

verifying the completion of mitigation activities.

Eelgrass warrants a strong protection strategy because of the important biological, physical, and economic values it provides, as well as its importance to managed species under the MSA. NMFS developed this policy to establish and support a goal of protecting this resource and its functions, including spatial coverage and density of eelgrass beds. Further, it is the intent of this policy to ensure that there is no net loss of habitat functions associated with delays in establishing compensatory mitigation. This is to be accomplished by creating a greater amount of eelgrass than is lost, if the mitigation is performed contemporaneously or after the impacts occur.

This policy will serve as the guidance for staff and managers within NMFS SWR for developing recommendations concerning eelgrass issues through EFH and FWCA consultations and NEPA reviews throughout California. It is also contemplated that this policy inform SWR's position on eelgrass issues in other roles as a responsible, advisory, or funding agency or trustee. In addition, this document provides guidance on the procedures developed to assist NMFS SWR in performing its consultative role under the statutes described above. Finally, pursuant to NMFS obligation to provide information to federal agencies under section 305(b)(1)(D) of the MSA, this policy serves that role by providing information intended to further the conservation and enhancement of EFH. Should this policy be inconsistent with any formally-promulgated NMFS regulations, those formally-promulgated regulations will supplant any inconsistent provisions of this policy.

While many of the activities impacting eelgrass are similar across California, eelgrass stressors and growth characteristics differ between southern California (U.S./Mexico border to Pt. Conception), central California (Point Conception to San Francisco Bay entrance), San Francisco Bay, and northern California (San Francisco Bay to the California/Oregon border). The amount of scientific information available to base management decisions on also differs among areas within California, with considerably more information and history with eelgrass habitat management in southern California than the other regions. Gaps in region-specific scientific information do not override the need to be protective of all eelgrass while relying on the best information currently available from areas within and outside of California. Although the primary orientation of this

policy is toward statewide use, specific elements of this policy may differ between southern California, central California, northern California and San Francisco Bay.

This policy is consistent with NMFS support for developing comprehensive resource protection strategies that are protective of eelgrass resources within the context of broader ecosystem needs and management objectives. As such, this policy provides for the modified application of policy elements for plans that provide comparable eelgrass resource protection.

For all of California, eelgrass compensatory mitigation should be considered only after avoidance and minimization of effects to eelgrass have been pursued to the fullest extent possible. Mitigation should be recommended for the loss of existing vegetated areas and the loss of unvegetated areas that have been demonstrated capable of supporting eelgrass based on recent history of eelgrass investigations, unless physical manipulation of the environment has permanently altered site suitability for eelgrass or a change in the baseline has occurred.

Under this policy, as is the case with the present Southern California Eelgrass Mitigation Policy, the burden for successful mitigation rests with the action party. As such, the action party should fully consider and evaluate the costs and risks associated with eelgrass mitigation and should take appropriate measures to ensure success in achieving required performance milestones. While NMFS staff can provide technical assistance, action parties are advised that they are ultimately responsible for achieving mitigation success under this policy, irrespective of advice or technical assistance provided by NMFS, other agencies, or technical experts.

Authority

The authorities for publication of this policy notification are the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1855), the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (16 U.S.C. 661), and the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321).

Dated: March 5, 2012.

Brian T. Pawlak,

Acting Director, Office of Habitat Conservation, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XB072

North Pacific Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of meetings of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Implementation Team.

SUMMARY: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) IFQ Implementation Team will meet March 26, 2012 in Anchorage, AK.

DATES: The meeting will be held on March 26, 2012, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Anchorage Hilton Hotel, 500 West 3rd Avenue, King Salmon/Illiamna Room, Anchorage, AK.

Council address: North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 605 W. 4th Ave., Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501-2252.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jane DiCosimo, Council staff; telephone: (907) 271-2809.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Team will review the discussion papers on Vessel Monitoring System requirement and a discussion paper on proposed changes to the Halibut and sablefish IFQ Program.

