

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

[I.D. 071204C]

Pacific Fishery Management Council; Notice of Intent

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

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS); request for written comments; preliminary notice of scoping meetings.

SUMMARY: NMFS and the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) intend to prepare an EIS in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 to analyze a range of alternatives for the annual allocation of the Pacific sardine harvest guideline.

DATES: Written comments will be accepted at the Council office through August 25, 2004.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by (I.D. 071204C), by any of the following methods:

- E-mail: pfmtc.comments@noaa.gov (enter "Pacific Sardine Allocation" and include the I.D. number in the subject line of the message).

- Mail: Written comment on issues and alternatives to be addressed in this EIS should be sent to Dr. Donald McIsaac, Pacific Fishery Management Council, 7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 200, Portland, OR 97220.

- Fax: 503-820-2299.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Svein Fougner, NMFS, Southwest Region telephone: 562-980-4040, fax: 562-980-4018; or Dan Waldeck, Pacific Fishery Management Council, telephone: 503-820-2280, fax: 503-820-2299.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Electronic Access**

This **Federal Register** document is available on the Government Printing Office's website at: www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index/html.

Background

NEPA requires consideration of a full range of reasonable alternatives including status quo (no action). The Council has not yet determined which alternative will be its preferred alternative. When developed, the proposed management alternatives would modify the Pacific sardine allocation framework in the Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Fishery

Management Plan (FMP) and regulations that implement the FMP (68 FR 52523). The tentative schedule for Council actions related to this matter is: September 2004, progress report; November 2004, review preliminary range of draft alternatives; January-February 2005, public hearings on range of alternatives; March or April 2005, preliminary action; June 2005, final action. If this schedule holds, and NMFS approves the Council action; the Council anticipates implementation of the new Pacific sardine allocation framework in time for the 2006 Pacific sardine fishery, which opens January 1.

Description of the Proposal

The proposed action is to implement a comprehensive, long-term allocation framework to apportion the annual Pacific sardine harvest guideline among the various sectors of the sardine fishery. The Pacific sardine resource is healthy and abundant, supporting fisheries in California (Los Angeles harbor area and Monterey Bay area), in Oregon (Port of Astoria), and Washington (ports of Westport and Ilwaco). The proposal is intended to ensure optimal utilization of the resource and equitably allocate harvest opportunity.

The Council adopted the CPS FMP in 1998. The CPS FMP was implemented by NMFS in December 1999 (64 FR 69888). The original Pacific sardine allocation formula in the FMP partitioned 33 percent of the annual harvest guideline to the northern subarea ("Subarea A") and 66 percent to the southern subarea ("Subarea B"). Nine months after the January 1 start of the fishery (i.e., October 1), the remaining harvest guideline was pooled and re-allocated 50 percent - 50 percent to each subarea. The original boundary between the two subareas was 35° 40' N lat. (approximately Point Piedras Blancas, California). This formula was incorporated into Federal management from existing California State law. The State law was designed to balance fishing opportunity between the Southern California-based fishery ("South") and the Monterey-based fishery ("North"). At the time of the FMP's implementation, this was considered a status quo action (as the sardine fishery occurred, principally, in California) with no environmental impacts. No alternative allocation formulae were considered.

As the Pacific sardine biomass expanded, fisheries developed in the Pacific Northwest. With this expansion, under the original formula, the northern area allocation was shared by Monterey, Oregon, and Washington-based

fisheries. Oregon and Washington fishery interests expressed concern to the Council that the original allocation framework did not provide optimal harvest opportunity to the respective fishery sectors. Each of the three sectors operates over a unique schedule. Generally, Southern California starts harvesting sardine January 1 and harvest increases steadily throughout the year; Northern California starts in August (tied to market squid availability) and harvest increases through January or February of the following year; and Oregon and Washington have a much more abbreviated season, which starts in June and ends in October. Because these sectors operate on very different schedules, annual allocations help to ensure that each sector receives a reasonable fishing opportunity. Ex-vessel landings in all sectors are driven by domestic and international market forces for sardines, as well as the availability and markets for other species of economic benefit to sardine vessels and processors (for example, market squid). The Northern California fishery and Pacific Northwest fishery are also affected by adverse weather.

In April 2003, the Council recommended to NMFS an interim framework for allocating sardine. The revised allocation system: (1) changed the definition of Subarea A (northern subarea) and Subarea B (southern subarea) by moving the geographic boundary between the two areas from 35° 40' N. lat. (Point Piedras Blancas, California) to 39° N. lat. (Point Arena, California), (2) moved the date when Pacific sardine that remains unharvested is reallocated to Subarea A and Subarea B from October 1 to September 1, (3) changed the percentage of the unharvested sardine that is reallocated to Subarea A and Subarea B from 50 percent to both subareas to 20 percent to Subarea A and 80 percent to Subarea B, and (4) reallocates all unharvested sardine that remains on December 1 coastwide.

