

changes to the amount of the quotas assigned to each state and removal of the Federal for-hire component from the EFP. The applications are considered together in this notice because they each would require a portion of the private-angling and Federal for-hire quotas; however, each application is independent and will be considered individually as part of the overall recreational management of Gulf red snapper.

Final decisions on issuance of the EFPs will depend on a NMFS review of public comments received on the applications, consultations with the affected states, the Council, and the U.S. Coast Guard, and a determination that each is consistent with all applicable laws.

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

Dated: March 7, 2018.

Emily H. Menashes,

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

[FR Doc. 2018-04859 Filed 3-9-18; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XG038

Endangered Species; File No. 19496-01

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

ACTION: Notice; receipt of application for a permit modification.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that Mariana Fuentes, Ph.D., Florida State University, 581 Oakland Avenue, Tallahassee, FL 32301, has requested a modification to scientific research Permit No. 19496.

DATES: Written, telefaxed, or email comments must be received on or before April 11, 2018.

ADDRESSES: The modification request and related documents are available for review by selecting "Records Open for Public Comment" from the Features box on the Applications and Permits for Protected Species (APPS) home page, <https://apps.nmfs.noaa.gov>, and then selecting File No. 19496 Mod 1 from the list of available applications. These documents are also available upon written request or by appointment in the Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705,

Silver Spring, MD 20910; phone (301) 427-8401; fax (301) 713-0376.

Written comments on this application should be submitted to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, at the address listed above. Comments may also be submitted by facsimile to (301) 713-0376, or by email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov. Please include the File No. in the subject line of the email comment.

Those individuals requesting a public hearing should submit a written request to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division at the address listed above. The request should set forth the specific reasons why a hearing on this application would be appropriate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Erin Markin or Amy Hapeman, (301) 427-8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The subject modification to Permit No. 19496, issued on June 16, 2016 (81 FR 1621), is requested under the authority of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) and the regulations governing the taking, importing, and exporting of endangered and threatened species (50 CFR parts 222-226).

Permit No. 19496 authorizes the permit holder to take loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*), green (*Chelonia mydas*), and hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) sea turtles for scientific research in the Florida Big Ben Region to identify important foraging and developmental habitats. The permit holder requests authorization to: (1) Add a new location to include the area from St. Lucie Inlet to Jupiter Inlet on the east coast of Florida, and (2) increase the number of green, Kemp's ridley, and loggerhead sea turtles that may be taken under the permit for the new location. Annually an additional 120 green, 48 loggerhead, and 3 Kemp's ridley sea turtles would be approached by vessel and pursued for capture. Additionally, up to 120 green, 48 loggerhead, and 3 Kemp's ridley sea turtles would be captured by hand or using dip, strike, or tangle nets, annually. All captured sea turtles would be tagged (passive integrated transponder and flipper), marked (temporarily), biologically sampled (tissue and blood), measured, weighed, and photographed. Up to 10 green and five loggerhead captured sea turtles also would receive a satellite transmitter (epoxy attachment) and biologically sampled (scute biopsy) prior to release.

Dated: March 6, 2018.

Julia Harrison,

Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2018-04830 Filed 3-9-18; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XF914

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic; Exempted Fishing Permit

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

ACTION: Notice of receipt of an application for an exempted fishing permit; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces the receipt of an application for an exempted fishing permit (EFP) from Clean Ocean Initiative, Inc. (Clean Ocean). If granted, the EFP would authorize Clean Ocean to fish for and retain Caribbean prohibited corals collected from 10 decommissioned submarine telecommunication cables being retrieved from U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters in the Caribbean off of Puerto Rico.

DATES: Comments must be received no later than March 27, 2018.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on the application by either of the following methods:

- **Email:** Sarah.Stephenson@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line of the email comment the following document identifier: "CLEAN OCEAN_EFP 2018".
- **Mail:** Sarah Stephenson, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

The application and related documents are available for review upon written request to any of the above addresses. All comments received, including all voluntarily submitted personal identifying information (*e.g.*, name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information, are part of the public record. NMFS will accept anonymous comments.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sarah Stephenson, telephone: 727-824-5305, email: Sarah.Stephenson@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The EFP is requested under the authority of the

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*), and regulations at 50 CFR 600.745(b) concerning exempted fishing.

