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(c) *Access area scallop allocation carryover.* Unless otherwise specified in § 648.59, a limited access scallop vessel operator may fish any unharvested Scallop Access Area allocation from a given fishing year within the first 60 days of the subsequent fishing year if the Access Area is open. For example, if a full-time vessel has 7,000 lb (3,175 kg) remaining in the Mid-Atlantic Access Area at the end of fishing year 2016, that vessel may harvest 7,000 lb (3,175 kg) from its 2017 fishing year scallop access area allocation during the first 60 days that the Mid-Atlantic Access Area is open in fishing year 2017 (March 1, 2017, through April 29, 2018). Unless otherwise specified in § 648.59, if an Access Area is not open in the subsequent fishing year, then the unharvested scallop allocation would expire at the end of the fishing year that the scallops were allocated.

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(e) *Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside Harvest in Access Areas—*(1) *Access Areas available for harvest of research set-aside (RSA).* Unless otherwise specified, RSA may be harvested in any access area that is open in a given fishing year, as specified through a framework adjustment and pursuant to § 648.56. The amount of scallops that can be harvested in each access area by vessels participating in approved RSA projects shall be determined through the RSA application review and approval process. The access areas open for RSA harvest for fishing years 2016 and 2017 are:

(i) 2016: The Mid-Atlantic Scallop Access Area, as specified in § 648.59(a).
(ii) 2017: None.

(2) [Reserved]

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(g) *Limited Access General Category Gear restrictions.* An LAGC IFQ scallop vessel authorized to fish in the Access Areas specified in § 648.59(b) through (e) must fish with dredge gear only. The

combined dredge width in use by, or in possession on board of, an LAGC scallop vessel fishing in Closed Area I, Closed Area II, and Nantucket Lightship Access Areas may not exceed 10.5 ft (3.2 m). The combined dredge width in use by, or in possession on board of, an LAGC scallop vessel fishing in the remaining Access Areas described in § 648.59 may not exceed 31 ft (9.4 m). Dredge width is measured at the widest point in the bail of the dredge.

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(3) *LAGC IFQ Access Area Trips.* (i) An LAGC scallop vessel authorized to fish in the Access Areas specified in § 648.59(a) through (e) or in (g)(3)(iv) of this section may land scallops, subject to the possession limit specified in § 648.52(a), unless the Regional Administrator has issued a notice that the number of LAGC IFQ access area trips have been or are projected to be taken. The total number of LAGC IFQ trips in a specified Access Area for fishing year 2016 and 2017 are:

Access area	2016	2017
Mid-Atlantic Access Area	2,068	602
Closed Area 1	0	0
Closed Area 2	0	0
Nantucket Lightship	0	0
Nantucket Lightship North	485	0

(ii) Scallops landed by each LAGC IFQ vessel on an access area trip shall count against the vessel's IFQ.

(iii) Upon a determination from the Regional Administrator that the total number of LAGC IFQ trips in a specified Access Area have been or are projected to be taken, the Regional Administrator shall publish notification of this determination in the **Federal Register**, in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act. Once this determination has been made, an LAGC IFQ scallop vessel may not fish for, possess, or land scallops in or from the specified Access Area after the effective date of the notification published in the **Federal Register**.

(iv) *Nantucket Lightship North Sea Scallop Access Area.* (A) From March 1, 2016, through February 28, 2018 (*i.e.*, fishing years 2016 and 2017), a vessel issued an LAGC IFQ scallop permit may not fish for, possess, or land scallops in or from the area known as the Nantucket Lightship North Access Area, described in paragraph (g)(3)(iv)(B) of this section, unless the vessel is participating in, and complying with the requirements of, the area access program described in this section or the vessel is transiting pursuant to § 648.59 (f). A vessel issued

both a NE multispecies permit and an LAGC scallop permit may not fish in an approved SAP under § 648.85 and under multispecies DAS in the scallop access area, unless it complies with restrictions in paragraph (d)(5)(ii)(C) of this section.

(B) The Nantucket Lightship North Sea Scallop Access Area is defined by straight lines connecting the following points in the order stated (copies of a chart depicting this area are available from the Regional Administrator upon request):

Point	Latitude	Longitude
NLNAA1	40°50' N.	69°00' W.
NLNAA2	40°30' N.	69°00' W.
NLNAA3	40°30' N.	69°30' W.
NLNAA4	40°50' N.	69°30' W.
NLNAA1	40°50' N.	69°00' W.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

RIN 0648-BF04

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Amendment 17 to the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Fishery Management Plan

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

ACTION: Notice of availability of proposed fishery management plan amendment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council has submitted Amendment 17 to the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Fishery Management Plan for review and approval by the Secretary of Commerce. We are requesting comments from the public on the amendment. Amendment 17 would establish cost recovery provisions for these individual transferable quota clam fisheries, modify how biological reference points

are incorporated into the Fishery Management Plan, and remove the Plan's optimum yield range.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before April 25, 2016.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by NOAA–NMFS–2015–0057, by any one of the following methods:

- **Electronic Submissions:** Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to www.regulations.gov/#/docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2015-0057, click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- **Mail:** John K. Bullard, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope: "Comments on Surfclam/Ocean Quahog Amendment 17."

Instructions: Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NMFS. All comments received are part of the public record and will generally be posted to www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information.

NMFS will accept anonymous comments. Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted via Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel,

WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

Copies of Amendment 17, and of the draft Environmental Assessment and preliminary Regulatory Impact Review (EA/RIR), are available from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901. The EA/RIR is also accessible via the Internet at: www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Douglas Potts, Fishery Policy Analyst, 978–281–9341.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: We are soliciting public comments on Amendment 17 and its incorporated documents through the end of the comment period stated in this notice of availability. We will publish a proposed rule in the **Federal Register** that would implement the amendment's management measures for additional public comment, following NMFS's evaluation of the proposed rule under the procedures of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Public comments must be received by the end of the comment period provided in this notice of availability to be considered in the approval/disapproval decision on the amendment. All comments received by April 25, 2016, will be considered in the approval/disapproval decision on the amendment. To be considered, comments must be received by close of business on the last day of the comment period. Comments received after that date will not be considered in the decision to approve or disapprove Amendment 17, including those

postmarked or otherwise transmitted by the last day of the comment period.

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council developed this amendment to establish a program to recover the costs of managing the surfclam and ocean quahog individual transferable quota (ITQ) fisheries, as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and to make administrative changes to improve the efficiency of the FMP. The Amendment would create a cost recovery program for the surfclam and ocean quahog ITQ fisheries modeled on the Council's existing cost recovery program for the Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program. Under the proposed program, any surfclam or ocean quahog ITQ permit holder who has quota share (*i.e.*, receives an initial allocation of cage tags each year) would be responsible for paying a fee at the end of the year based on the number of their cage tags that were ultimately used to land clams that year. Amendment 17 would also modify how the FMP defines when the surfclam and ocean quahog stocks are overfished or experiencing overfishing so the definitions remain current to the best scientific information available. This action would also remove the optimum yield range from the FMP. Additional details of the proposed measures are available in the amendment document.

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

Dated: February 19, 2016.

Jennifer M. Wallace,

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

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