

# THE DAILY TIMES

Thursday, January 10, 2008

Salisbury, Maryland

## White marlin won't be protected

### Endangered listing could hurt OC event

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OCEAN CITY -- The Atlantic white marlin will not be listed as an endangered species, according to a newly released government finding, preventing any possible shutdown of the beloved marlin season for Eastern Shore sport anglers.

"It's really good news for us," said Jim Motsko, president of the White Marlin Open -- the annual fishing tournament that brings thousands to Ocean City every August.

"If it had been rendered as an endangered species, in its worst-case scenario, you couldn't even be in an area where you could encounter one. You couldn't even go out in an area and drag baits. It's a good thing for all of Ocean City," he said.

Results of a 2007 assessment by the National Marine Fisheries Service said putting the fish on the Endangered Species List is "not warranted" and that overfishing, while a problem historically, is not occurring today.

"The white marlin stock will remain stable or continue to increase," according to the report. "It appears that both decreasing population size ... and sustained increase in fishing mortality have been abated by management efforts."

While another marlin study is scheduled for 2010, the future of the species remained inconclusive beyond a 15-year window. Scientists still don't know the maximum age of a marlin -- in fact, one tagged specimen has been swimming free for 18 years, according to the study.

The results were published in the Jan. 4 edition of the Federal Register, a publication for government agencies.

Concerns from environmental watchdog Center for Biological Diversity led the group in 2001 to petition the NMFS to list white marlin as endangered, based upon commercial fishing boats accidentally catching and killing marlin worldwide.

Subsequent results of a 2002 NMFS study showed marlin were not in danger of extinction, but noted that if unchecked, the stock could decline to endangered levels.

After the same environmental group again challenged the results, both sides reached a settlement where scientists would conduct yet another study in 2006, which led to the release of the latest marlin assessment.

Rep. Wayne Gilchrest, R-Md.-1st, former chairman of the House Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation and Oceans, applauded the report's findings, specifically regarding the White Marlin Open.

"If listed as endangered, the action would have effectively shut down all U.S. offshore commercial and recreational fishing in the Atlantic Ocean," he said. "It means a significant economic boost to the town and area businesses."

Gilchrest remains active in persuading the international community to prevent overfishing of white marlin. He said more than 95 percent of marlin deaths occur as a result of commercial overfishing in international waters, while recreational fishing contributes to a fraction of annual marlin losses.

White marlin fishing is legal in the United States using catch-and-release methods from private vessels using non-lethal circle hooks.

Bill Snape, senior counsel for the Center of Biological Diversity, said he doesn't believe the results of the study are based on environmental interests and blamed the Bush administration for ignoring scientific facts.

"This administration has such an incredibly woeful record of listing species under the Endangered Species Act that any decision they make at this point is incredibly suspect," he said. "This is another sorry example of the administration ignoring science to benefit their own political constituents."