

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[I.D. 021600B]

Notice of Availability of Final Stock Assessment Reports

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

ACTION: Notice of completion and availability of revised marine mammal stock assessment reports; response to comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS has incorporated public comments into revisions of marine mammal stock assessment reports (SARs). The 1999 revisions of the reports are now complete, and copies of the final 1999 SARs are available to the public.

ADDRESSES: Send requests for printed copies of reports to: Chief, Marine Mammal Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3226, Attn: Stock Assessments.

Copies of the regional reports may also be requested from:

Anita Lopez, Alaska Fisheries Science Center (F/AKC), NMFS, 7600 Sand Point Way, NE BIN 15700, Seattle, WA 98115-0070 (Alaska);

Richard Merrick, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water St., Woods Hole, MA 02543 (Atlantic); and

Tim Price, Southwest Regional Office (F/SWO3), NMFS, 501 West Ocean Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90802-4213 (Pacific).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Thomas Eagle, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, at (301) 713-2322, ext. 105, Anita Lopez (206) 526-4045, regarding Alaska regional stock assessments; Tim Price, (562) 980-4020, regarding Pacific regional stock assessments; or Richard Merrick, (508) 495-2311, or Steven Swartz, (305) 361-4487, regarding Atlantic regional stock assessments.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Section 117 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) required NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to prepare stock assessments for each stock of marine mammals that occurs in waters under the jurisdiction of the United States. These reports must contain information regarding the distribution and abundance of the stock, population growth rates and trends, estimates of

annual human-caused mortality from all sources, descriptions of the fisheries with which the stock interacts, and the status of the stock. Initial reports were completed in 1995.

The MMPA also requires NMFS and FWS to review these reports annually, or every 3 years for non-strategic stocks, and revise them if the status of the stock has changed or can be more accurately determined. These updated reports represent the 1999 revisions of reports for which NMFS is responsible.

Draft 1999 SARs were made available for a 90-day public review and comment period on May 28, 1999 (64 FR 29000). Prior to release for public review and comment, NMFS subjected the draft reports to internal technical review and to review by regional Scientific Review Groups established under the MMPA. Following the close of the comment period, NMFS revised the reports as needed to prepare final 1999 SARs. Printed copies may be obtained by request (see **ADDRESSES**).

Response to Comments

NMFS received one comment on the 1999 draft SARs. The affected report was revised to reflect the following response.

Comment: The draft report ignores a significant new analysis of Western North Atlantic right whale mortality and population growth, recently published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Response: The findings regarding right whale survival in the referenced article were incorporated into the final 1999 right whale SAR. Specifically, the decline in crude survival probability is referenced in the Current Population Trend, and Potential Biological Removal sections. Further, these findings will be incorporated into future revisions of the right whale report and used in the estimation of maximum net productivity for this stock.

Dated: March 2, 2000.

Art Jeffers,

Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 00-5782 Filed 3-8-00; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[I.D. 022900D]

New England Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) will hold a 2-day public meeting on March 22 and 23, 2000, to consider actions affecting New England fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

DATES: The meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 22, 2000, beginning at 9 a.m., and Thursday, March 23, at 8:30 a.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Tavern on the Harbor, 30 Western Avenue, Gloucester, MA 01930; telephone (978) 283-4200. Requests for special accommodations should be addressed to the New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill 2, Newburyport, MA; telephone: (978) 465-0492.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Paul J. Howard, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council (978) 465-0492.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Wednesday, March 22, 2000**

After introductions, the meeting will begin with reports on recent activities from the Council Chairman, Executive Director, the NMFS Regional Administrator, Northeast Fisheries Science Center and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council liaisons, and representatives of the Coast Guard, NMFS Enforcement and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Following reports, there will be consideration and approval of a schedule of Council management actions for 2000, including approval of modifications to the joint fishery management plan development process. The Research Steering Committee Chairman will review recent committee activities including the development of groundfish research priorities, and cooperative efforts with NMFS to fund collaborative research through recent Congressional appropriations. The Spiny Dogfish Committee will review the results of the joint Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC)/New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) Scientific and Statistical Committee meeting concerning the 2000-2001 annual specifications for the spiny dogfish fishery, the conclusions of the MAFMC/NEFMC Joint Spiny Dogfish Committee meeting, and the subsequent recommendations of the full MAFMC on the management of spiny dogfish. Following receipt of this information, the Council will consider and approve

its response to this management issue. The Sea Scallop Committee will review comments provided at the recent Sea Scallop FMP Amendment 10 scoping hearings and approve the range of issues to be addressed in that amendment.

