covered by the HMS vessel marking collection. The total number of vessels fishing for swordfish and sharks using longline gear in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is estimated at approximately 604. It is further estimated that approximately 85% of these longline vessels have NMFS Southeast Regional Office permits for additional fisheries and would thus be covered under the vessel marking collection for those fisheries (OMB Control No. 0648-0358). This leaves about 91 longline vessels, plus an estimated 86 vessels that catch sharks and swordfish with nets (sharks) and harpoons or buoy gear (swordfish), to be covered by the HMS vessel marking collection. Estimated time to mark each vessel is 45 minutes.

Total annual burden for marking tuna vessels:

6,709 vessels @ 45 minutes = 5,032 hours

Total annual burden for marking directed, incidental, and handgear swordfish and shark vessels:

177 (91 + 86) vessels @ 45 minutes = 133 hours

**Total annual vessel marking burden hours for HMS: 5,165 hours (6,886 x 45/60)**

**Total number of vessel marking respondents: 6,886 vessels (6,709 + 177)**

**Total number of vessel marking responses: 6,886 x 1 = 6,886**

**Gear marking**

Handgear: The total number of vessels fishing for HMS using handline and harpoon, in the EEZ is estimated at approximately 265, based on 125 permitted vessels that reported landing bluefin tuna during 2007, and including an estimated 140 vessels that fish for other tunas, sharks and

swordfish with this gear. This includes recreational vessels targeting swordfish using handline gear. Estimated time to mark each float is 15 minutes. In most cases, regulations, availability of fish or weather/sea conditions would limit catch to a few fish per day; thus it is assumed that each vessel would have a maximum of five floats.

Annual burden hours for marking HMS handgear:

265 vessels x 5 floats @ 15 minutes = **331 hours** (1,325 x 15/60)

Total number of respondents: 265 vessels

Total number of responses: 265 vessels @ 5 floats = 1,325 responses

Longline gear: As of October 1, 2007, the total number of vessels fishing for swordfish and sharks using longline gear in the EEZ is estimated at approximately 604, based on the number of limited access permits for swordfish and sharks. In the pelagic longline fishery for HMS, for 218 vessels, about eight radio beacons called high-fliers are used to monitor each longline set. In addition, in both the pelagic and the bottom longline fishery (386 vessels) for HMS, the terminal floats must be marked. Estimated time to mark each high-flier or float is 15 minutes.

Annual burden for marking HMS pelagic longline gear (tunas and swordfish):

218 vessels x 8 high-fliers @ 15 minutes = 436 hours (1,744 x 15/60)

218 vessels x 2 terminal floats @ 15 minutes = 109 hours (436 x 15/60)

Annual burden for marking HMS bottom longline gear (sharks):

386 vessels x 2 terminal floats @ 15 minutes = 193 hours (772 x 15/60)

Total annual burden hours for marking HMS longline gear:

= **738 hours** (436 + 109 + 193)

Total number of respondents: 218 + 386 = 604 vessels

218 vessels @ 8 high-fliers + 2 terminal floats = 2,180 responses

386 vessels @ 2 terminal floats = 772 responses

Total number of responses for marking HMS longline gear = 2,952

Swordfish Buoy Gear: Currently there are 82 vessels participating in the swordfish handgear fishery, which may include the use of buoy gear. Participants in this fishery may have up to 35 flotation devices onboard, all of which would be marked with either the vessel or permit identification number.

Annual burden for marking swordfish buoy gear:

82 vessels x 35 flotation devices @ 15 minutes = **718 hours** (2,870 x 15/60)

82 vessels x 35 flotation devices = 2,870 responses

Total number of respondents = 82 vessels

Shark net gear: Currently, 5 vessels participate in the drift net fishery for sharks. The HMS Fishery Management Plan (FMP) banned the use of drift gillnet for tunas, and NMFS has, in a separate rulemaking, banned driftnets in the swordfish fishery. Therefore, those vessels are not

included in this Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) collection. In the net fishery for sharks, terminal floats must be marked. Estimated time to mark each float is 15 minutes.

Annual burden for marking shark net gear:

Total annual burden hours for marking shark net gear:

Five vessels x 2 floats @ 15 minutes = **2.5 hours (3)** (10 x 15/60)

Total number of respondents: 5 vessels

Total number of responses: 5 vessels @ 2 floats = 10 responses

**Total gear marking burden hours for all HMS gear** = 1,790 hours (331 + 738 + 718 + 3)

**Total number of respondents for all HMS gear:** 956 vessels (265 + 604 + 82 + 5)

**Total number of responses for all HMS gear:** 7,157 responses (1,325 + 2,952 + 2,870 + 10)

**Total annual burden hours for vessel and gear marking: 6,955** (1,790 + 5,165)

**Total number of vessel and gear marking unduplicated respondents: 6,886**

**Total number of vessel and gear marking responses: 14,043** (7,157 + 6,886).

**13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to the respondents or record-keepers resulting from the collection (excluding the value of the burden hours in #12 above).**

The cost to fishermen for vessel marking and gear marking is minimal. Materials needed are paint and paint brush or applicator, and possibly a stencil. The total cost of materials per vessel is approximately \$40 per year. It is estimated that the combination of weather and water exposure will result in painting once per year to maintain legibility. Total annual cost would be 7,151 vessels (6,886 gear marking vessels + 265 handgear vessels) @ \$40 = \$286,040.

**14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government.**

There is no cost to the Federal Government.

**15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments reported in Items 13 or 14 of the OMB 83-I.**

Adjustments are based on updated estimates of applicable vessel numbers. Note: the agency estimated 6,955 hours and ROCIS rounded off to 6,954.

**16. For collections whose results will be published, outline the plans for tabulation and publication.**

No results are published.

**17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons why display would be inappropriate.**

Not applicable.

**18. Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in Item 19 of the OMB 83-I.**

No exceptions are requested.

**B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS**

This collection does not employ statistical methods.