This action involves activity covered by regulations implementing the Fishery Management Plan for Corals and Reef Associated Plants and Invertebrates of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (FMP). The proposed application for exempted fishing involves activity that would otherwise be prohibited by regulations at 50 CFR part 622, as they pertain to coral and invertebrate FMP species managed by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Council). The EFP would exempt this activity from Federal regulations at § 622.472(b) (Caribbean prohibited coral). See 50 CFR 622.2 defining Caribbean prohibited coral and Appendix A to part 622.

Submarine telecommunication cables have been deployed throughout the U.S. EEZ in the Caribbean for many years and these cables may act as substrate for organisms to use as benthic habitat, such as corals and invertebrates. The applicant requests authorization to collect and retain prohibited coral, excluding Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species, from 10 decommissioned submarine telecommunication cables as they are being retrieved from waters in the U.S. EEZ off Puerto Rico. The applicant has been permitted by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Antilles Section, to retrieve these decommissioned submarine cables in territorial and U.S. EEZ off Puerto Rico waters. The EFP would only apply to coral collection and retention activities in Federal waters.

As part of an overall effort to remove decommissioned submarine cables, Clean Ocean would identify additional submarine cables in the U.S. EEZ off Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands for possible future removal. If the applicant identifies any additional cables that could be removed, NMFS expects Clean Ocean will submit an additional application for an EFP authorizing coral collection and retention activities similar to those described herein.

The 10 cables from which the applicant is proposing to collect corals and invertebrates in its EFP application were deployed between 1874 and 1963 and have been inactive since 1986. Cable routes initiate in Puerto Rico and extend across the Caribbean basin, terminating in the Dominican Republic, Turks and Caicos, Antigua, or Florida. Activities permitted under the EFP would initiate at the inner boundary of

the U.S. EEZ off Puerto Rico and terminate at the outer boundary of the U.S. EEZ, with an estimated minimum starting depth of 1,000 ft (305 m). Total lengths of the cables to be salvaged in territorial and Federal waters range from 41 nautical miles (nmi) to 172 nmi, and the total estimated length to be retrieved from all 10 decommissioned cables is 947 nmi. The portion of the cable retrieved in Federal waters, from which the applicant seeks to collect and retain prohibited corals under an EFP, is unknown, but represents a smaller portion of this total length. As described in the application, the proposed activities would be expected to take up to 18 months and any EFP would be valid for up to 18 months from date of issuance.

Before cable retrieval activities commence, the applicant is proposing to conduct benthic surveys to identify and record the presence of coral species and other species (sponges, mollusks, anemones, etc.) along each cable corridor. These surveys would be conducted via a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) operated from a 115-ft (35 m) survey vessel. The ROV would remove as many organisms as possible from the cable and transplant them to the surrounding area, ensuring adequate distance from the cable so they are not impacted during the cable recovery phase. The ROV would not bring organisms to the surface but would instead relocate those organisms at depth. If there are too many organisms on a particular section of cable to effectively relocate them by ROV, or if the organisms are too large or too small to relocate, the ROV would not remove and transplant them. Instead, for those sections of cable with large organisms or dense aggregations, the ROV would cut the submarine cable on either side of these organisms and that section would remain on the bottom with organisms attached. Sections of cable with organisms that are too small to be removed and transplanted would be retrieved during the cable recovery phase.

Once the benthic surveys and any organism relocations are complete, the ROV would then locate the cable retrieval start point and prepare the cable for retrieval. The cables would be retrieved through the use of a 275-ft (84-m) pipe lay barge. As each cable is being retrieved, any attached coral and invertebrates remaining on the cable would be removed onboard the barge using a specialized funnel fitted around the cable. Resultant specimens would be deposited into a collection container monitored by Clean Ocean's marine biologist. Species information and

measurements of all collected organisms would be recorded, and corals and invertebrates selected for further study would be identified. Those specimens selected for further study would be placed in a controlled aquatic storage area onboard the survey vessel and any remaining specimens would be returned to the water from the barge as soon as possible with as little harm practicable. Retained specimens would be transferred to Clean Ocean's Coral Research Center in Ponce, Puerto Rico, and made available to scientists and graduate students for the study of their taxonomy, growth, behavior, and genetics.

