

public as well as the fact that extension of the comment period is not anticipated to delay development of the FMP, NMFS is extending the comment period on this scoping document from December 1, 1997 to January 9, 1998.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: November 20, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[I.D. 112097E]

New England Fishery Management Council; Meeting

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Public meeting.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) will hold a 3-day public meeting to consider actions affecting New England fisheries in the exclusive economic zone.

DATES: The meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 9, 1997, at 10 a.m., on Wednesday, December 10, 1997, at 8:30 a.m., and on Thursday, December 11, 1997, at 8:30 a.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Peabody Marriott, 8A Centennial Drive, Peabody, MA; telephone (978) 977-9700. Requests for special accommodations should be addressed to the New England Fishery Management Council, 5 Broadway, Saugus, MA 01906-1097; telephone (781) 231-0422.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Paul J. Howard, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council (781) 231-0422.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Tuesday, December 9, 1997

After introductions the Council meeting will begin with the Multispecies Monitoring Committee Annual Report. The presentation will include landings projections for the 1997 fishing year, target total allowable catches (TACs) for the 1998 fishing year, options for reaching or maintaining the rebuilding plan fishing mortality objectives for cod, haddock, and yellowtail flounder stocks, and the

status of fisheries for pollock, redfish, winter flounder, witch flounder, American plaice, windowpane flounder, and white hake.

Following the report, the Council's Groundfish Committee will discuss and seek approval of initial action on Framework Adjustment 25 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The adjustment would include measures to meet the 1998 fishing year rebuilding plan objectives (based on the report of the Multispecies Monitoring Committee) through the use of any of the following measures—area closures, trip limits, adjustments to days-at-sea (DAS) or gear modifications. The framework adjustment would also include measures to adjust the opening date of the Cultivator Shoal Whiting Exempted Fishery, require a raised footrope trawl in the Small Mesh Area 2 Exempted Fishery, restrict or prohibit the use of "streetsweeper" gear, and modify the regulations that now require vessel monitoring systems (VMS) on all individual DAS vessels. VMS options under consideration would include, but are not limited to, voluntary use of VMS, mandatory use only on vessels with DAS allocations over a specified level, or mandatory use only on vessels with specific violations. The framework may also prohibit fishing for regulated species in groundfish closed areas by vessels using exempted gears such as lobster pots, even when such vessels are fishing in the DAS program.

Wednesday, December 10, 1997

If necessary, the Council will continue consideration of Framework Adjustment 25. The Overfishing Definition Review Panel will present a preliminary report on new overfishing definitions developed to comply with the Sustainable Fisheries Act. Species to be discussed include Atlantic sea scallops, Georges Bank yellowtail flounder, monkfish, Atlantic mackerel, and possibly others. Prior to addressing sea scallop issues there will be reports from the Scallop Advisory Panel and the Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT). The Scallop Committee will then recommend final measures to be included in Amendment 7 to the Scallop Fishery Management Plan. Currently, the proposal contains a program to allow consolidation of DAS and the use of closed area management. There will also be further consideration of Framework Adjustment 10, an action to modify the scallop DAS schedule following the third-year review of the DAS scallop effort reduction program. There will be a review of committee discussions on VMS regulations and

measures to allow scallop vessels to fish in the areas closed for groundfish conservation. After reports from the Herring Advisory Panel and PDT, the Herring Committee will seek approval of proposed fishery management plan objectives, as well as the array of management measures to be discussed at public hearings. Measures may include vessel/dealer/operator permits, spawning area closures, a target TAC, vessel size limits, prohibitions on directed mealing, area management, limits on fishing time, and possibly other measures.

Thursday, December 11, 1997

The Monkfish Advisory Panel and the Monkfish PDT will report to the Council, followed by consideration and approval of monkfish measures for Amendment 9 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP. There may be a request to the Secretary of Commerce to implement interim management measures for the monkfish fishery. The afternoon session will begin with reports from the Council Chairman, Executive Director, NMFS Regional Administrator, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council liaisons, and representatives of the Coast Guard and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). There will be a briefing on the recent Habitat Advisory Panel meeting and progress on the development of essential fish habitat information. This will be followed by an update on revisions to draft Amendment 10 to the Atlantic Surf Clam and Ocean Quahog Fishery Management Plan to manage ocean quahogs in the Gulf of Maine.

The Chairman of the Council's Lobster Committee will review the ASMFC's final fishery management plan for American lobster and discuss options to address any concerns with the plan. There also may be consideration of future management strategies, if necessary, to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Fisheries Act. The meeting will adjourn after the conclusion of any other outstanding Council business.

Although other issues not contained in this agenda may come before this Council for discussion, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, those issues may not be the subject of formal Council action during this meeting. Council actions will be restricted to those issues specifically listed in this notice.

Special Accommodations

This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Paul J. Howard (see **ADDRESSES**) at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: November 21, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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