



NOAA
FISHERIES

Proposed Rule to Prohibit Retention of Mobulid Rays in Fisheries for Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS)



HMS Advisory Panel Meeting
September 4, 2025

Background: International Measure

In 2024, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) adopted [Recommendation 24-12](#):

- Prohibits retaining on board, transshipping, landing, or storing all species of mobulid rays (family Mobulidae) taken in ICCAT fisheries
- Requires that vessels promptly release unharmed, to the extent practicable, mobulid rays as soon as they are seen on the hook or at the vessel
- Encourages implementation of best handling practices for the safe release of mobulid rays



Background: Fishery Practices

- In HMS fisheries, mobulid rays are bycatch and are not targeted or retained
- Interaction rates in HMS fisheries are low
- HMS fisheries are most likely to interact with the following 5 species of mobulid rays:
 - Giant manta ray (*Mobula birostris*)
 - Pygmy devil ray (*M. hypostoma*)
 - Spinetail devil ray (*M. mobular*)
 - Sicklefin devil ray (*M. tarapacana*)
 - Bentfin devil ray (*M. thurstoni*)



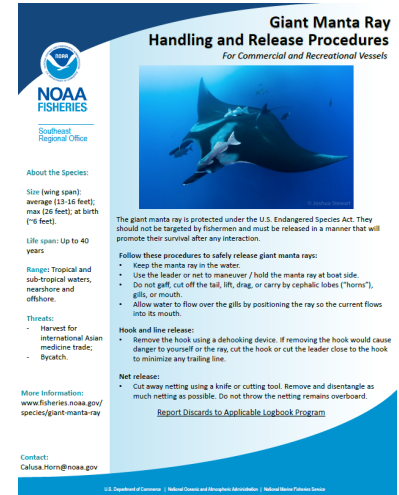
Background: U.S. Management

- HMS Fishery Management Plan (FMP)
 - No measures for mobulid rays described in the HMS FMP or its amendments
 - Currently no HMS regulations concerning mobulid rays, though various requirements for other bycatch species
- Other Federal FMPs
 - FMP for Puerto Rico lists the giant manta ray (a species of mobulid ray) as a prohibited species
 - Harvest of mobulid rays not managed under any other FMPs in the U.S. Atlantic, including the Gulf or Caribbean



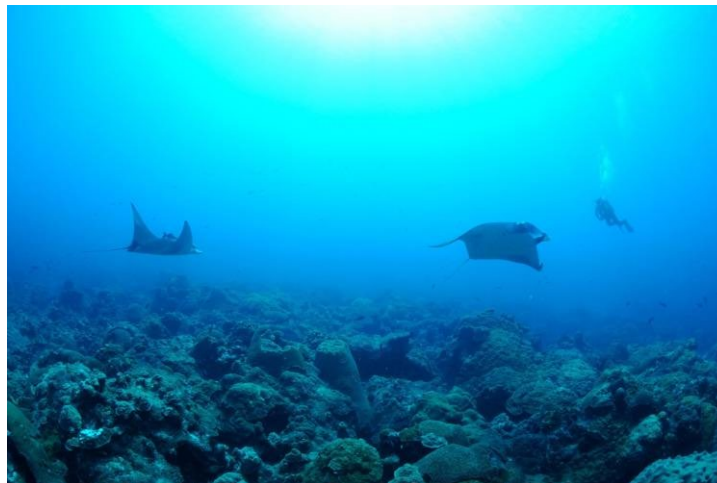
Background: Giant Manta Ray under ESA

- Listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2018
- Recommended [handling and release procedures](#) distributed to HMS fishermen per the 2020 Biological Opinions for HMS fisheries
- Draft Recovery Plan, Draft Recovery Implementation Strategy, and Recovery Status Review [released in 2024](#)



Proposed Rule: Purpose

- To protect mobulid rays and minimize their bycatch and bycatch mortality to the extent practicable in HMS fisheries
- Consistent with:
 - ICCAT Recommendation 24-12
 - National Standard 9 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act
 - ESA actions (for giant manta rays)



Proposed Rule: Retention Prohibition

Preferred Alternative A3

- Vessels with any HMS permit would be prohibited from retaining, transshipping, landing, or storing mobulid rays
- All persons would be prohibited from selling or purchasing any mobulid ray caught by a vessel with an HMS permit
- Researchers would need an exempted fishing permit or related permit when conducting research on mobulid rays on any HMS-permitted fishing vessel

Proposed Rule: Handling and Release Practices

Preferred Alternative B2

- Vessels with any HMS permit would be required to release unharmed, to the extent practicable, mobulid rays when seen on the hook or at the vessel

Preferred Alternative B3

- Vessels with an HMS permit fishing with pelagic longline gear would be required to:
 - Release, as safely as practicable, any hooked or entangled mobulid rays using dehookers or line clippers or cutters
 - If using a line clipper or cutter, cut the gangion so less than 3 feet of line remains attached to the hook
 - Leave mobulid rays in the water
 - Not gaff mobulid rays

Proposed Rule: Non-Preferred Alternatives

- Alternatives A1 and B1: Status quo. No HMS regulations on mobulid rays
- Alternative A2: Prohibit retention of mobulid rays in fisheries for tunas and tuna-like species (i.e., ICCAT fisheries)



Proposed Rule: Impacts of Preferred Alternatives

Alternative A3

- Neutral ecological, social, and economic impacts
 - Mobulid rays are not currently retained or sold in HMS fisheries, and this measure would not change fishing rates, fishing effort, or interaction rates

Alternatives B2 and B3

- Beneficial ecological impacts from best handling practices
- Neutral social and economic impacts, other than potential short-term minor adverse impacts as pelagic longline fishermen adjust to new practices



Request for Public Comments

- Proposed rule published August 22, 2025
- Comment period closes on **September 22, 2025**
- Please submit comments at <https://www.regulations.gov> (Search “NOAA-NMFS-2025-0015”)
- **Public hearing webinar:** September 18, 2025, 1-3 p.m. ET

For More Information

- Action webpage:
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/comments-requested-proposed-rule-prohibit-retention-mobulid-rays-atlantic-highly-migratory>
- Contact: Carrie.Soltanoff@noaa.gov