Announcement of Experimental Fishery Application

The NMFS Regional Administrator will discuss during the reports portion of the agenda the receipt of an experimental fishing proposal submitted by the Maine Department of Marine Resources (MEDMR) to conduct an experimental fishery for Atlantic halibut. This announcement serves as public notification of the experimental fishing proposal. Specifically, the Regional Administrator is seeking comment on the provisions of the experimental fishing proposal in relation to the goals of management measures for Atlantic halibut contained in the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

The objective of the proposed experiment is to contribute to the protection and rebuilding of Atlantic halibut by enabling the collection and analyses of basic biological and ecological data essential for the long-term sustainable management of Atlantic halibut. The proposed experiment would collect data on the distribution, relative abundance, migration, stock definition, mortality rates, stock size, yield and other significant biological reference points for Atlantic halibut. The proposed experiment would also collect data on age and growth, size, sex composition, and rate of onset of sexual maturity.

The experimental fishery has been proposed for April 15 through June 15 of each year through 2003 in the northern portion of the Gulf of Maine. The proposed experiment would allow eight vessels, selected by MEDMR, to participate and land up to six Atlantic halibut, 36 inches (66 cm) or greater, per day, for up to 60 days during each year. Halibut caught over the daily limit and those under 36 inches (66 cm) would be tagged and released. Participating vessel owners would be required to be trained in sampling scales, otoliths, stomachs and gonads. Vessel owners would also be required to accommodate observers, use tub trawl gear no longer than 100 hooks, use 1500 circle hooks only, and report catch and other relevant information on special logbooks devised by MEDMR.

Thursday, March 23, 2000

The second day of the meeting will begin with a discussion and possible approval of recommended options for

managing fishing capacity in New England fisheries. The Council also may agree to forward approved options to the appropriate oversight committees for further consideration. During the Groundfish Committee Report, the Council will provide guidance to the committee on objectives developed for Amendment 13 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP. Additional input will focus on the resolution of overfishing definition issues and stock rebuilding timelines, alternatives developed to date by the committee and other issues identified for inclusion in the amendment. Northeast Fisheries Science Center staff will then present a report on Stock Definition of New England groundfish. Prior to addressing any other outstanding business, the Red Crab and Herring Committees will each brief the Council on the recent scoping hearings.

Although other non-emergency issues not contained in this agenda may come before this Council for discussion, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during this meeting. Council 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 Fishery Conservation and Management Act, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take final action to address the emergency.

Documents pertaining to framework adjustment actions are available for public review 7 days prior to a final vote by the Council. Copies of the documents may be obtained from the Council (see **ADDRESSES**).

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.

Dated: March 3, 2000.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Patent and Trademark Office

[Docket No. 000302057-0057-01]

Request for Comments on Patent Law Treaty

AGENCY: Patent and Trademark Office, Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of request for public comments.

SUMMARY: A Diplomatic Conference for the adoption of the draft Patent Law Treaty will be held at the World Intellectual Property Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, from May 11 through June 2, 2000. The Patent and Trademark Office is seeking comments to obtain views of the public on this effort to simplify the formal requirements associated with patent applications and patents and the consequent changes to United States law and practice. Comments may be offered on any aspect of this effort.

DATES: All comments are due by April 21, 2000.

ADDRESSES: Persons wishing to offer written comments should address those comments to the Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks, Box 4, Patent and Trademark Office, Washington, DC 20231, marked to the attention of Lois E. Boland. Comments may also be submitted by facsimile transmission to (703) 305-8885 or by electronic mail through the Internet to lois.boland@uspto.gov. All comments will be maintained for public inspection in Room 902 of Crystal Park II, at 2121 Crystal Drive, Arlington, Virginia.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Lois E. Boland by telephone at (703) 305-9300, by fax at (703) 305-8885 or by mail marked to her attention and addressed to Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks, Box 4, Washington, DC 20231.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

1. Background

Since 1995, the United States has been involved in an effort, carried out under the auspices of the World Intellectual Property Organization, to reduce the formal requirements associated with patent applications and patents in the different countries of the world. This effort has involved five sessions of the Committee of Experts on the Patent Law Treaty and three sessions of its successor, the Standing Committee on the Law of Patents. The objective of the meetings has been to develop a Basic Proposal, consisting of articles and regulations, which will