

of the tendency of flatfish to swim towards the ocean bottom after encountering the separation panel and thereby into the lower codend portion of the net. Roundfish, which are not expected to swim towards the seafloor after encountering the panel, would swim into the upper codend portion of the net, which could be left open if roundfish were not being retained.

Underwater video equipment would be employed to observe fish behavior and functioning of the experimental selectivity device. Catch and bycatch are proposed to be sampled from each tow. If available, 100 each of cod, haddock, yellowtail flounder, whiting (silver hake), American plaice and witch flounder (including both legal and sub-legal sizes) would be measured from the catch in both the control net (commercial trawl net) and from the experimental trawl net, using alternating tows. The total weight of roundfish and flatfish would be determined from the upper and lower codends of the experimental trawl net and from the control net. Finally, the catch of each species in the upper and lower codend of the experimental net would be analyzed using statistical methods to calculate a separation index to determine whether the experimental system is effective at separating the species.

To avoid the Cape Cod yellowtail flounder stock area, the vessel would be required to conduct experimental fishing activity north of 42°50' N. lat. (the northern boundary of the Cape Cod yellowtail flounder stock area), due to the significant reduction in fishing mortality that is currently required for that stock to eliminate overfishing. The sea trials would be conducted in shallow water (30 to 50 fathoms (54.9 - 91.4 meters)) off the coasts of New Hampshire, southern Maine, and a small portion of northern Massachusetts. UNH researchers would be aboard the vessel during all experimental work. All undersized fish, and/or protected species, would be returned to the sea as quickly as possible after measurement. However, legal-sized fish that would otherwise have to be discarded would be allowed to be retained and sold. The overall catch levels are not expected to have a detrimental impact on the NE multispecies resource. Estimated total landings for the 20 days are: Cod - 6,000 lb (2721.5 kg); flatfish (witch flounder, American plaice, winter flounder, yellowtail flounder) - 6,000 lb (2721.5 kg); other groundfish (haddock, cusk, white hake, silver hake, red hake, ocean pout, wolffish, etc.) - 4,000 lb (1814.4 kg). This is approximately one-half the level of landings that would be expected

for 20 days of normal commercial fishing for this vessel. The participating vessel would be required to report all of its landings in its Vessel Trip Reports.

This experimental work is important because it could lead to the development of gear that could reduce bycatch of species that are subject to restrictive trip limits, such as cod, when fishing for species that are not subject to restrictive trip limits. The successful development of a soft species separation device, which could easily be installed in commercial trawl nets, could provide the fishing industry with more flexibility in conducting fishing activities, while simultaneously providing additional conservation for overfished species.

Based on the results of this EFP, this action may lead to future rulemaking.

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

Dated: August 9, 2002.

Virginia M. Fay,

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

[I.D. 080602E]

Fisheries off the West Coast States and in the Western Pacific; Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery; Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Fishing Conducted Under the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP)

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

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an EIS; request for written comments.

SUMMARY: The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) announces its intention to prepare an EIS in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to assess the impacts of the 2003 Pacific Coast groundfish fishery specifications and management measures on the human environment.

DATES: Written comments must be received no later than 5 p.m. local time (l.t.), on September 13, 2002. A public scoping meeting is scheduled as part of the Council's August 28-29, 2002, Allocation Committee meeting in

Portland, OR (see **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**).

ADDRESSES: Written comments on suggested alternatives and potential impacts should be sent to Donald McIsaac, Executive Director, Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), 7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 200, Portland, OR 97220-1384. Comments may also be sent via facsimile (fax) to 503-820-2299. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or Internet. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for specific dates and times.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: John DeVore, Groundfish Fishery Management Coordinator; phone: 503-820-2280 and e-mail: john.devore@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

There are more than 80 species managed under the Pacific Coast Groundfish FMP, nine of which have been declared overfished. The groundfish stocks support an array of commercial, recreational, and Indian tribal fishing interests in state and Federal waters off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California. In addition, groundfish are also harvested incidentally in nongroundfish fisheries, most notably the trawl fisheries for pink shrimp, spot/ridgeback prawns, California halibut, and sea cucumber. Restrictive management measures intended to rebuild overfished species have been adopted and implemented over the past several years for most commercial and recreational fishing sectors.

The proposed action is the identification and evaluation of 2003 groundfish harvest level specifications and fishery management measures intended to meet but not exceed those specifications. These specifications include acceptable biological catches and optimum yields (OYs) for groundfish species or species groups in need of particular protection; OYs may be represented by harvest guidelines or quotas for species that need individual management. The allocation of commercial OYs between the open access and limited entry segments of the fishery is also part of the proposed action. The FMP requires that these specifications for groundfish be annually evaluated and revised as necessary, and that management measures designed to achieve the OYs be published in the **Federal Register** and made effective by January 1, the beginning of the fishing year. The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery

Conservation and Management Act and the FMP also require that NMFS implement actions to prevent overfishing and to rebuild overfished stocks. These specifications include fish caught in state ocean waters (0–3 nautical miles (nm) offshore) as well as fish caught in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (3–200 nm offshore). Management measures intended to control the rate at which different groundfish species or species groups are taken in the fisheries include trip limits, bag limits, size limits, time/area closures, and gear restrictions.

