

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 660**

[Docket No. 130717633–3633–01]

RIN 0648–XC772

Fisheries Off West Coast States; Coastal Pelagic Species Fisheries; Annual Specifications

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

ACTION: Proposed rule.

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes to implement the annual catch limit (ACL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), annual catch target (ACT) and associated annual reference points for Pacific mackerel in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off the Pacific coast for the fishing season of July 1, 2013, through June 30, 2014. This rule is proposed according to the Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The proposed 2013–2014 ACL for Pacific mackerel is 52,358 metric tons (mt). The proposed ACT, which will be the directed fishing harvest target, is 39,268 mt. If the fishery attains the ACT, the directed fishery will close, reserving the difference between the ACL and ACT (which is 13,089 mt) as a set aside for incidental landings in other CPS fisheries and other sources of mortality. This rule is intended to conserve and manage the Pacific mackerel stock off the U.S. West Coast.

DATES: Comments must be received by October 18, 2013.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this document identified by NOAA–NMFS–2013–0135 by any of the following methods:

- *Electronic Submissions:* Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to www.regulations.gov

- *Web:* Go to www.regulations.gov#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2013-0135, click the “Comment Now!” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- *Mail:* Submit written comments to Rodney R. McInnis, Regional Administrator, Southwest Region, NMFS, 501 West Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA 90802.

- *Fax:* (562) 980–4047.

Instructions: Comments must be submitted by one of the above methods to ensure that the comments are received, documented, and considered by NMFS. Comments sent by any other

method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.) submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word or Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

Copies of the report “Pacific Mackerel (*Scomber japonicus*) Stock Assessment for USA Management in the 2011–12 Fishing Year” which was updated for this fishing season using a catch-only projection estimate may be obtained from the Southwest Regional Office (see **ADDRESSES**).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Joshua Lindsay, Southwest Region, NMFS, (562) 980–4034.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: During public meetings each year, the estimated biomass for Pacific mackerel is presented to the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s (Council) Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Management Team (Team), the Council’s CPS Advisory Subpanel (Subpanel) and the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), where the biomass and the status of the fisheries are reviewed and discussed. The biomass estimate is then presented to the Council along with the calculated overfishing limit (OFL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), annual catch limit (ACL) and annual catch target (ACT) recommendations and comments from the Team, Subpanel and SSC. Following review by the Council and after hearing public comment, the Council adopts a biomass estimate and makes its catch level recommendations to NMFS.

The purpose of this proposed rule is to implement the 2013/2014 ACL, ACT and other annual catch reference points, including OFL and an ABC that takes into consideration uncertainty surrounding the current estimate of biomass, for Pacific mackerel in the U.S. EEZ off the Pacific coast. The CPS FMP and its implementing regulations require NMFS to set these annual catch levels for the Pacific mackerel fishery based on the annual specification framework in the FMP. For the 2013/

2014 fishing season the ACL is set equal to the result of the ABC calculation. This formula is:

$ABC = \text{Biomass} * \text{Buffer} * F_{MSY} *$
Distribution with the parameters described as follows:

1. *Biomass.* The estimated stock biomass of Pacific mackerel for the 2013–2014 management season is 272,932 mt.

2. *Buffer.* Used to address uncertainty in the OFL. For the 2013–2014 fishing season the buffer value is 0.913496. This is based on the Council’s recommendation of a P^* of 0.45 and the SSC recommended sigma of 0.72. The sigma for this year is double that used for previous years due to a higher level of uncertainty in the biomass estimate.

3. F_{MSY} . The fishing mortality rate at maximum sustainable yield (MSY) is set to 0.30.

4. *Distribution.* The average portion (currently 70%) of the total Pacific mackerel biomass that is estimated to be in the U.S. EEZ off the Pacific coast.

At the June 2013 Council meeting, the Council recommended management measures for the Pacific mackerel fishery. These management measures and catch specifications are based on the control rules established in the CPS FMP and a biomass estimate of 272,932 mt (the result of a full stock assessment that was completed in 2011 and updated based on a projection estimate for 2013). This biomass estimate was reviewed and approved by the SSC as the best available science for use in management. Based on recommendations from the Council’s SSC and other advisory bodies, the Council recommended and NOAA Fisheries (NMFS) is proposing, an OFL of 57,316 mt, an ABC of 52,358 mt, an ACL 52,358 and an ACT of 39,268 mt for the 2013–2014 Pacific mackerel fishing season. The Pacific mackerel fishing season runs from July 1 to June 30 of the following year.

Amendment 13 (“ACL” amendment) to the CPS FMP established a framework that sets the ACL equal to the calculated ABC (reduced from OFL for scientific uncertainty) or the result of the harvest guideline (HG) equation (maximum quota prior to Amendment 13), whichever value is less. This is the first time in the two years since implementation of Amendment 13 that the ACL (maximum directed fishing quota) is based on the ABC as opposed to the HG; which for 2013 was calculated to be 53,494 mt.

If the ACT is attained, the directed fishery will close, and the difference between the ACL and ACT (13,089 mt) will be reserved as a set aside for

incidental landings in other CPS fisheries and other sources of mortality. In that event, incidental harvest measures will be in place for the remainder of the fishing year, including a 45 percent incidental catch allowance when Pacific mackerel are landed with other CPS. In other words, no more than 45 percent by weight of the CPS landed per trip may be Pacific mackerel, except that up to 1 mt of Pacific mackerel could be landed without landing any other CPS. Upon the fishery attaining the ACL/ABC (52,358 mt), no vessels in CPS fisheries may retain Pacific mackerel. The purpose of the incidental set-aside and allowance of an incidental fishery is to allow for the restricted incidental landings of Pacific mackerel in other fisheries, particularly other CPS fisheries, when the directed fishery is closed to reduce potential discard of Pacific mackerel and allow for continued prosecution of other important CPS fisheries.