The Agenda posted at <http://www.alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/npfmc/>.

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 this meeting. 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.

Special Accommodations

The meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Gail Bendixen at (907) 271-2809 at least 7 working days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: March 6, 2012.

Tracey L. Thompson,

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

[FR Doc. 2012-5795 Filed 3-8-12; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XB073

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 Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), on March 28, 2012, 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 Wednesday, March 28, 2012 at 8 a.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Providence Biltmore Hotel, 11 Dorrance Street, Providence, RI 02903; telephone: (401) 421-0700; fax: (401) 455-3050.

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.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

The NEFMC's Scientific and Statistical Committee will:

- Review the paper, "An Investigation of Differences Amongst SCAA and ASAP Assessment (including Reference Point) Estimates for Gulf of Maine Cod" by Dr. Butterworth and Rebecca Rademeyer and advise the Council on its applicability to management reference points and stock assessments for Gulf of Maine cod;
- Discuss the performance of projections for groundfish stocks based on the February 2012 groundfish assessment updates;
- Review assessments and develop ABC recommendations for the Council for redfish, Georges Bank haddock, Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank windowpane flounder, Southern New England/Mid-

Atlantic windowpane flounder, ocean pout, wolffish and halibut; and
d. Other business may be discussed.

The public is invited to participate in the SSC meeting via webinar. For online access to the meeting, please reserve your webinar seat now at <https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/45053222>.

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 this meeting. 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 Paul J. Howard, Executive Director, at (978) 465-0492, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

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

Dated: March 6, 2012.

Tracey L. Thompson,

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

[FR Doc. 2012-5740 Filed 3-8-12; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XB071

North Pacific Fishery Management Council; Public Meetings

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

ACTION: Notice of meetings of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and its advisory committees.

SUMMARY: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and its advisory committees will hold public meetings, March 26 through April 3, 2012.

DATES: The meetings will be held March 26 through April 3, 2012. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for specific dates and times.

ADDRESSES: The meetings will be held at the Anchorage Hilton Hotel, 500 West 3rd Avenue, Anchorage, AK.

Council address: North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 605 W. 4th Avenue, Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501-2252.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

David Witherell, Council staff; telephone: (907) 271-2809.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Council will begin its plenary session at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, March 28 continuing through Tuesday, April 1. Council's Advisory Panel (AP) will begin at 8 a.m., Monday, March 26 and continue through Friday, March 30. The Scientific Statistical Committee (SSC) will begin at 8 a.m. on Monday, March 26 and continue through Wednesday, March 28. The Halibut Implementation Committee will meet March 26 at 4 p.m. The Ecosystem Committee will meet March 27, 9 a.m.-12 p.m. The Enforcement Committee will meet March 27 at 1 p.m.-4 p.m. All meetings are open to the public, except executive sessions.

Council Plenary Session: The agenda for the Council's plenary session will include the following issues. The Council may take appropriate action on any of the issues identified.

Reports:

- Executive Director's Report
NMFS Management Report (incl. report on observer program implementation)
Alaska Department of Fish & Game Report
NOAA Enforcement Report
United States Coast Guard Report
United States Fish & Wildlife Service Report
Protected Species Report (including review of Steller Sea Lion (SSL) Notice of Intent for Environmental Impact Statement)

- Cooperative Reports: Receive Amendment 80 Cooperative Reports; Receive Central Gulf of Alaska (CGOA) Rockfish Cooperative Reports; Receive American Fisheries Act (AFA) Pollock Cooperative and Incentive Program Agreements (IPA) Reports.

- Bering Sea Aleutian Island (BSAI) Chum Salmon Bycatch: Update on salmon genetics (T); Initial review of chum salmon bycatch measures.

- Habitat Conservation Issues: Initial Review of Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) skate sites; Final action on Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Flatfish Trawl Sweep Modification; Review Bering Sea (BS) Habitat Conservation Area boundary; Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultation criteria: Ecosystem Committee Report.