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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 021904B]

Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT); Spring Species Working Group Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT announces its spring meeting from March 15 to 17, 2004. The Advisory Committee will hold a workshop on the first day of the spring meeting, March 15, 2004, to discuss the upcoming ICCAT intersessional meeting on integrated and coordinated management of Atlantic bluefin tuna. Following the workshop, the Advisory Committee will meet with its Species Working Group Technical Advisors on March 16 and 17, 2004.

DATES: The open sessions of the Committee meeting will be held on March 15, 2004, from 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m., on March 16, 2004, from 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m., and on March 17, 2004, from 8:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. and from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 a.m.. Closed sessions will be held on March 15, 2004, from 1:30 p.m. to approximately 6 p.m., on March 16, 2004, from 1:30 p.m. to approximately 6 p.m., and on March 17, 2004, from 9 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Holiday Inn Hotel, 8777 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Erika Carlsen at (301) 713–2276.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT will meet in an open session on March 15, 2004, for a workshop to receive and discuss information on the upcoming ICCAT intersessional on integrated and coordinated management of Atlantic bluefin tuna, including Atlantic bluefin tuna stock composition; a historical review of Atlantic bluefin tuna management; and the 2001 ICCAT report on bluefin tuna mixing. In addition, the Committee will receive information on the results of the review

of bluefin tuna and marlin landings estimates previously reported to ICCAT. The Advisory Committee will meet again in an open session on March 16 and 17, 2004, to receive and discuss information on (1) the 2003 ICCAT meeting results and U.S. implementation of ICCAT decisions; (2) 2003 ICCAT and NMFS research and monitoring activities; (3) 2004 Commission activities; (4) the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act required consultation on the identification of countries that are diminishing the effectiveness of ICCAT; (5) the results of the meetings of the Committee's Species Working Groups; and (6) other matters relating to the international management of ICCAT species. The public will have access to the open sessions of the meeting, but there will be no opportunity for public comment.

The Advisory Committee will go into executive session during part of the afternoon of March 15, 2004, to discuss sensitive information relating to upcoming international negotiations. In addition, the Committee will meet in its Species Working Groups for a portion of the afternoon of March 16 and morning of March 17, 2004. These sessions are not open to the public, but the results of the species working group discussions will be reported to the full Advisory Committee during the Committee's morning open session on March 17.

Special Accommodations

The meeting location is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Erika Carlsen at (301) 713–2276 at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: February 24, 2004.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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

[FR Doc. 04–4516 Filed 2–27–04; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 021804A]

Endangered Species; Permit File No. 1260

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

ACTION: Receipt of application for modification.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the NMFS, Southeast Region, 9721 Executive Center Drive, North, St. Petersburg, Florida 33702–2449, has requested a modification to scientific research Permit No. 1260.

DATES: Written comments or requests for a public hearing must be received on or before March 31, 2004.

ADDRESSES: The modification request and related documents are available for review upon written request or by appointment in the following offices:

Permits, Conservation and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705, Silver Spring, MD 20910; phone (301) 713–2289; fax (301) 713–0376; and Southeast Region, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive North, St. Petersburg, FL 33702–2432; phone (727) 570–5301; fax (727) 570–5320.

Written comments or requests for a public hearing must be submitted to the Chief, Permits, Conservation and Education Division, F/PR1, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Those individuals requesting a hearing should set forth the specific reasons why a hearing on this particular modification request would be appropriate.

Comments may be submitted by facsimile to (301) 713–0376, provided the facsimile is confirmed by hard copy submitted by mail and postmarked no later than the closing date of the comment period. They may also be submitted by e-mail. The mailbox address for providing e-mail comments is NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line of the e-mail comment the following document identifier: File No. 1260 Modification.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Patrick Opay, (301) 713–1401 or Ruth Johnson, (301) 713–2289.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The subject modification request to Permit No. 1260, issued on June 29, 2001 (66 FR 34621) is requested under the authority of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) and the regulations governing the taking, importing, and exporting of endangered and threatened species (50 CFR 222–226).

