

Fishing for pollock under this EFP would be required to cease should the pollock or POP limits be attained.

Any salmon bycatch will be counted against the prohibited species catch (PSC) cap for the AI pollock fishery. Any incidental catch of non-pollock species will be counted against the optimum yield for that species. All catch will be retained for weighing and secondary sampling at the processing plant.

#### Exemptions

Two exemptions are necessary to conduct this experiment. First, an exemption would be necessary from MRA requirements at § 679.20(e)(ii). The participating AFA CVs and non-AFA CVs less than 60 ft LOA fishing for AI pollock under the Aleut Corporation's permit would be exempted from the 5 percent MRA limit for POP in the pollock fishery. This exemption would apply from the date the 2019 final harvest specifications are effective until April 15, 2019 and again during the same time period in 2020. Harvest specifications may be found at <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/>.

Second would be an exemption from § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(B)(4) that applies to halibut PSC bycatch management and PSC limits for rockfish trawl fisheries in the BSAI. POP is a type of rockfish. While this EFP is not targeting POP directly, allowing participating vessels to retain POP above the 5 percent MRA may put them into the range of POP in the directed POP fishery. The directed POP fishery in the AI for vessels less than 60 ft LOA does not open until April 15 to limit halibut bycatch. Because vessels fishing under this EFP would be operating before that April 15 date, those vessels would be exempt from the halibut PSC limit applicable to directed fishing for POP in the BSAI.

#### Permit Conditions, Review, and Effects

The applicant would be required to submit to NMFS an interim report of the EFP results by November 30, 2019, and a final report by November 30, 2020. The report would include all data from this experimental fishery, including the catch and position data.

The activities that would be conducted under this EFP are not expected to have a significant impact on the human environment, as detailed in the categorical exclusion prepared for this action (see **ADDRESSES**).

In accordance with § 679.6, NMFS has determined that the application warrants further consideration and has forwarded the application to the Council to initiate consultation. The Council is scheduled to consider the

EFP application during its December 2018 meeting, which will be held at the Hilton Hotel, Anchorage, AK. The EFP application will also be provided to the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee for review at the December Council meeting. The applicant has been invited to appear in support of the application.

#### Public Comments

Interested persons may comment on the application at the December 2018 Council meeting during public testimony or until December 11, 2018 when the 15-day comment period ends. Information regarding the meeting is available at the Council's website at <http://www.npfmc.org>. Copies of the application and categorical exclusion are available for review from NMFS (see **ADDRESSES**). Comments also may be submitted directly to NMFS (see **ADDRESSES**) by the end of the comment period (see **DATES**).

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

Dated: November 15, 2018.

**Karen H. Abrams,**

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

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

**RIN 0648-XG634**

#### New England Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

**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, NEFMC) will hold a three-day meeting to consider actions affecting New England fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

**DATES:** The meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 4, 2018 through Thursday, December 6, 2018, beginning at 9 a.m. on December 4 and 8:30 a.m. on December 5 and 6.

#### **ADDRESSES:**

**Meeting address:** The meeting will be held at Hotel Viking, One Bellevue Avenue, Newport, RI 02840; telephone: (508) 747-4900; online at [www.hotel1620.com](http://www.hotel1620.com).

**Council address:** New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water

Street, Mill 2, Newburyport, MA 01950; telephone: (978) 465-0492; [www.nefmc.org](http://www.nefmc.org).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council; telephone: (978) 465-0492, ext. 113.

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

#### **Agenda**

*Tuesday, December 4, 2018*

After introductions and brief announcements, the meeting will begin with reports from the Council Chairman and Executive Director, NMFS's Regional Administrator for the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO), liaisons from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, representatives from NOAA General Counsel and NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement, and staff from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. The Council then will hear a report summarizing the mid-October meeting of the Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas. This will be followed by a brief update on the Council's Research Set-Aside Program Review, which is ongoing. The Small-Mesh Multispecies (Whiting) Committee Report will be next. The Council will take final action on Amendment 22 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP), also known as the "Whiting Amendment." The Council first will review public hearing comments on the amendment and then decide whether or not to adopt a limited access program and related measures for small-mesh multispecies.

