

October 4, 2003, and will terminate at 8:45 p.m. (PDT) on October 4, 2003.

Dated: September 23, 2003.

Gerald M. Swanson,

Captain, U.S. Coast Guard, Captain of the Port, San Francisco Bay, California.

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POSTAL SERVICE

39 CFR Part 230

Rules Governing Compliance With Subpoenas, Summonses, and Court Orders by Postal Employees Within the Office of Inspector General Where Neither the Postal Service, the United States, Nor Any Other Federal Agency Is a Party

AGENCY: Postal Service.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Postal Service is amending the Code of Federal Regulations to state the rules that govern compliance with subpoenas, summonses, and court orders served on employees of the Office of Inspector General where neither the Postal Service, the United States, nor any other federal agency is a party.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 3, 2003.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Marta Erceg, Director, Legal Services, Office of Inspector General, at (703) 248-2447.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Postal Service has previously published rules that govern compliance with subpoenas, summonses, and court orders served on Postal Service and Inspection Service employees. This is the first publication of subpoena compliance rules as they apply to Office of Inspector General employees.

List of Subjects in 39 CFR Part 230

Administrative practice and procedure.

■ For the reasons stated in the preamble, the Postal Service amends 39 CFR as follows:

PART 230—OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

■ 1. The authority citation for part 230 is revised to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. App.3; 39 U.S.C. 401(2) and 1001.

Subpart A—General Policy and Authority

■ 2. Sections 230.1 through § 230.5 are designated as new subpart A and a

heading for subpart A is added to read as set forth above.

■ 3. Following Subpart A, add the following new subpart B:

Subpart B—Rules Governing Compliance with Subpoenas, Summonses, and Court Orders by Postal Employees Within the Office of Inspector General Where Neither the Postal Service, the United States, Nor Any Other Federal Agency Is a Party

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230.23 May an Office of Inspector General employee testify as an expert or opinion witness?

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230.26 Do these rules affect the service of process requirements of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (28 U.S.C. Appendix)?

230.27 Do these rules create any right or benefit enforceable by a party against the Postal Service?

Subpart B—Rules Governing Compliance With Subpoenas, Summonses, and Court Orders by Postal Employees Within the Office of Inspector General Where Neither the Postal Service, the United States, Nor Any Other Federal Agency Is a Party

§ 230.10 What do these rules govern?

(a) Subpart B governs those situations where an employee of the Office of Inspector General has been summoned, subpoenaed, or given a court order in connection with any federal, state, local court, administrative, or legislative proceeding.

(b) The rules in Subpart B do not apply to:

(1) Proceedings where the United States, the Postal Service, or any other federal agency is named as a party;

(2) Congressional requests or subpoenas for testimony or documents;

(3) Employees serving as expert witnesses in connection with professional and consultative services under Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 7001, provided they state for the record that their testimony reflects their personal opinions and should not be viewed as the official position of the Postal Service;

(4) Employees making appearances in their private capacities in proceedings that do not relate to their Postal Service employment, such as traffic accidents or domestic relations matters; and do not involve professional or consultative services;

(5) Situations where the Inspector General or an official designated by the Inspector General determines that the best interests of the public or the Office of Inspector General would be served by an exemption from the regulations.

(c) These rules should be read together with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which provides additional information about access to records.

§ 230.11 What special definitions apply to these rules?

The following definitions apply to Subpart B:

(a) Authorizing official means the Inspector General or an official designated by the Inspector General to authorize release of documents or permission to testify.

(b) Case or matter means any civil proceeding before a court of law, administrative board, hearing officer, or other body conducting a judicial or administrative proceeding in which the United States, the Postal Service, or another federal agency is not a named party.

(c) Demand includes any request, order, or subpoena for testimony or the production of documents.

(d) Document means all records, papers, or official files, including, but not limited to, official letters, telegrams, memoranda, reports, studies, calendar and diary entries, graphs, notes, charts, tabulations, data analyses, statistical or information accumulations, records of meetings and conversations, film impressions, magnetic tapes, computer discs, and sound or mechanical reproductions.

(e) Employee or Office of Inspector General employee, for the purpose of this subpart only, means a Postal Service employee currently or formerly assigned to the Postal Service Office of Inspector General, student interns, contractors, and employees of contractors who have access to Office of Inspector General information and records.

(f) General Counsel to the Inspector General means the General Counsel of the Office of Inspector General, or a person authorized by the Inspector General to give legal advice to Office of Inspector General employees. General Counsel to the Inspector General does not mean the General Counsel of the Postal Service.

(g) Nonpublic includes any material or information not subject to mandatory public disclosure under § 265.6(b) or which must be kept confidential under the Inspector General Act, 5 U.S.C. App. 3.

(h) Office of Inspector General means the organizational unit within the Postal Service as outlined in part 221 of this chapter.