Permit No. 1260 authorizes the permit holder to take loggerhead (Caretta caretta), leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*), hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), green (*Chelonia mydas*) and olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) sea

turtles for scientific research. The permit holder requests authorization to increase the number of sea turtles that can be sampled after they are incidentally captured during separately authorized trawl, bottom longline and pelagic longline resource assessment cruises. The permit holder proposes to take an additional 14 loggerhead and six Kemp's ridley sea turtles and also requests authorization to take nine leatherback, six green and six hawksbill sea turtles during the cruises. The applicant proposes to handle, flipper tag, measure and release all turtles associated with these cruises. None of the activities authorized under this modification are expected to result in mortality. The research will be conducted in waters of the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico during the remainder of the permit which expires June 30, 2006.

Dated: February 20, 2004.

Carrie W. Hubbard,

Acting Chief, Permits, Conservation and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 04-4515 Filed 2-27-04; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 022504A]

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Application for Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs)

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

ACTION: Notification of a proposal for EFPs to conduct experimental fishing; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the Assistant Regional Administrator for

Sustainable Fisheries, Northeast Region, NOAA Fisheries (Assistant Regional Administrator), has determined that an application for EFPs contains all of the required information and warrants further consideration. The Assistant Regional Administrator is considering the impacts of the activities to be authorized under the EFPs with respect to the Northeast (NE) Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP). However, further review and consultation may be necessary before a final determination is made to issue EFPs. Therefore, NMFS announces that the Assistant Regional Administrator proposes to issue EFPs in response to an application submitted by the Maine Department of Marine Resources (Maine DMR). These EFPs would allow six commercial longline or tub trawl vessels to conduct fishing operations that are otherwise restricted by the regulations governing the fisheries of the Northeastern United States. The EFPs would allow for exemptions from the FMP as follows: Six federally permitted vessels would be allowed to fish for, land, and possess Atlantic halibut (*Hippoglossus hippoglossus*) in excess of the allowable landing and possession limit specified at 50 CFR 648.86(c) within a portion of the Gulf of Maine Regulated Mesh Area (GOM RMA); these vessels would be allowed to possess temporarily Atlantic halibut less than the minimum size requirement of 36 inches (91.4 cm) specified at § 648.83(a)(1) for purposes of collecting scientific information; and these vessels would be granted access to GOM Rolling Closure Area IV (June 1–June 30).

Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Act require publication of this notification to provide interested parties the opportunity to comment on applications for proposed EFPs.

DATES: Comments on this notification must be received at the appropriate address or fax number (see **ADDRESSES**) on or before March 16, 2004.

ADDRESSES: Comments on this notice may be submitted by e-mail. The mailbox address for providing e-mail comments is DA367@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line of the e-mail comment the following document identifier: "Comments on Maine Halibut EFP Proposal." Written comments should be sent to Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope "Comments on Maine Halibut EFP Proposal." Comments may also be sent via facsimile to (978) 281-9135.

Copies of the Draft 2004 Amended Environmental Assessment (EA) Prepared for the Experimental Halibut Fishery in Groundfish Closed Areas in the Eastern Gulf of Maine are available from the Northeast Regional Office at the same address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Susan Chinn, Fishery Management Specialist, 978-281-9218.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Maine DMR submitted an application on December 19, 2003, to conduct an experimental Atlantic halibut fishery using up to six commercial longline and tub trawl vessels in a portion of the GOM RMA. The proposed experiment is a continuation of experimental fisheries conducted by Maine DMR in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003 the fifth in a series of at least five anticipated studies aimed at collecting biological information to be used in the long-term management of this species. As with the prior studies, this year's application proposes to collect data on the distribution, relative abundance, migration, stock definition, mortality rates, stock size, yield, and other significant biological reference points for Atlantic halibut.

The proposed 2004 experimental fishery would take place from May 1 to June 30, 2004, or 60 days concurrent from the start date, in a portion of the GOM RMA defined as follows:

Area point	N. Latitude	W. Latitude
HAL 1	Mainland Maine Coastline	69°00"
HAL 2	43°12.3"	69°00"
HAL 3	43°58.3"	67°21.5"
HAL 4 ¹	Mainland Maine Coastline and U.S./Canada Maritime Boundary	Mainland Maine Coastline and U.S./Canada Maritime Boundary

¹Between points HAL 3 and HAL 4, the area follows the U.S./Canada maritime boundary.

Participating vessels would be authorized to use only traditional longline or tub trawl gear during the experiment. These vessels would be

limited to a maximum of 700 hooks per boat, and would be restricted to using only circle hooks no smaller than 140 in size.

Each of the six vessels would be limited to a total allowable catch (TAC) of 50 halibut, with no possession or landing limit prior to reaching this