

SPORT FISHING

What are the most recent changes to the Fisheries Regulations in The Bahamas?

Sharks are now protected in The Bahamas as a result of an amendment made in 2011. Sharks may only be taken under special permits for very specific purposes. A shark that is hooked during the course of any fishing activity is to be released unharmed.

How much fish am I allowed to keep?

The Regulations specify the amount of fish and fishery products that can be aboard a licensed foreign sportfishing vessel at any time. The bag limits are:

- a. 18 pelagic fish (Any combination of Dolphin, Wahoo, Kingfish or Tuna),
- b. 10 lobsters, (when in season)
- c. 6 conchs
- d. 60 pounds or up to 20 demersal fish such as snappers and groupers, whichever is the lesser.

Am I allowed to eat any of the fish I catch?

Yes.

Can I still use a spear for fishing?

Sportsfishers visiting The Bahamas are limited to angling with a hook and line held in the hand or attached to a rod and reel. The Fisheries Regulations prohibit sportsfishers from the use of a spear, trap or net (other than a landing net), unless such use is specifically authorized. The authorization to use a spear is easy to get.

How do I get permission to engage in spearfishing?

A person wishing to use a spear should put this on their application form for the sportfishing permit. Permission may be granted by the officer issuing the permit for the use of a spear with a hand held sling, referred to as a Hawaiian sling in The Bahamas, or a pole spear. When permission is granted for the use of a spear, this must be endorsed in writing on the permit by the issuing officer

Where can I go spearfishing?

Spearfishing is not allowed within 1 mile of the coast of New Providence or the southern coast of Freeport, Grand Bahama Island. It is also prohibited within 200 yards of the coast of any Family Island.

Can I use a spear gun?

The use of a spear gun for fishing is not allowed in The Bahamas.

How many fishing rods can I have on my boat?

There is no limit to the number of rods you may have onboard the vessel. You are limited to the use of six or less at any given time. The use of more than six rods moves you to another category of sportsfishing vessel. The fee for such a permit is \$10,000.00 per year.

Can I use scuba gear or an air compressor for fishing?

No.

Can I use an electric reel?

Yes.

I own a home in The Bahamas. Do I still need a sportsfishing permit?

Any person who is not a Bahamian citizen needs a sportsfishing permit if they wish to engage in fishing from a vessel that is not Bahamian owned.

I am a Permanent Resident of The Bahamas, are the rules different for me?

You still need to obtain a sportsfishing permit to use any foreign owned vessel for fishing. The catch limits that apply to visitors however, do not apply to Permanent Residents. As is the case for a Bahamian citizen, your catch cannot exceed 250 pounds. Doing so will put you in the commercial fishing category.

- b. Demersal (bottom) fish, sixty (60) lbs. or twenty (20) individual fish, whichever is the lesser;
- c. Ten (10) lobsters; and
- d. Six (6) conchs

Do I need a sportsfishing permit to go after bonefish?

This depends upon whether or not you are using a Non-Bahamian owned vessel. A sportsfishing permit is required if you are fishing using a Non-Bahamian owned boat

Is there a catch limit for bonefish?

There is no catch limit for bonefish. Catch and release is strongly encouraged.

Do I have to use a local fishing guide?

There is no requirement that you use a Bahamian guide. The Department of Marine Resources encourages the use of Bahamian fishing guides as this provides an enhanced fishing experience.

Am I allowed to keep any billfish (Marlins, sailfish, swordfish) caught?

Unless you are fishing in an approved tournament, all billfish caught must be returned to the sea unharmed.

Can I sell some of the fish I catch in The Bahamas?

Visitors to The Bahamas are not allowed to sell or trade any fishery products. This constitutes commercial fishing and would be a serious violation of the law.

Do I need permission to organize a Sportsfishing Tournament or event in The Bahamas?

1. Yes. Organizers of Sportsfishing tournaments coordinated to attract foreign sportfishers must have the written approval of the Minister to organize or hold a tournament.

I intend to fish from the shore or a dock. Do I need a sportsfishing permit?

No, because you will not be using a foreign owned vessel.

Can I use a cast net to gather bait fish?

The use of a net must be specifically authorized. If you wish to use a cast net to gather bait, you must specify that you want to use this kind of gear on the Sportsfishing Permit Application Form. Once approved the issuing officer will include the use of the cast net when he issues the Sportsfishing Permit. Any such approval will be expressed in writing on the permit.

I intend to rent a boat when I visit The Bahamas. Do I need a sportsfishing permit?

You will only need a sportsfishing permit if the boat you rent is not Bahamian owned. Even when fishing from such a boat, a Non-Bahamian person must observe the sportsfishing catch limits.

Can I still gather conchs while in The Bahamas?

Sportsfishers are allowed to gather conchs. The maximum number that you may have aboard the sportfishing vessel at any time is six (6). Remember that there is a legal size limit for conch in The Bahamas. The shell must have a well developed flaring lip. This is a sign of maturity.

How much fish can I take home when I leave The Bahamas?

When you leave The Bahamas via a foreign vessel that had a sportsfishing permit, marine resources up to the new catch limits may be aboard. This does not depend on the number of person aboard the vessel. The catch limits are set out below:

- a. 18 pelagic fish (Any combination of Dolphin, Wahoo, Tuna or Kingfish);

2. Organizers of local sportfishing tournaments, which are not coordinated to attract foreign sportfishers, do not require the written approval of the Minister.

If the tournament or event is to include foreign vessels, you must complete the appropriate application form and provide the necessary supporting documents, such as a copy of the proposed rules for the tournament or event. There is a fee of \$500 to be paid once the application is approved. The necessary permit will be issued and this will specify the terms and conditions under which the tournament must be conducted. All foreign owned vessels *in* the tournament are required to obtain a sportfishing decal from the tournament organizers before engaging in fishing as a part of the tournament.

Where do I apply for permission to organize a sportfishing tournament or event in The Bahamas?

Applications may be submitted via the Department of Marine Head Office in New Providence, any of its Family Island Offices or the Family Island Administrator's Office.

How and where do I get a sportfishing tournament application form?

Sportfishing tournament application forms may be accessed online via the department's website (www.bahamas.gov.bs/marineresources) or they may be collected from the department's Head Office in New Providence or any of its sub-offices in the Family Islands.

Can I clear into The Bahamas and obtain a Sportsfishing Permit online?

No, unfortunately these services are not available online. The sportfishing vessel must clear Bahamas Customs at a Port-of-Entry and obtain the Sportsfishing Permit at that time. You should not engage in any fishing until this has been done.

When travelling from Florida, when do I cross into Bahamian waters?

The maritime boundary between The Bahamas and the United States of America (USA) has not been formally agreed upon. In the South Florida area, where the

USA and The Bahamas are separated by the Gulf Stream, NOAA Chart 11469 depicts the line marking the limits of the United States Exclusive Economic Zone. This line essentially runs up the middle of Gulf Stream. If you are east of that line, you are considered to be within the waters of The Bahamas and the laws of The Bahamas are applicable. The distance you may be from any land mass in The Bahamas is not particularly relevant as the line setting the limits of the territorial waters of The Bahamas is not always drawn from a land mass.

Can I fillet fish while aboard my vessel?

Yes. Once you have a valid Sportsfishing Permit the catch limits detailed above apply.

For more information please contact

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