The EFP would allow Clean Ocean to harvest and possess non-ESA-listed corals from Federal waters for which harvest is otherwise prohibited. The majority of the operations under the EFP would occur at depths where there is little to no light penetration; thus, any corals anticipated to be encountered on the cables would be deep-water species. Cable diameters depend on the type of cable, fiber optic or coaxial, and range from 1.75 to 3 inches (4.4–7.6 cm). Deep-water corals tend to grow at a slow rate, but these submarine cables have been on the bottom for over 50 years, providing adequate time for early settlers to grow to a substantial size. Clean Ocean conducted preliminary benthic surveys of its cable retrieval operations, in territorial waters at depths from 100 to 250 ft (30.5 to 76.2 m), to evaluate organisms and habitats along the cable corridors. Based on those initial results, Clean Ocean expects that most of the cable lengths to be retrieved are submerged under the sand and have few, if any, organisms attached. Moreover, given the operating depths for the activities under the proposed EFP, which occur in deeper Federal waters, it is not expected that the applicant would encounter any ESA-listed corals. Finally, the USACE conditioned the permits for the cable retrieval so that those activities, which start in shallower territorial waters, occur at depths where ESA-listed corals are not expected to occur.

In addition to non-ESA listed corals, federally managed aquarium trade species, including sponges, anemones, polychaete worms, feather stars, and tunicates, could potentially be collected during the proposed activities. Aquarium trade species are managed in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ under an annual catch limit (ACL) of 8,155 lb (3,699 kg), round weight. The ROV would be expected to remove most organisms from the cable prior to cable retrieval commences, and it is unlikely that the amount of organism fragments

remaining attached to the cable, collected onboard the barge, and selected for further study would contribute substantially to the landings quota against which the aquarium trade species ACL is compared. As part of the permit conditions, NMFS intends to limit the amount of aquarium trade species to be retained by Clean Ocean during the proposed activities. Clean Ocean personnel will be trained and prepared to prevent damage to sensitive areas and a marine biologist will be onboard at all times to identify and report any sensitive environmental resources and to stop operations if necessary.

NMFS finds this application warrants further consideration, based on a preliminary review. In addition to the above, possible conditions the agency may impose on this permit, if it is granted, include but are not limited to, requiring Clean Ocean to submit monthly reports on the amount of coral and aquarium trade species collected, and to announce at least daily the present and following week's anticipated start and stop locations via VHF channel 16 to allow fishers time to relocate their gear and avoid trap-cable interactions.

A final decision on issuance of the EFP will depend on NMFS' review of public comments received on the application, consultations with the affected state(s), the Council, and the U.S. Coast Guard, and a determination that it is consistent with all applicable laws.

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

Dated: March 6, 2018.

Emily H. Menashes,

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

[FR Doc. 2018-04842 Filed 3-9-18; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XG074

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 Groundfish Advisory Panel 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 Monday, March 26, 2018 at 9:30 a.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Hilton Garden Inn Logan Airport, 100 Boardman Street, Boston, MA 02129; phone: (617) 561-0798.

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

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council; telephone: (978) 465-0492.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Agenda

The Advisory Panel will provide recommendations to the Groundfish Committee on Groundfish Monitoring Amendment 23 specifically the draft alternatives and Plan Development Team (PDT) work related to development of the action. They will also discuss priorities for 2018 and the PDT work to date and make recommendations to the Groundfish Committee. Other business will be discussed as necessary.

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 these meetings. 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 Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director, at 978-465-0492, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date. This meeting will be recorded. Consistent with 16 U.S.C. 1852, a copy of the recording is available upon request.

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

Dated: March 7, 2018.

Tracey L. Thompson,

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

[FR Doc. 2018-04870 Filed 3-9-18; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XG080

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 Skate Advisory Panel 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, 2018 at 9 a.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Hilton Garden Inn, 100 Boardman Street, Boston, MA 02128; telephone: (617) 567-6789.

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

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council; telephone: (978) 465-0492.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Agenda

The Advisory Panel will review draft alternatives to prolong the wing fishery, which may include adjusting the management uncertainty buffer, and changes to the incidental possession limit and its trigger. They will also recommend preferred alternatives for Framework 6 to the Committee. Other business will be discussed as necessary.

Although non-emergency issues not contained on this agenda may come before this Council for discussion, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during this meeting. Council 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. This meeting will be recorded. Consistent with 16