

bottom trawl gear; (2) altering the northern boundary of Area B and splitting Area B into two areas (B1 and B2) to reduce the risk of catching cod closer to Jeffrey's Ledge; and (3) adding an Area C, which would provide additional access at a different time of year and for vessels from other ports.

Under this EFP, participating fishermen would conduct tows in targeted areas within GOM Cod Protection Closures I, II, and III, where industry-based groundfish surveys previously demonstrated low spawning cod density compared to other portions of the closure (Attachment). Vessels would submit trip notification to the Pre-Trip Notification System as usual. Vessels would only be allowed in targeted areas if they have a Northeast Fisheries Observer or At-sea Monitor aboard, or participate in an approved electronic monitoring program for the trip. Tows conducted within the targeted areas would be restricted to remain inside the area for the entire tow; however, vessels could make tows both inside and outside the target area on the same trip. Upon departure for a trip, vessels would notify a MA DMF project coordinator about intent to fish in the target areas. Up to 80 total tows would be conducted in Area A; up to 48 total tows would be conducted in Areas B1 and B2 combined; and up to 50 total tows would be conducted in Area C.

During all trips under the EFP, cod of all sizes caught in each tow conducted within the target areas would be kept round (not gutted), and isolated in separate totes with sealed and zip-tied lids. Cod caught in tows conducted outside the target areas would be handled consistent with standard fishing practices. Upon returning from a trip, vessels would contact MA DMF to meet them to sample target area-caught cod for sex and maturity. Additional sampling would be conducted to support the Northeast Fisheries Science Center conversion factor study. All catch would be accounted for consistent with standard fishing activities and applicable Annual Catch Entitlement, and legal size catch would be sold.

If MA DMF detects spawning cod caught in tows within the target areas to be at or above proposed thresholds, participating vessels would no longer be authorized to fish under the EFP within that particular target area (each of the four target areas (A, B1, B2, and C) will be evaluated separately). MA DMF defines spawning cod as females with clear eggs or males with running milt (either expressed externally, or when the testes are cut through). The proposed thresholds are more than five spawning cod in one tow or more than

18 percent of tows within a 7-day consecutive fishing period containing any spawning cod. MA DMF would immediately notify participating sector managers and NMFS if a cod spawning threshold has been reached.

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 impacts that do not change the scope or impact 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: March 12, 2026.

**David R. Blankinship,**

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

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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[RTID 0648-XF589]

**Pacific 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 Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Pacific Council) Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) and Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) will hold a joint webinar meeting that is open to the public.

**DATES:** The meeting will be held Friday, April 3, 2026, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Pacific Time, or until business for the day has been completed.

**ADDRESSES:** This meeting will be held online. Specific meeting information, including directions on how to join the meeting and system requirements, will be provided in the meeting announcement on the Pacific Council's website (see <https://www.pcouncil.org>). You may send an email to Mr. Hayden York ([hayden.york@pcouncil.org](mailto:hayden.york@pcouncil.org)) or contact him at (503) 820-2424 for technical assistance.

*Council address:* Pacific Fishery Management Council, 7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101, Portland, OR 97220-1384.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Kerry Griffin, Staff Officer, Pacific Council; telephone: (503) 820-2409.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The primary purpose of this meeting is to consider topics on the Council's April meeting agenda. There are no HMS-specific agenda items. However, the HMSMT and HMSAS may discuss and potentially develop supplemental reports on Cross Fishery Management Plan agenda items H.1 (Special Project 1—Adaptive Management and Flexibility) and H.2 (Council and NMFS Workload—Capacity Alignment).

Although non-emergency issues not contained in the meeting agenda may be discussed, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during this meeting. Action will be restricted to those issues specifically listed in this document and any issues arising after publication of this document 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 intent to take final action to address the emergency.

**Special Accommodations**

Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Mr. Hayden York ([hayden.york@pcouncil.org](mailto:hayden.york@pcouncil.org); (503) 820-2424) at least 10 days prior to the meeting date.

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

Dated: March 12, 2026.

**Rey Israel Marquez,**

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

[FR Doc. 2026-05093 Filed 3-13-26; 8:45 am]

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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[RTID 0648-XF584]

**Pacific 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 Pacific Fishery Management Council (Pacific Council) will convene an online meeting of its Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG), which is open to the public.

**DATES:** The online meeting will be held Friday, April 3, 2026, from 1 p.m. to 4