(i) Office of Inspector General Manual is the document containing the standard operating procedures for criminal investigators, evaluators, and other employees of the Office of Inspector General.

(j) Reports include all written reports, letters, recordings, or other memorizations made in conjunction with the duties of an Office of Inspector General employee.

(k) Testify or testimony includes both in-person oral statements before any body conducting a judicial or administrative proceeding and statements made in depositions, answers to interrogatories, declarations, affidavits, or other similar documents.

§ 230.12 Can Office of Inspector General employees testify or produce documents that would assist me in my civil proceeding?

No current or former employee within the Office of Inspector General may testify or produce documents

concerning information acquired in the course of employment or as a result of his or her relationship with the Postal Service in any proceeding to which this subpart applies (see § 230.10), unless authorized to do so by an authorizing official.

§ 230.13 Why are restrictions on Office of Inspector General employees in civil proceedings necessary?

The restrictions are intended to reduce the risk of inappropriate disclosures that might affect the operations of the Office of Inspector General; prevent the expenditure of Office of Inspector General or Postal Service resources for private purposes; and ensure that employee time is serving the best interests of the public.

§ 230.14 Who owns the written or recorded notes, memoranda, reports, and transcriptions made pursuant to an official investigation, audit, or review conducted by an employee of the Office of Inspector General?

Notes, memoranda, reports, and transcriptions, whether written or recorded and made pursuant to an official investigation, audit, or review conducted by an employee of the Office of Inspector General, are the property of the Office of Inspector General.

§ 230.15 What must an Office of Inspector General employee do if served with a demand requiring the production of documents or an appearance in court?

If an Office of Inspector General employee is served with a demand requiring the production of documents or an appearance in court, the employee must promptly inform the authorizing official of the nature of the documents or testimony sought and all relevant facts and circumstances. Office of Inspector General employees are directed to appear as the subpoena or summons may require, but may not testify or produce documents unless authorized.

§ 230.16 Is there a prohibition on presenting Office of Inspector General reports or records during an employee's testimony?

Yes, Office of Inspector General reports or records will not be presented during an employee's testimony, unless authorized by an authorizing official.

§ 230.17 If an attempt is made to compel production of reports and records during the employee's testimony, what is an Office of Inspector General employee directed to do?

If an attempt is made to compel production of reports and records during the employee's testimony, the employee is directed to decline to

produce the item or information and to state that the material cannot be disclosed or produced without the approval of the authorizing official. All such requests, and any other requests for documents in judicial or administrative proceedings in which the United States is not a party, shall be deemed to be a request for records under the Freedom of Information Act and shall be handled pursuant to 39 CFR 230.5.

§ 230.18 If authorization to testify or produce documents is not obtained by the employee, what is the employee directed to do?

Absent written authorization from the authorizing official, the employee must respectfully decline to produce the requested documents, testify, or otherwise disclose the requested information. If the authorization is denied or not received by the return date, the employee, together with counsel, where appropriate, shall appear at the stated time and place, produce a copy of this section, and respectfully decline to testify or produce any document on the basis of the regulations in this section.

§ 230.19 What criteria will the authorizing official use to determine whether to authorize testimony or production of documents?

(a) The authorizing official will determine whether testimony or the production of documents will be authorized according to the following criteria:

- (1) Statutory restrictions, as well as any legal objection, exemption, or privilege that may apply;
- (2) Relevant legal standards for disclosure of nonpublic information and documents;
- (3) Office of Inspector General rules and regulations;
- (4) The public interest;
- (5) Minimizing or preventing expenditures of Office of Inspector General and Postal Service time and resources solely for private purposes.
- (6) Minimizing the appearance of improperly favoring one litigant over another;
- (7) Minimizing the possibility that the public will misconstrue variances between personal opinions of Office of Inspector General employees and agency policy; and
- (8) Preserving the integrity of the administrative process.

(b) Permission to testify or to release documents in all cases will be limited to matters outlined in the affidavit or declaration described in section 230.24 of this part or to such matters as deemed appropriate by the authorizing official.

If the authorizing official allows the release of documents or testimony to be given by an employee, arrangements shall be made for the taking of testimony or receipt of documents by the method least disruptive to the employee's official duties. Testimony may, for example, be provided by affidavits, answers to interrogatories, written depositions, or depositions transcribed, recorded, or preserved by any other means allowable by law.

(c) Upon issuance of an unfavorable final determination by the authorizing official, the party or the party's counsel seeking testimony or documents may consult or negotiate with the authorizing official to refine and limit the demand.

(d) The Office of Inspector General will offer all possible assistance to the courts, but the question of disclosing information for which an exemption may be claimed is a matter of discretion that rests with the authorizing official. If in the opinion of the authorizing official the documents should not be released or testimony should not be furnished, that determination will be final.

