

Reduction of the GB Cod Trip Limit in the Closed Area II Haddock Special Access Program

The projection supporting the increase of the common pool possession and trip limits for GB cod is based on the assumption that the common pool fleet fishes primarily within the Western U.S./Canada area, outside of any Special Access Programs (SAPs), as it has done for several years. As described in 50 CFR 648.85(b), SAPs are established to authorize specific fisheries to allow increased yield of certain target stocks without undermining the achievement of the goals of the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. The Closed Area II Haddock SAP (CA2 SAP) has a limit of 1,000 lb (453.6 kg) per trip of GB cod, which is double the GB cod trip limit for common pool vessels not participating in the SAPs.

Under a worst-case scenario projection, the common pool fleet could take up to 12 trips within the CA2 SAP at 1,000 lb (453.6 kg) per trip. In this scenario, the common pool could potentially land the entire common pool Eastern GB cod sub-ACL of 11,500 lb (5.2 mt), and could substantially contribute to exceeding the entire common pool GB cod sub-ACL.

In order to avoid this worst case scenario that would contribute to the common pool exceeding its quotas, effective November 29, 2018, the trip limit of GB cod for common pool vessels participating in the CA2 SAP is set to 500 lb (226.8 kg) per trip. In addition, this change may help avoid confusion and facilitate enforcement by making the CA2 SAP GB cod trip limit consistent with other common pool limits for the stock.

Common pool groundfish vessels participating in the affected SAPs that have declared their trip through the vessel monitoring system (VMS) or interactive voice response system, and crossed the VMS demarcation line prior to November 29, 2018, are not subject new possession and trip limits for that trip.

Weekly quota monitoring reports for the common pool fishery can be found on our website at: <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/ro/fso/MultiMonReports.htm>. We will continue to monitor common pool catch through vessel trip reports, dealer-reported landings, VMS catch reports, and other available information and, if necessary, we will make additional adjustments to common pool management measures.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, finds good cause pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) and 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment and the 30-day delayed effectiveness period because it would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest.

The catch data used as the basis for this action only recently became available. The available analysis indicates that the increased possession and trip limit adjustments for GB cod will help the fishery achieve the optimum yield (OY) for this stock. Any delay in this action would limit the benefits to common pool vessels that this action is intended to provide.

The decrease in the CA2 SAP trip limit reduces the low likelihood of overages should vessels participate in the CA2 SAP. An overage of the common pool quota for this stock would undermine conservation objectives and trigger the implementation of accountability measures that could reduce available catch in the next fishing year, which would have negative economic impacts on the common pool fishery.

The time necessary to provide for prior notice and comment, and a 30-day delay in effectiveness, would keep NMFS from implementing the necessary possession and trip limit changes in a timely manner, which could prevent the fishery from achieving the OY and cause negative economic impacts to the common pool fishery.

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

Dated: November 26, 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

50 CFR Part 660

[Docket No. 171023999–8440–02]

RIN 0648–XG581

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; Fisheries Off West Coast States; Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery; 2018 Tribal Fishery Allocations for Pacific Whiting; Reapportionment Between Tribal and Non-tribal Sectors

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; reapportionment of tribal Pacific whiting allocation.

SUMMARY: This document announces the reapportionment of 40,000 metric tons of Pacific whiting from the tribal allocation to the non-tribal commercial fishery sectors via automatic action on September 24, 2018. This reapportionment is to allow full utilization of the Pacific whiting resource.

DATES: The reapportionment of Pacific whiting was applicable from 12 noon local time, September 24, 2018 through December 31, 2018. Comments will be accepted through December 17, 2018.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by NOAA–NMFS–2017–0160 by any of the following methods:

- **Electronic Submissions:** Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at www.regulations.gov/#/docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2017-0160. Click the “Comment Now!” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- **Mail:** Barry A. Thom, Regional Administrator, West Coast Region, NMFS, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115–0070, Attn: Miako Ushio.