The Council requested this allocation framework be in place for the 2003 and 2004 fishing seasons, and also in 2005 (if the 2005 harvest guideline is at least 90 percent of the 2003 harvest guideline). NMFS implemented the revised allocation framework by a regulation that was published on September 4, 2003 (68 FR 52523).

Using the best available information, the interim allocation framework was rapidly developed to address the concerns in the short-term. At the time, it was understood that more information and time would be needed to develop a more comprehensive, longer-term

allocation framework, which is a purpose of this EIS.

Preliminary Identification of Environmental Issues

A principal objective of this scoping and public input process is to identify potentially significant impacts to the human environment that should be analyzed in depth in the EIS. Impacts of the following components on the biological and physical environment may be evaluated: (1) essential fish habitat and ecosystems; (2) protected species listed under the Endangered Species Act or protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the critical habitat of those species (if any); and (3) the fishery management unit, including target and nontarget fish stocks. Socioeconomic impacts on the following groups are also going to be evaluated: (1) those who participate in harvesting the fishery resources and other living marine resources (for commercial, subsistence, or recreational purposes); (2) those who process and market fish and fish products; (3) those who are involved in allied support industries; (4) those who rely on living marine resources in the management area; (5) those who consume fish products; (6) those who benefit from nonconsumptive use (e.g., wildlife viewing); (7) those who do not use the resource, but derive benefit from it by virtue of its existence, the option to use it, or the bequest of the resource to future generations; (8) those involved in managing and monitoring fisheries; and (9) fishing communities. Analysis of these groups will be presented in a manner that allows the identification of any disproportionate impacts on low income and minority segments of the identified groups and impacts on small entities.

Scoping and Public Involvement

Scoping is an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to proposed alternatives (including status quo). A principal objective of the scoping and public input processes is to identify a reasonable set of alternatives that, with adequate analysis, sharply define critical issues and provide a clear basis for distinguishing among those alternatives and selecting a preferred alternative. The public scoping process provides the public with the opportunity to comment on the range of alternatives and specific options within the alternatives. The scope of the alternatives to be analyzed should be broad enough for the Council and NMFS to make informed decisions on whether

an alternative should be developed and, if so, how it should be designed, and to assess other changes to the FMP and regulations necessary for the implementation of the alternative.

Dated: July 13, 2004.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

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

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Integrated Ocean Observation System; Public Meeting

AGENCY: National Ocean Service, NOAA, Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of open meeting.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given to those interested of a public meeting on the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS), in New York, New York. The meeting is focused on the needs and questions from the maritime navigational services community as a participant/user in IOOS, but will address IOOS development and implementation and NOAA's role and responsibilities as part of IOOS. Attendees are asked to register for the meeting on-line no later than Monday July 26, 2004, with the National Ocean Service (*see Supplementary Information*, below).

DATES: The meeting will be held on Friday, July 30, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Crowne Plaza Times Square, 1605 Broadway, Manhattan, New York, (212) 977-4000.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Mike Szabados, Director, Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services (CO-OPS), 1305 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910, mike.szabados@noaa.gov, (301) 713-2981.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The meeting will be open to public participation. Morning sessions are briefings about IOOS. The afternoon sessions beginning at 1:30 p.m. will be for comments, issues and concerns, with interactive, facilitated discussions, including time for direct verbal comments or questions from the public. Each individual or group making a verbal comment will be limited to a total time of five (5) minutes. Written comments may be submitted on-line or at the meeting. Approximately 75 seats

will be available for the public. Seats will be available on a first-come, first served basis. To assist in the management of the meeting, all participants are asked to register for the meeting on the NOAA/NOS Web site, found at: <http://www8.nos.noaa.gov/ioos/> no later than close of business July 26, 2004.

Matters to be Considered: The meeting will include discussion on the following topics: (1) Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS); (2) the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) contribution to the IOOS National Backbone; (3) IOOS Recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy; and, (4) IOOS Regional Associations stakeholder outreach.

Dated: July 14, 2004.

Mike Szabados,

Director, Center for Operational Oceanographic, Products and Services (CO-OPS), National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 071304B]

New England Fishery Management Council; Public Meetings

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) is scheduling a public meeting of its Research Steering Committee in August, 2004 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: The meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 3, 2004 at 9:30 a.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Sheraton Colonial, 1 Audubon Road, Wakefield, MA 01880; telephone: (781) 245-9300.

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

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