The NMFS Southwest Regional Administrator will publish a notice in the **Federal Register** announcing the date of any closure to either directed or incidental fishing. Additionally, to ensure the regulated community is informed of any closure NMFS will also make announcements through other means available, including fax, email, and mail to fishermen, processors, and state fishery management agencies.

Detailed information on the fishery and the stock assessment are found in the report "Pacific Mackerel (*Scomber japonicus*) Stock Assessment for USA Management in the 2011–12 Fishing Year" (see **ADDRESSES**).

Classification

Pursuant to section 304(b)(1)(A) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the NMFS Assistant Administrator has determined that this proposed rule is consistent with the CPS FMP, other provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and other applicable law, subject to further consideration after public comment.

These proposed specifications are exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Pursuant to the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), 5 U.S.C. 605(b), the Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration that this proposed rule, if adopted, would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities, for the reasons as follows:

The purpose of this proposed rule is to implement the 2013–2014 annual specifications for Pacific mackerel in the U.S. EEZ off the Pacific coast. The CPS FMP and its implementing regulations require NMFS to set an OFL, ABC, and ACL for the Pacific mackerel fishery based on the harvest control rules in the FMP. These specific harvest control rules are applied to the current stock biomass estimate to derive these annual catch limits, which is used to manage the commercial take of Pacific mackerel.

On June 20, 2013, the Small Business Administration (SBA) issued a final rule revising the small business size standards for several industries effective July 22, 2013 (78 FR 37398). The rule increased the size standard for Finfish Fishing from \$ 4.0 to 19.0 million, Shellfish Fishing from \$ 4.0 to 5.0 million, and Other Marine Fishing from \$4.0 to 7.0 million. 78 FR 37398, 37400 (See Table 1). NMFS conducted its analysis for this action in light of the new size standards.

As stated above, the U.S. Small Business Administration now defines small businesses engaged in finfish fishing as those vessels with annual revenues of or below \$19 million. Under the former, lower size standards, all entities subject to this action in previous years were considered small entities, and under the new standards they all would continue to be considered small.

The small entities that would be affected by the proposed action are the vessels that compose the West Coast CPS finfish fleet. Pacific mackerel harvest is one component of CPS fisheries off the U.S. West Coast, which primarily includes the fisheries for Pacific sardine, northern anchovy and market squid. Pacific mackerel are principally caught off southern California within the limited entry portion (south of 39 degrees N. latitude; Point Arena, California) of the fishery. Fifty-eight vessels are currently permitted in the Federal CPS limited entry fishery off California. The average annual per vessel revenue in 2012 for the West Coast CPS finfish fleet was well below \$19 million; therefore, all of these vessels are considered small businesses under the RFA. Because each affected vessel is a small business, this proposed rule has an equal effect on all of these small entities, and therefore will impact a substantial number of these small entities in the same manner.

The profitability of these vessels as a result of this proposed rule is based on the average Pacific mackerel ex-vessel price per mt. NMFS used average Pacific mackerel ex-vessel price per mt to conduct a profitability analysis because cost data for the harvesting operations of

CPS finfish vessels was limited or unavailable. For the 2012–2013 fishing year the maximum directed fishing quota was 40,514 mt and was divided into a directed fishery (or ACT) of 30,386 mt and an incidental fishery of 10,128 mt. Approximately 5,488 mt of this HG was harvested in 2012–2013 fishing season with an estimated ex-vessel value of approximately \$1.1 million. Using these figures, the average 2012–2013 ex-vessel price per mt of Pacific mackerel was approximately \$200.

The proposed ACL (maximum fishing level) for the 2013–2014 Pacific mackerel fishing season is 52,358 mt, with a directed fishing harvest target or ACT of 39,268 mt. This season's directed fishing target is approximately 23% greater than the previous year. If the fleet were to take the entire 2013–2014 ACT, and assuming a coastwide average ex-vessel price per mt of \$220 (average of 2011 and 2012 ex-vessel), the potential revenue to the fleet would be approximately \$8.6 million.

However, this result will depend greatly on market forces within the fishery, and on the regional availability of the resource to the fleet and the fleets' ability to find schools of Pacific mackerel. The annual average U.S. Pacific mackerel harvest from 2002 to 2012 is approximately 4,300 mt, and over those last 10 years has not exceeded 8,000 mt. As a result, it is unlikely that the ACT proposed in this rule will limit the potential profitability to the fleet from catching Pacific mackerel. Accordingly, vessels' profits are not expected to be altered as a result of this rule as it relates to recent catches in the fishery and the previous season's regulation.

Based on the disproportionality and profitability analysis above, this rule, if adopted, will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of these small entities. As a result, an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis is not required, and none has been prepared.

There are no reporting, record-keeping, or other compliance requirements required by this proposed rule. Additionally, no other Federal rules duplicate, overlap or conflict with this proposed rule.

This action does not contain a collection-of-information requirement for purposes of the Paper Reduction Act.

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

Dated: September 11, 2013.

Samuel D. Rauch III,

*Deputy Assistant Administrator for
Regulatory Programs, Performing the
functions and duties of the Assistant
Administrator for Fisheries, National Marine
Fisheries Service.*

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