Instructions: 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 by NMFS. All comments received are a part of the public record. All personal identifying information (*e.g.*, name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. 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, Excel, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Miako Ushio (West Coast Region, NMFS), phone: 206-526-4644 or email: miako.ushio@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Electronic Access

This document is accessible online at the Office of the Federal Register's website at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/home.action>. Background information and documents are available at NMFS' West Coast Region website at www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/management/whiting/pacific_whiting.html

Background

Pacific Whiting

Pacific whiting (*Merluccius productus*) is a very productive species with highly variable recruitment (the biomass of fish that mature and enter the fishery each year) and a relatively short life span when compared to other groundfish species. Pacific whiting has the largest annual allowable harvest levels (by volume) of the more than 90

groundfish species managed under the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), which governs the groundfish fishery off Washington, Oregon, and California. The coastwide Pacific whiting stock is managed jointly by the United States and Canada, and mature Pacific whiting are commonly available to vessels operating in U.S. waters from April through December. Background on the stock assessment, and the establishment of the 2018 Total Allowable Catch (TAC), for Pacific whiting was provided in the final rule for the 2018 Pacific whiting harvest specifications, published May 15, 2018 (83 FR 22401). Pacific whiting is allocated to the Pacific Coast treaty tribes (tribal fishery) and to three non-tribal commercial sectors: The catcher/processor cooperative (C/P Coop), the mothership cooperative (MS Coop), and the Shorebased Individual Fishery Quota (IFQ) Program.

This document announces the reapportionment of 40,000 metric tons (mt) of Pacific whiting from the tribal allocation to the non-tribal commercial sectors on September 24, 2018. Regulations at 50 CFR 660.131(h) contain provisions that allow the Regional Administrator to reapportion Pacific whiting from the tribal allocation, specified at 50 CFR 660.50,

that will not be harvested by the end of the fishing year to other sectors.

Pacific Whiting Reapportionment

For 2018, the Pacific Coast treaty tribes were allocated 77,251 mt of Pacific whiting. The best available information on September 24, 2018, indicated that less than 5,000 mt of the 2018 allocation had been harvested, and at least 40,000 mt of the tribal allocation would not be harvested by December 31, 2018. To allow for increased utilization of the resource, on September 24, 2018, NMFS reapportioned 40,000 mt from the Tribal sector to the Shorebased IFQ Program, C/P Coop, and MS Coop in proportion to each sector's original allocation. Reapportioning this amount is expected to allow for greater attainment of the TAC while not limiting tribal harvest opportunities for the remainder of the year. NMFS provided notice of the reapportionment on September 24, 2018, via emails sent directly to fishing businesses and individuals, and postings on the NMFS West Coast Region website. Reapportionment was effective the same day as the notice.

The amounts of Pacific whiting available for 2018 before and after the reapportionment are described in the table below.

Sector	Initial 2018 allocation (mt)	Final 2018 allocation (mt)
Tribal	77,251	37,251
C/P Coop	123,312	136,912
MS Coop	87,044	96,644
Shorebased IFQ Program	152,326.5	169,127

Classification

NOAA's Assistant Administrator for Fisheries (AA) finds that good cause exists for this notification to be issued without affording prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), because such notification would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest. As previously noted, NMFS provided actual notice of the reapportionment to fishery participants at the time of the action. Prior notice and opportunity for public comment on

this reapportionment was impracticable because NMFS had insufficient time to provide prior notice between the time the information about the progress of the fishery needed to make this determination became available and the time at which fishery modifications had to be implemented in order to allow fishers access to the available fish during the remainder of the fishing season. For the same reasons, the AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in effectiveness for these actions, required under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3).

These actions are authorized by §§ 660.55 (i), 660.60(d) and 660.131(h) and are exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.* and 16 U.S.C. 7001 *et seq.*

Dated: November 27, 2018.

Karen H. Abrams,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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