

As required by the ESA, as applicable, issuance of these permits was based on a finding that such permits: (1) Were applied for in good faith; (2) will not operate to the disadvantage of such endangered species; and (3) are consistent with the purposes and policies set forth in Section 2 of the ESA.

Authority: The requested permits have been issued under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*), the regulations governing the taking and importing of marine mammals (50 CFR part 216), the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), and the regulations governing the taking, importing, and exporting of endangered and threatened species (50 CFR parts 222–226), as applicable.

Dated: December 20, 2017.

Julia Harrison,

Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2017–27737 Filed 12–22–17; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648–XF916

New England Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice; public meeting.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) is scheduling a public meeting of its Habitat Committee to consider actions affecting New England fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Recommendations from this group will be brought to the full Council for formal consideration and action, if appropriate.

DATES: This meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 9, 2018 at 9:30 a.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Four Points by Sheraton, 1 Audubon Road, Wakefield, MA 01880; phone: (781) 245–9300.

Council address: New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill 2, Newburyport, MA 01950.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council; telephone: (978) 465–0492.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Agenda

The Committee will review an updated coral management zone alternative including boundary changes and impacts analysis. They will then recommend final preferred deep-sea coral alternatives to the Council for action during its January 30–February 1 meeting, considering any recommendations from the Habitat Advisory Panel and Plan Development Team. Many aspects of the amendment have already been finalized. The remaining topic for consideration is a coral protection zone or zones along the continental slope, canyons, and seamounts south of Georges Bank. The Committee also plans to discuss next steps stemming from the anticipated January 4 NOAA Fisheries decision on Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2. This will include a discussion of alternatives development for the trailing action to consider clam dredge exemption areas on Georges Bank and Nantucket Shoals, as well as a discussion about how the decision on the amendment might influence 2018 management priorities. They will also discuss any updates related to offshore wind, oil and gas development, and recommend specific projects for the Council to comment on during early 2018. The Committee will hear a progress update on fishing impacts modeling efforts and receive updates on other habitat-related aspects of the Council's fishery management program, as needed, for example ongoing EFH consultation work. Other business may be discussed as necessary.

Although non-emergency issues not contained in this agenda may come before this group for discussion, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during these meetings. Action will be restricted to those issues specifically listed in this notice and any issues arising after publication of this notice that require emergency action under section 305(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take final action to address the emergency.

Special Accommodations

This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director, at (978) 465–0492, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date. Consistent with 16 U.S.C. 1852, a copy of the recording is available upon request.

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

Dated: December 20, 2017.

Tracey L. Thompson,

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

[FR Doc. 2017–27720 Filed 12–22–17; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648–XF913

Fishing Capacity Reduction Program for the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery

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

ACTION: Notice of fee rate adjustment.

SUMMARY: NMFS issues this notice to decrease the fee rate to 4.5 percent for the Pacific Coast Groundfish fee-share fishery to repay the \$28,428,718.88 groundfish sub-loan of the \$35,662,471 reduction loan that financed the Pacific Coast Groundfish fishing capacity reduction program.

DATES: The Pacific Coast Groundfish program fee rate decrease for groundfish fishery will begin on landings starting on January 1, 2018. The first due date for fee payments with the decreased rate will be February 14, 2018.

ADDRESSES: Send questions about this notice to Paul Marx, Chief, Financial Services Division, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910–3282.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Paul Marx, (301) 427–8871.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

Background Sections 312(b) through (e) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1861a(b) through (e)) generally authorizes fishing capacity reduction programs. In particular, section 312(d) authorizes industry fee systems for repaying reduction loans that finance reduction program. Subpart L of 50 CFR part 600 is the framework rule generally implementing section 312(b) through (e). Sections 1111 and 1112 of the Merchant Marine Act, 1936 (46 App. U.S.C. 1279f and 1279g) generally authorizes reduction loans.

Enacted on February 20, 2003, section 212 of Division B, Title II, of Public Law 108–7 (section 212) specifically authorizes a fishing capacity reduction

program for that portion of the limited entry trawl fishery under the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan whose permits, excluding those registered to whiting catcher-processors, are endorsed for trawl gear operation (reduction fishery).

The reduction program's objective was to reduce the number of vessels and permits endorsed for the operation of groundfish trawl gear. The program also involved corollary fishing capacity reduction in the California, Oregon, and Washington fisheries for Dungeness crab and pink shrimp and the sub-loans for these state fisheries have all been repaid.

NMFS proposed the implementing notice on May 28, 2003 (68 FR 31653) and published the final notice on July 18, 2003 (68 FR 42613). NMFS allocated \$28,428,719 reduction loan to the groundfish fishery. The allocation became a reduction loan repayable by fees from the groundfish fishery.