§ 230.20 What records will not be released?

Generally, any record demanded by a subpoena duces tecum or appropriate court order can be released by a properly authorized Office of Inspector General employee, except for the following:

(a) Records required to remain confidential by the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, and parts 230 and 262 of this chapter,

(b) Records containing information relating to an employee's security or loyalty;

(c) Original records;

(d) Office of Inspector General criminal investigative reports, unless there is specific authorization by an authorizing official, after consulting with General Counsel to the Inspector General; and

(e) The Office of Inspector General Manual and other operating instructions issued to Office of Inspector General employees, unless there is specific authorization by an authorizing official, after consultation with the General Counsel to the Inspector General. If the requested information relates to confidential investigative techniques, confidential sources of information, or information that must be kept confidential under the Inspector General Act, 5 U.S.C. app. 3, because release of the information would adversely affect the duties and obligations or law enforcement mission of the Office of

Inspector General, the subpoenaed official, through the Inspector General, or an authorizing official, may request an in camera, ex parte conference to determine the necessity for the release of the information.

§ 230.21 May the General Counsel to the Inspector General and/or a U.S. Department of Justice attorney represent the employee in any appearance?

At the option of the Attorney General, or an authorizing official, an Office of Inspector General legal counsel may represent and assist the employee. The authorizing official designated by the Inspector General may also request assistance from the U.S. Department of Justice in representing and assisting the employee in any appearance.

§ 230.22 May another employee be substituted for the employee requested to appear?

The Inspector General or designee may, where appropriate, designate another Office of Inspector General employee to respond to a request for an appearance.

§ 230.23 May an Office of Inspector General employee testify as an expert or opinion witness?

No, an Office of Inspector General employee may not testify as an expert or opinion witness with regard to any matter arising out of the employee's duties or functions at the Office of Inspector General for any party other than the United States, except that in extraordinary circumstances, and where the anticipated testimony will not be adverse to the interest of the United States, the authorizing official may approve such testimony in private litigation. A litigant must first obtain the permission of an authorizing official designated by the Inspector General before designating an Office of Inspector General employee as an expert or opinion witness.

§ 230.24 How is a demand for employee documents or testimony made to the Office of Inspector General?

(a) All demands for the production of nonpublic documents or testimony of Office of Inspector General employees concerning matters relating to their official duties and subject to the conditions set forth in § 230.601(b) shall be made in writing and conform to the following requirements outlined in paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section.

(b) Before or simultaneously with service of a demand, the requesting party shall serve on the General Counsel to the Inspector General at the Office of Inspector General, 1735 North Lynn Street, Arlington, VA 22209-2020, a

summons or subpoena issued in accordance with the appropriate rules of civil procedure along with an affidavit or sworn declaration containing the following information:

(1) The title of the case and the forum where it will be heard;

(2) The party's interest in the case;

(3) The reasons for the demand;

(4) A showing that the requested information is available, by law, to a party outside the Postal Service;

(5) If testimony is sought, a detailed summary of the anticipated testimony;

(6) If testimony is sought, a showing that Office of Inspector General records could not be provided and used in place of the requested testimony;

(7) The intended use of the documents or testimony; and

(8) An affirmative statement that the documents or testimony is necessary for defending or prosecuting the case at issue.

§ 230.25 Who pays the costs incurred when the Office of Inspector General responds to a demand for documents or testimony?

(a) Unless determined by 28 U.S.C. 1821 or other applicable statute, the costs of providing testimony, including the cost of transcripts, shall be borne by the requesting party. Furthermore, unless limited by statute, such costs shall also include reimbursement to the Office of Inspector General for the usual and ordinary expenses attendant upon the employee's absence from his or her official duties in connection with the case or matter, including the employee's salary and applicable overhead charges, and any necessary travel expenses as follows:

(1) The Office of Inspector General is authorized to charge reasonable fees to parties demanding documents or information. Such fees, calculated to reimburse the Office of Inspector General for the cost of responding to a demand, may include the costs of time expended by Office of Inspector General employees, including attorneys, to process and respond to the demand; attorney time for reviewing the demand and for legal work in connection with the demand; expenses generated by equipment used to search for, produce, and copy the requested information; and travel costs of the employee and the agency attorney or other representative, including lodging and per diem. Such fees shall be assessed at the rates and in the manner specified in 39 CFR 265.9.

(2) At the discretion of the Office of Inspector General where appropriate, fees and costs may be estimated and collected before testimony is given.

(b) The provisions of Subpart B do not affect rights and procedures governing

public access to official documents pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552a.

§ 230.26 Do these rules affect the service of process requirements of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (28 U.S.C. Appendix)?

No, the rules in subpart B in no way modify the requirements of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure regarding service of process.

