

initiate Framework Adjustment 32 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop FMP, which contains specifications for the 2020 fishing year, 2021 default specifications, and other measures. Third, the Council will review scoping comments for Amendment 21 to the Scallop FMP, which is being developed to address Northern Gulf of Maine Management Area issues, limited access general category (LAGC) possession limits, and LAGC individual fishing quota (IFQ) transfers. The Council will review goals and objectives for Amendment 21 at this meeting. Then, the Council will discuss the recent Research Set-Aside Program Review and receive input from both the Scallop and Herring Committees on the review panel's findings and recommendations. After that, the Council will adjourn for the day.

*Wednesday, June 12, 2019*

The Council will begin its morning session with a presentation from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Fishery Management and Research Division. The presentation will cover: (1) The division's role and responsibilities; (2) cooperative research activities; and (3) observer program updates. The Council then will receive a presentation from its Whiting PDT on causes and sources of high groundfish bycatch in the small-mesh multispecies (whiting) fishery based on an analysis of sea sampling data. Next, the Council will receive a report from a sub-panel of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) that was charged with reviewing the scientific validity of information and analyses for Amendment 23 to the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) FMP, which is being developed to improve groundfish monitoring. This discussion will flow into the Groundfish Committee Report. Here, the Council is scheduled to approve the range of alternatives for further analysis in Amendment 23. The Council also will initiate Framework Adjustment 59 to the Groundfish FMP, which includes: (1) 2020 total allowable catches for U.S./Canada stocks of Eastern Georges Bank cod, Eastern Georges Bank haddock, and Georges Bank yellowtail flounder; (2) 2020–22 specifications for all stocks; and (3) other measures as needed.

Following the lunch break, the Council will continue its groundfish discussion until all related business is concluded. Next, the Council will receive an update on potential strategies for addressing recreational fishing issues more effectively. This discussion will be followed by a GARFO briefing on the "Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2018," better known as the "Modern Fish Act."

The Council then will receive a presentation on new and revised electronic vessel reporting requirements for charter/headboat (for-hire) vessels with South Atlantic permits. NMFS Highly Migratory Species (HMS) issues will wrap up the afternoon. First, the Council will receive a presentation on a series of scoping meetings and public hearings being conducted by the HMS Division on four proposed management actions, which cover a number of bluefin tuna, shark, gear, quota system, and research issues. Next, the Council will receive a report on the HMS Advisory Panel's May 21–23, 2019 meeting, which will include input on the proposed NMFS HMS actions. Under this agenda item, the Council also will discuss bigeye tuna and yellowfin tuna management under the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) before adjourning for the day.

*Thursday, June 13, 2019*

The third day of the meeting will begin with a progress report from the Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM) Committee, which is developing an example Fishery Ecosystem Plan (eFEP) for Georges Bank. The Committee will provide updates on several components of the eFEP, including ones related to data and monitoring, incentive-based measures, and draft ecosystem forage fish management strategies. The report also will include a short overview of initial planning efforts for a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) related to ecosystem-based fishery management. The Monkfish Committee then will present two actions asking the Council to: (1) Initiate Framework Adjustment 12 to the Monkfish FMP, which includes 2020–22 specifications and any other needed measures; and (2) approve 2020–21 priorities for the Monkfish Research Set-Aside Program. Next, the Council will discuss the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Commercial Electronic Vessel Trip Reporting (eVTR) Omnibus Framework Action, which proposes to implement electronic VTRs for all vessels with commercial permits for species managed by the Mid-Atlantic Council. The New England Council's discussion will focus on two jointly managed species between the Councils, those being monkfish and spiny dogfish. The New England Council then will determine a path forward regarding commercial eVTRs in its own fisheries, including monkfish and dogfish, given the Mid-Atlantic Council's evolving action. Afterwards, GARFO will provide a presentation on the results of the

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team's April 23–26, 2019 meeting and discuss next steps for rulemaking.

Following the lunch break, the Council will take up the Skate Committee Report. The Council will initiate Framework Adjustment 8 to the Northeast Skate Complex FMP, which includes 2020–21 specifications and other measures if needed. Second, the Council will discuss Amendment 5 to the Skate FMP, which proposes to establish a limited access program for the skate wing and/or skate bait fisheries. Next, the Council will receive a presentation on the joint Northeast Fisheries Science Center and GARFO Regional Strategic Plan for 2020–23, which highlights collective priorities. Finally, 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**

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 (see **ADDRESSES**) at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: May 17, 2019.