NMFS published in the **Federal Register** on July 13, 2005 (70 FR 40225), the final rule to implement the industry fee system for repaying the program's reduction loan. The regulations implementing the program are located at § 600.1012 of 50 CFR part 600, subpart M. On August 8, 2005, NMFS published in the **Federal Register** (70 FR 45695) a notice of the fee effective date and established September 8, 2005, as the effective date when fee collection and loan repayment began.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this notice is to adjust, in accordance with the framework rule's § 600.1013(b), the fee rate for the groundfish fishery. Section 600.1013(b) directs NMFS to recalculate the fee rate that will be reasonably necessary to ensure reduction loan repayment within the specified 30-year term. NMFS has determined that the current fee rate of 5.0 percent for the groundfish fishery is projected to collect more than the annual amortization amount needed for 2018. Therefore, NMFS is decreasing the fee rate to 4.5 percent for all landings beginning January 1, 2018. As of November 24, 2017, the outstanding balance on the groundfish fishery sub-loan was \$22,628,122.29.

Fish buyers may continue to disburse collected fee deposits to NMFS by using www.pay.gov or mail payments to our lockbox. Our lockbox's address is: NOAA Fisheries Pacific Coast Groundfish Buyback, P.O. Box 979059, St. Louis, MO 63197-9000. Fish buyers must include the fee collection report with the fee payment. Fish buyers using www.pay.gov will find an electronic fee collection report form. Fish buyers not

using www.pay.gov may also access the NMFS website for a copy of the fee collection report at: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/mb/financial_services/docs/pacific_coast_groundfish_buyback_loan_fee_collection_report.pdf.

III. Notice

The new 4.5 percent fee rate for the groundfish fishery will begin for all landings starting January 1, 2018. From and after this date, all groundfish program fish sellers paying fees fishery shall begin paying groundfish program fees at the revised rate. From and after this date, all fees received by NMFS for the groundfish fishery shall be subject to the new fee rates regardless of the applicable fee month. The first due date for fee payments with the decreased rate will be February 14, 2018.

Fee collection and submission shall follow previously established methods in § 600.1013 of the framework rule and in the final fee rule published in the **Federal Register** on July 13, 2005 (70 FR 40225).

Dated: December 19, 2017.

Samuel D. Rauch, III,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2017-27769 Filed 12-22-17; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XF915

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of a public meeting.

SUMMARY: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will hold a two and a half day meeting of its Standing, Reef Fish, Coral, and Socioeconomics Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSC).

DATES: The meeting will convene on Tuesday, January 9, 2018, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday, January 10, 2018, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Wednesday, January 11, 2018, from 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. EDT, if needed.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held in the Gulf Council's Conference Room. *Council address:* Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 2203 N Lois

Avenue, Suite 1100, Tampa, FL 33607; telephone: (813) 348-1630.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Steven Atran, Senior Fishery Biologist, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; steven.atran@gulfcouncil.org; telephone: (813) 348-1630.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Day 1—Tuesday, January 9, 2018; 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

- I. Introductions and Adoption of Agenda
- II. Approval of Minutes
 - a. March 8, 2012 Coral SSC meeting summary
 - b. October 31, 2017 Standing and Reef Fish SSC webinar summary
- III. Selection of SSC representative at January 29–February 1, 2018 Council meeting in New Orleans, LA
- Standing and Coral SSC Session*
- IV. Southeast Deep-sea Coral Initiative in the Gulf of Mexico
- V. Review of the public hearing draft of Coral Amendment 9
- VI. Review of Management Strategy Evaluation Developed for the Coral Reef Conservation Program Grant

Standing and Socioeconomic SSC Session

- VII. Grouper and Tilefish 5-year IFQ Review
 - a. Safety at sea
 - b. IFQ participants, dealers, and crew surveys

Standing and Reef Fish SSC Session

- VIII. Review of Draft Status Determination Criteria/Optimum Yield Options Paper

Day 2—Wednesday, January 10, 2018; 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

- IX. SEDAR Activities
 - a. SEDAR 62 Gray Triggerfish standard assessment
 - i. Terms of reference
 - ii. Project schedule
 - iii. Assessment workshop appointments
- X. Spawning Aggregations in the Gulf of Mexico
 - a. RESTORE Act Science Program project on spawning aggregations in the Gulf of Mexico
 - b. Prediction and Verification of Snapper-Grouper Spawning Aggregation Sites on the Offshore Banks of the Northwestern Gulf of Mexico
- XI. Evaluating Robustness of Harvest Control Rules to Future Red Tide Events
- XII. Further Development of a Stock Assessment Prioritization Spreadsheet