

greatest potential to ensure that vessels harvest at least the available TAC, but carried with it the highest risk of exceeding the TAC.

According to section 8.8 of the Red Crab Specifications document, Alternative 1 would be expected to generate the lowest level of landings and revenue because it allocates 35 fewer fleet DAS than the preferred alternative. On the other hand, Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 would allocate more fleet DAS than the preferred alternative; 81, 60, and 94 more fleet DAS, respectively. The additional allocated DAS would have enabled each vessel to take extra trips, and the economic benefits would have been expected to increase compared to FY2003 with more DAS available. But each of these other alternatives would increase the risk of exceeding the TAC. The opting out of one red crab vessel for FY2004, however, means that the remaining four vessels are allocated 195 DAS each, an increase over the FY2003 allocation of 156 DAS, under the preferred alternative. This increase in individual DAS significantly increases the potential landings and economic benefits for these vessels, compared to FY2003. In balancing the FMP objectives of providing the fleet with the greatest number of landings without exceeding the TAC, the preferred alternative is considered to represent the optimal DAS allocation by maximizing the potential economic benefits to affected vessels while minimizing the risk to the red crab resource of exceeding the TAC.

Section 212 of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement and Fairness Act of 1996 states that, for each rule or group of related rules for which an agency is required to prepare a FRFA, the agency shall publish one or more guides to assist small entities in complying with the rule, and shall designate such publications as "small entity compliance guides." The agency shall explain the actions a small entity is required to take to comply with a rule or group of rules. As part of this rulemaking process, a small entity compliance guide will be sent to all holders of Atlantic deep-sea red crab limited access vessel or dealer permits. In addition, copies of these final specifications and guide (i.e., permit holder letter) are available from NMFS (see ADDRESSES) and at the following web site: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/>.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 648

Fishing, Fisheries, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

Dated: February 27, 2004.

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

■ For the reasons set out in the preamble, 50 CFR part 648 is amended as follows:

PART 648—FISHERIES OF THE NORTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

■ 1. The authority citation for part 648 continues to read as follows:

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

■ 2. In § 648.262 paragraphs (b)(2) and (b)(6) are revised to read as follows:

§ 648.262 Effort control program for red crab limited access vessels.

* * * * *

(b) * * *

(2) *For fishing years 2003 and thereafter.* Each limited access permit holder shall be allocated 156 DAS unless one or more vessels declares out of the fishery consistent with § 648.4(a)(13)(B)(2) or the TAC is adjusted consistent with § 648.260.

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(6) *Adjustments in annual red crab DAS allocations.* Adjustments to the annual red crab DAS allocation, if required to meet fishing mortality goals, may be implemented pursuant to § 648.260.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 031104274-4011-02; I.D. 022604C]

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fisheries; Closure of the Quarter I Fishery for Loligo Squid

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

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the directed fishery for Loligo squid in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) will be closed effective March 5, 2004. Vessels issued a Federal permit to harvest Loligo squid may not retain or land more than 2,500 lb (1.13 mt) of *Loligo* squid per trip for the remainder of the

quarter (through March 31, 2004). This action is necessary to prevent the fishery from exceeding its Quarter I quota and allow for effective management of this stock.

DATES: Effective 0001 hours, March 5, 2004, through 2400 hours, March 31, 2004.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Don Frei, Fishery Management Specialist, 978-281-9221, fax 978-281-9135, e-mail don.frei@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Regulations governing the *Loligo* squid fishery are found at 50 CFR part 648. The regulations require specifications for maximum sustainable yield, initial optimum yield, allowable biological catch, domestic annual harvest (DAH), domestic annual processing, joint venture processing and total allowable levels of foreign fishing for the species managed under the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan. The procedures for setting the annual initial specifications are described in § 648.21.

The 2004 specification of DAH for *Loligo* squid was set at 16,872.4 mt (69 FR 4861, February 2, 2004). This amount is allocated by quarter, as shown below.

TABLE 1.—*Loligo* SQUID QUARTERLY ALLOCATIONS.

Quarter	Per-cent	Metric Tons ¹	Re-search Set-aside
I (Jan-Mar)	33.23	5,606.7	N/A
II (Apr-Jun)	17.61	2,971.2	N/A
III (Jul-Sep)	17.3	2,918.9	N/A
IV (Oct-Dec)	31.86	5,375.6	N/A
Total	100	16,872.4	127.5

¹Quarterly allocations after 127.6 mt re-search set-aside deduction.

Section 648.22 requires NMFS to close the directed *Loligo* squid fishery in the EEZ when 80 percent of the quarterly allocation is harvested in Quarters I, II and III, and when 95 percent of the total annual DAH has been harvested. NMFS is further required to notify, in advance of the closure, the Executive Directors of the Mid-Atlantic, New England, and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils; mail notification of the closure to all holders of *Loligo* squid permits at least 72 hours before the effective date of the closure; provide adequate notice of the closure to recreational participants in the fishery; and publish notification of the closure in the **Federal Register**. The Administrator, Northeast Region, NMFS, based on dealer reports and

other available information, has determined that 80 percent of the DAH for *Loligo* squid in Quarter I will be harvested. Therefore, effective 0001 hours, March 5, 2004, the directed fishery for *Loligo* squid is closed and vessels issued Federal permits for *Loligo* squid may not retain or land more than 2,500 lb (1.13 mt) of *Loligo*. Such vessels

may not land more than 2,500 lb (1.13 mt) of *Loligo* during a calendar day. The directed fishery will reopen effective 0001 hours, April 1, 2004, when the Quarter II quota becomes available.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under E.O. 12866.

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

Dated: February 27, 2004.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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

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