§ 230.27 Do these rules create any right or benefit enforceable by a party against the Postal Service?

No, subpart B is intended to provide instructions to Office of Inspector General employees and members of the public. It does not create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable by any party against the Office of Inspector General or the Postal Service.

Stanley F. Mires,
Chief Counsel, Legislative.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 030430107-3236-02; I.D. 040703A]

RIN 0648-AN87

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic; Pelagic Sargassum Habitat of the South Atlantic Region

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

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: NMFS issues this final rule to implement the Fishery Management Plan for Pelagic Sargassum Habitat of the South Atlantic Region (FMP). This final rule limits the harvest or possession of pelagic sargassum in or from the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off the southern Atlantic states to 5,000 lb (2,268 kg) annually, restricts fishing for pelagic sargassum in the South Atlantic EEZ to an area no less than 100 nautical miles offshore of North Carolina and to the months of November through June, requires vessel owners or operators to accommodate NMFS-approved observers on all pelagic sargassum fishing trips, and restricts the

mesh and frame sizes of nets used to harvest pelagic sargassum. The FMP also defines the management unit, maximum sustainable yield (MSY), optimum yield (OY), and overfishing parameters. In addition, NMFS informs the public of the approval by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) of the collection-of-information requirements contained in this final rule and publishes the OMB control numbers for those collections. The intended effects are to conserve and manage pelagic sargassum and to protect essential fish habitat.

DATES: This final rule is effective November 3, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the final regulatory flexibility analysis (FRFA) may be obtained from the Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702.

Written comments regarding the burden-hour estimates or other aspects of the collection-of-information requirements contained in this final rule may be submitted to Robert Sadler, Southeast Region, NMFS, at the above address, and by e-mail to David_Rostker@omb.eop.gov, or fax to (202) 395-7285.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steve Branstetter, phone: 727-570-5305, fax: 727-570-5583, e-mail: Steve.Branstetter@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) prepared the FMP under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

On April 17, 2003, NMFS announced the availability of the FMP and requested comments on it (68 FR 18942). NMFS published a proposed rule to implement the FMP and requested comments on the proposed rule through June 30, 2003 (68 FR 32450, May 30, 2003). NMFS partially approved the FMP on July 11, 2003; the designation of essential fish habitat (EFH), EFH-habitat areas of particular concern (EFH-HAPCs), and the estimate of maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT) were disapproved. The rationale for the measures in the FMP is provided in the preamble to the proposed rule and is not repeated here.

Comments and Responses

NMFS received 22 letters on the FMP and proposed rule. Of those, 18 were in general support of the actions identified in the FMP, 2 were opposed, and 2 letters focused on future research needs regarding the role of pelagic sargassum as habitat in the open ocean

environment. A summary of those comments and NMFS's responses are provided below.

Comment 1: Sargassum is extremely important habitat for a variety of marine species. NMFS is urged to approve this FMP and its implementing regulations, which would limit the harvest of sargassum and protect the resource as essential fish habitat (EFH) and EFH habitat areas of particular concern (EFH-HAPC).

Response: NMFS recognizes the importance of sargassum as EFH for managed species, and sargassum's general importance as habitat in the open ocean environment. NMFS has partially approved the FMP, and regulations implemented through this rule will prohibit the harvest of sargassum south of 34° N. lat. in the SAFMC's area of jurisdiction, and restrict the allowable harvest to 5,000 lb (2,268 kg) annually from waters greater than 100 nautical miles offshore of the North Carolina coast. These actions are intended to provide protection to sargassum habitat, which is designated as EFH for snappers, groupers, and coastal migratory pelagic fishes, and is known to be used by threatened and endangered sea turtles and large quantities of other marine life.

Comment 2: Because of the importance of sargassum as habitat, and its designation as EFH and HAPC for several managed finfish species, all harvest of sargassum should be prohibited.

Response: NMFS previously informed the SAFMC that there was insufficient justification to prohibit all harvest of sargassum. Section 303(a)(7) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that the Councils minimize to the extent practicable adverse effects on EFH caused by fishing, but clearly this does not, in every instance, preclude some loss or damage to EFH from fishing impacts. Given the suggested standing crop of sargassum is 9 to 24 billion lbs (4 to 11 million mt) and there has been a documented harvest of 448,000 lb (203 mt) over a 22-year period, NMFS determined that the administrative record does not provide sufficient evidence that there has been an adverse impact on sargassum as EFH, or that harvest should be prohibited.

Comment 3: Quantities of sargassum found off of the east coast of Florida have declined in recent years. The ongoing harvest of sargassum is detrimental to Florida's offshore fisheries and should not be allowed.

Response: Given that sargassum is dispersed northward from the Sargasso Sea to the north Atlantic Ocean via the Gulf Stream and prevailing winds,