For 2003, the Council is considering management measures that could include time/area closures of large portions of the continental shelf off the U.S. West Coast. These measures would be necessary to prevent fishing vessels from directly targeting or incidentally catching the overfished species that are primarily found on the continental shelf. In particular, large time/area closures would focus on protecting bocaccio, canary rockfish, darkblotched rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish. While other overfished species could also be expected to benefit from these closures, the rebuilding needs of these particular overfished species would likely shape the design of the closed areas. A more detailed description of the management alternatives that will be considered by the Council at its September 9–13, 2002, meeting in Portland, OR is available on the Council's web site at <http://www.pcouncil.org>.

A principal objective of the scoping and public input process is to identify significant issues that will be analyzed in depth in the EIS. The EIS will address these significant issues through a range of reasonable management alternatives and an analysis of their impacts on the human environment. Alternatives will be analyzed for impacts on essential fish habitat, target and non-target species of fish, discarded fish, marine mammals, and other protected species present in the Pacific Coast ecosystem. In addition, the environmental consequences section of the EIS will contain an analysis of impacts from fishery management measures on the following groups of individuals: (1) Those who participate in harvesting the fishery resources and other living marine resources; (2) those who process and market the fish and fish products; (3) those who are involved in allied support industries; (4) those who consume fish products; (5) those who rely on living marine resources in the management area, either for subsistence needs or for recreational benefits; (6) those who benefit from non-consumptive uses of

living marine resources; (7) those involved in managing and monitoring fisheries; and (8) fishing communities.

Scoping documents that identify the management issues, initial alternatives, and an outline of the proposed analysis will be made available at the August 28–29, 2002, meeting.

Dates and Times of the Scoping Meeting and Associated Informational Meetings

A scoping meeting for this EIS will be held in concurrence with a meeting of the Council's Allocation Committee on August 28–29, 2002, at the Shilo Inn, 11707 NE Airport Way, Portland, OR 97220. The Council will be particularly seeking comments on the EIS at 4 p.m., i.e., on August 28, 2002. The purpose of the Allocation Committee's meeting is to discuss the Council's proposed 2003 groundfish specifications and management measures prior to and in preparation for the Council's September 9–13, 2002 meeting in Portland, OR. Issues to be analyzed in this EIS were also discussed at the Council's June 18–21, 2002 meeting in Foster City, CA, at the meetings of the Allocation Committee and the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) that preceded that June Council meeting, and a July 29 through August 2, 2002, meeting of the Council's GMT. The scoping hearing held as part of the Council's August 28–29, 2002, Allocation Committee meeting, and the earlier meetings listed above are intended to meet NEPA scoping guidelines at 40 CFR 1501.7(b).

Special Accommodations

These meetings are accessible to people with physical disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Carolyn Porter 503–820–2280 (voice) or 503–820–2299 (fax), at least 5 days prior to the scheduled meeting date.

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

Dated: August 9, 2002.

Virginia M. Fay,

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

[I.D.080902A]

Western Pacific Fishery Management Council; Public Meetings

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

ACTION: Notice of public meetings/public hearings.

SUMMARY: The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) will meet on August 29, 2002, at 2 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The Council meeting will be held via telephone conference call at the Council offices, 1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400, Honolulu Hawaii 96813; telephone: 808–522–8220; FAX: (808)522–8226.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kitty M. Simonds, Executive Director; telephone: 808–522–8220.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Public Hearing

A public hearing will be conducted for final action on American Samoa longline fishery limited entry program, on Wednesday, August 29, 2002, at 3 p.m.

Public comment periods will be provided throughout the agenda. The order in which agenda items are addressed may change. The Council will meet as late as necessary to complete scheduled business. The agenda during the Council meeting will include the items listed below:

1. Pelagic Fisheries

(i) American Samoa longline limited entry program

(ii) public hearing

The Council will hold a public hearing on the preferred alternative for the American Samoa longline fishery limited entry program, and may take final action on these management measures. At its 113th meeting, the Council adopted a limited entry program for the American Samoa longline fishery. This action was prompted by the doubling of the number of fishing vessels participating in the American Samoa longline fishery during 2001, and a fourfold rise in the level of fishing effort in terms of hooks set. Unlike Hawaii, American Samoa is surrounded by the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of other nations and options for fishing elsewhere are