Following the lunch break, the Council will hear from its Enforcement Committee, which will provide recommendations and enforcement concerns related to: (1) The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan; (2) Atlantic cod discards; (3) the Codend Compliance Assistance Program; (4) the OMEGA Mesh Gauge; and (5) other issues. The Coast Guard will provide a short demonstration on use of the OMEGA gauge as part of this report. The Habitat Committee will be up next. During this segment, the Council will take final action on its Clam Dredge Framework, which contains alternatives to consider continued surfclam fishery access and potential mussel dredge access to the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area. As part of this report, the Enforcement Committee

will present its recommendations on the framework alternatives. Following the framework action, the Council will receive an update on offshore energy activities and consult on any timely issues. The Council then will adjourn for the day. Shortly following the conclusion of Council business, NMFS staff will hold a feedback session in the Council's meeting room to solicit suggestions for improving communication and utilization of results achieved by the Saltonstall-Kennedy (S-K) Grant Program.

*Wednesday, December 5, 2018*

The Council will begin the day with a NMFS presentation on the S-K Grant Program, which will include: An overview of the program; information on priority setting, funding, and proposal reviews; and an explanation of the decision-making process for issuing awards. The Council will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the S-K program. Next, the Council will receive a presentation on a project to measure the ecological, social, economic, and governance effects of catch shares in the groundfish fishery. The presentation will include a short demonstration on the use of 14 neutral, scientific indicators that can be used to measure the effects of catch shares. Then, the Council will receive a report on the November 19, 2018 meeting of the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel Working Group. The Groundfish Committee Report will follow. The Council will take final action on Framework Adjustment 58 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP, which includes: (1) 2019 total allowable catches for shared U.S./Canada stocks of Eastern Georges Bank cod, Eastern Georges Bank haddock, and Georges Bank yellowtail flounder; (2) rebuilding plans for Georges Bank winter flounder, Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder, witch flounder, Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank northern windowpane flounder, and ocean pout; (3) minimum size exemptions for vessels fishing in waters regulated by the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO); and (4) extension of a scallop fishery provision for triggering Georges Bank yellowtail flounder accountability measures. The Groundfish Committee Report also will include: An update on Groundfish Monitoring Amendment 23; and an update on work being conducted by the Fishery Data for Stock Assessment Working Group. Next, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will provide the Council with 2019–2020 overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations for

Atlantic sea scallops and 2019–2021 OFL and ABC recommendations for Atlantic herring.

After the lunch break, members of the public will have the opportunity to speak during an open comment period on issues that relate to Council business but are not included on the published agenda for this meeting. The Council asks the public to limit remarks to 3–5 minutes. Next, the Council will hear from its Scallop Committee and take final action on Framework Adjustment 30 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop FMP. The framework includes specifications for fishing year 2019, default specifications for 2020, and several standard default measures. Then, if available, the Council will review, discuss, and comment on NMFS's proposed rule to set Atlantic herring catch limits and other specifications for the 2019 fishing year. After that, the Council will receive a report on the Northeast Regional Coordinating Council's decisions for revising the stock assessment process and assessment scheduling. The Council then will adjourn for the day. Following the conclusion of Council business, NMFS staff will hold a second feedback session to solicit suggestions for improving communication and utilization of results achieved by the S-K Grant Program.

*Thursday, December 6, 2018*

The third day of the meeting will begin with a presentation on the Council's work on Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM). This will include two components: (1) A progress report on efforts to develop an example Fishery Ecosystem Plan (eFEP) framework for Georges Bank; and (2) a brief introduction into how Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) may be used for EBFM. Next, the Council will take final action on 2019–2021 fishing year specifications for spiny dogfish. Then, the Council will receive a report on the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology three-year review. Following this discussion, the Council will receive two whale-related reports, which will cover: (a) The October meeting of the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team; and (b) the November meeting of the Ropeless Consortium. Next, the Council will receive a presentation on GARFO's Fishery Dependent Data Initiative. NMFS annually reports to the Council on efforts by GARFO and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center to modernize fishery dependent data collection.

After the lunch break, the Council will discuss and take final action on 2019 priorities for all committees and Council responsibilities. After that, the

Council will discuss and make a decision on the future of its Research Steering Committee. The Council will close out the meeting with "other business."

Although non-emergency issues not contained on this agenda may come before the 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 Fishery Conservation and Management Act, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take final action to address the emergency. The public also should be aware that the meeting will be recorded. Consistent with 16 U.S.C. 1852, a copy of the recording is available upon request.

#### **Special Accommodations**

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Thomas A. Nies (see **ADDRESSES**) at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: November 15, 2018.

**Tracey L. Thompson,**

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

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## **DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

### **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**RIN 0648–XG631**

#### **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 Whiting Advisory Panel and Committee 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, December 3, 2018 at 1:30 p.m.