**Rey Israel Marquez,**

*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–GAR–A003**

#### **Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Application for Exempted Fishing Permits**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** The NMFS Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Greater Atlantic Region, has made a preliminary determination that an exempted fishing permit application contains all of the required information and warrants further consideration. This exempted fishing permit would allow up to six commercial fishing vessels to use raised-footrope trawl gear to target small-mesh multispecies (silver and red hake) within Small Mesh Area 1 before the start of the open season. Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require publication of this notification to provide interested parties the opportunity to comment on applications for a proposed exempted fishing permit.

**DATES:** Comments must be received on or before June 6, 2019.

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit written comments by any of the following methods:

- *Email:* NMFS.GAR.EFP@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line “Comments on the Gloucester Fisheries Commission Whiting Exempted Fishery Study EFP.”
- *Mail:* Michael Pentony, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope “Gloucester

Fisheries Commission Exempted Fishery Study EFP.”

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Laura Hansen, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 281-9225.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Gloucester Fisheries Commission (GFC) submitted an application for an EFP on May 6, 2019. This EFP would allow up to 6 commercial fishing vessels to take up to 60 trips to fish for small-mesh multispecies within Small Mesh Area 1 (SMA1). The GFC asserts that SMA 1 is underutilized during the current season and that small-mesh multispecies stocks may be more prevalent and more effectively targeted within the area before the start of the July 15 opening of the exemption area. This study would provide data on catch rates of small-mesh multispecies and bycatch of regulated Northeast multispecies (and other species) to help evaluate the potential for opening SMA1 earlier.

The small-mesh multispecies fishery is open in SMA1 from July 15 through November 15. This EFP would allow the participating vessels to fish in SMA1 as early as June 1 through July 14, 2019. The exact start date may be after June 1, as some details of participation and monitoring resources are still being finalized. The length of each trip would be at the discretion of the vessel operators, consistent with normal commercial fishing practices. Fishing would not occur in any area closed to protect spawning groundfish.

Participating vessels would use a raised-footrope trawl with diamond mesh codends that have a mesh size of greater than 2.5 inches but less than 3 inches, consistent with 50 CFR 648.80(a)(9)(ii). Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) staff would inspect all gear prior to use to verify that it meets the required mesh size and gear specifications. Per regulation, this size mesh will allow participating vessels to retain up to 3,000 lb (3.4 mt) of whiting/offshore hake and 7,500 lb (1.4 mt) of red hake per trip. Participating vessels would also be exempt from the possession limits and minimum size requirements for biological sampling purposes only. All catch that is not retained for sale will be promptly returned to the sea.

A contracted observer or Northeast Fisheries Science Center staff would be on board all trips to collect data on catch composition, length and weight measurements, and operational data (location, weather, time, duration of tow, trawl speed, etc.).

The table below shows catch estimates for the project that are based on a similar study conducted by MA DMF, in 2016 and 2017. There is potential to catch up to 18 percent of the red hake total allowable landings (TAL) as part of this project which may be of concern to other fishermen that are not participating in the EFP.

TABLE 1—ESTIMATED CATCH FOR WHITING, RED HAKE, REGULATED GROUND FISH, AND OTHER SPECIES  
[Numbers in metric tons]

Species	Average catch/trip 2016	Average catch/trip 2017	Project average	Expected catch (60 trips)	Percent of quota
Northern Silver Hake .....	2.4	1.9	2.1	128.5	0.5
Northern Red Hake .....	0.9	0.8	0.8	50.2	* 18.0
Cod .....	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1	0.2	<0.1
Haddock .....	0.5	0.1	0.3	19.0	<0.1
American plaice .....	<0.1	0.1	0.1	3.2	<0.1
Herring .....	<0.1	0.9	0.5	27.5	<0.1
Yellowtail flounder .....	<0.1	0.1	<0.1	2.4	<0.1
Groundfish Excluding Haddock .....	0.1	0.1	0.1	6.8	

\* This number is the percent of the TAL for Northern red hake.

If approved, the applicant may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate completion of the proposed research and have minimal impact that does not change the scope of the initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of

the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

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

Dated: May 17, 2019.

**Jennifer M. Wallace,**  
*Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.*  
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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS®) Advisory Committee**

**AGENCY:** National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce.