

below (*Notification of Injured or Dead Marine Mammals*).

(c) *Notification of Injured or Dead Marine Mammals*.

(i) In the unanticipated event that the specified HRG and geotechnical survey activities lead to an injury of a marine mammal (Level A harassment) or mortality (e.g., ship-strike, gear interaction, and/or entanglement), the Holder shall immediately cease the specified activities and report the incident to the Chief of the Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, 301-427-8401, and the NOAA Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) Stranding Coordinator, 978-281-9300. The report shall include the following information:

- Time, date, and location (latitude/longitude) of the incident;
- Name and type of vessel involved;
- Vessel's speed during and leading up to the incident;
- Description of the incident;
- Status of all sound source use in the 24 hours preceding the incident;
- Water depth;
- Environmental conditions (e.g., wind speed and direction, Beaufort sea state, cloud cover, and visibility);
- Description of all marine mammal observations in the 24 hours preceding the incident;
- Species identification or description of the animal(s) involved;
- Fate of the animal(s); and
- Photographs or video footage of the animal(s) (if equipment is available).

Activities shall not resume until NMFS is able to review the circumstances of the event. NMFS would work with the Holder to minimize reoccurrence of such an event in the future. The Holder shall not resume activities until notified by NMFS.

(ii) In the event that the Holder discovers an injured or dead marine mammal and determines that the cause of the injury or death is unknown and the death is relatively recent (i.e., in less than a moderate state of decomposition), the Holder shall immediately report the incident to the Chief of the Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, 301-427-8401, and the GARFO Stranding Coordinator, 978-281-9300. The report shall include the same information identified in the paragraph above. Activities would be able to continue while NMFS reviews the circumstances of the incident. NMFS would work with the Holder to determine if modifications in the activities are appropriate.

(iii) In the event that the Holder discovers an injured or dead marine

mammal and determines that the injury or death is not associated with or related to the activities authorized in the IHA (e.g., previously wounded animal, carcass with moderate to advanced decomposition, or scavenger damage), the Holder shall report the incident to the Chief of the Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 301-427-8401, and the NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office Regional Stranding Coordinator, 978-281-9300, within 24 hours of the discovery. The Holder shall provide photographs or video footage (if available) or other documentation of the stranded animal sighting.

(d) Within 90 days after completion of the marine site characterization survey activities, a technical report shall be provided to NMFS and BOEM that fully documents the methods and monitoring protocols, summarizes the data recorded during monitoring, estimates the number of marine mammals that may have been taken during survey activities, and provides an interpretation of the results and effectiveness of all monitoring tasks. Any recommendations made by NMFS shall be addressed in the final report prior to acceptance by NMFS.

(e) In addition to the Holder's reporting requirements outlined above, the Holder shall provide an assessment report of the effectiveness of the various mitigation techniques, i.e., visual observations during day and night, compared to the PAM detections/operations. This shall be submitted as a draft to NMFS and BOEM 30 days after the completion of the HRG and geotechnical surveys and as a final version 60 days after completion of the surveys.

10. This Authorization may be modified, suspended, or withdrawn if the Holder fails to abide by the conditions prescribed herein or if NMFS determines the authorized taking is having more than a negligible impact on the species or stock of affected marine mammals.

11. A copy of this Authorization and the Incidental Take Statement must be in the possession of each vessel operator taking marine mammals under the authority of this Incidental Harassment Authorization.

12. The Holder is required to comply with the Terms and Conditions of the Incidental Take Statement corresponding to NMFS' Biological Opinion.

Request for Public Comments

NMFS requests comment on our analysis, the draft authorization, and

any other aspect of the Notice of Proposed IHA for DONG Energy's proposed high-resolution geophysical and geotechnical survey investigations associated with marine site characterization activities off the coast of Massachusetts in the area of the Commercial Lease of Submerged Lands for Renewable Energy Development on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS-A 0500). Please include with your comments any supporting data or literature citations to help inform our final decision on DONG Energy's request for an MMPA authorization.

Dated: March 30, 2016.

Wanda Cain,

Acting Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XE554

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 Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Greater Atlantic Region, NMFS, 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 one commercial fishing vessel to fish outside of the limited access scallop regulations in support of research conducted by the National Fisheries Institute that is investigating scallop incidental mortality in the scallop dredge fishery.

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 proposed Exempted Fishing Permits.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before April 20, 2016.

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 DA16-013 NFI Incidental Discard Mortality EFP."

• Mail: John K. Bullard, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope "Comments on DA16-013 NFI Incidental Discard Mortality EFP."

• Fax: (978) 281-9135.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Shannah Jaburek, Fisheries Management Specialist, 978-282-8456.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NOAA awarded the National Fisheries Institute (NFI) a grant through the 2014 Atlantic sea scallop research set-aside program in support of a project titled, "Determining Incidental Discard Mortality of Atlantic Sea Scallops, *Placopecten magellanicus*, in the Scallop Dredge Fishery in the Mid-Atlantic Bight." NMFS issued the National Fisheries Institute (NFI) an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) on April 30, 2015, to complete the project. On February 16, 2016, NMFS received a request to authorize participating vessels to perform an additional 20 tows over the course of two limited access Atlantic sea scallop days-at-sea (DAS). NFI is requesting exemptions that would allow one commercial fishing vessel to fish outside of the DAS regulations found at 50 CFR 648.53(b); mesh size restrictions at § 648.51(a)(2); obstruction in dredge gear restrictions at § 648.51(b)(4)(iii); and the crew size regulations at § 648.51(c). In addition, the EFP would temporarily exempt the participating vessel from possession limits and minimum size requirements specified in 50 CFR part 648, subsections B and D through O, for sampling purposes only. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

The project would conduct dredging activities to assess the incidental mortality of scallops passing through the 4-inch (10.16-cm) rings of a 12-foot (4.57-m) Turtle Deflector Dredge on sandy and hard (gravel) substrates. Dredging would be conducted over approximately two DAS during the proposed period of May 2016 through June 2016. All dredging would occur in open access scallop fishing areas off the coast of New Jersey. A total of 20 scallop tows would be conducted (10 tows per substrate). Each tow would be made at depths of 18 to 25 fathoms (32.92 to 45.72 m) for a duration of 40 minutes. The scallop vessel would fish two dredges simultaneously. One dredge

would use an experimental net bag cover and the other would fish with an industry standard 12-foot (4.57-m) turtle excluder dredge. The experimental cover is constructed of 1 $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch (4.76-cm) mesh and sewn into the top of the dredge apron. The bag can be dumped independently of the 4-inch (10.16-cm) ring bag to collect the scallops and other organisms that pass through the 4-inch (10.16-cm) rings. The dredge configurations would be switched to the opposite side after five tows for each substrate.

All scallops that filter through the 4-inch (10.16-cm) rings and into the mesh bag would be measured for shell height and assessed for damage to the shell in one of three categories: Not injured; sub-lethal (repairable); or lethal (non-repairable). After all scallops are assessed, they would be returned to the ocean bottom as soon as practicable. The researchers would then use this information to estimate the proportion of scallops in each injury category. The weight of scallop catch retained in the 4-inch (10.16-cm) ring bags of both dredges would be estimated by the captain. Researchers would take shell measurements of a subsample of 50 scallops per tow per dredge to determine size selectivity within each dredge. All other bycatch in the experimental net bag would be sorted, the captain would estimate the weights, and researchers would measure a minimum of 25 lengths per individual species. No catch would be landed for sale.

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 31, 2016.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XE555

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

ACTION: Notice; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Greater Atlantic Region, NMFS, has made a preliminary determination that an Exempted Fishing Permit application contains all of the required information and warrants further consideration. The Exempted Fishing Permit would allow a commercial fishing vessel to fish outside of the limited access scallop regulations in support of research conducted by the Coonamessett Farm Foundation. The exemptions are in support of gear research designed to reduce flatfish bycatch in the limited access general category scallop fishery.

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 proposed Exempted Fishing Permits.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before April 20, 2016.

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

• Email: nmfs.gar.efp@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line "CFF LAGC Modified Sweep EFP."

• Mail: John K. Bullard, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope "Comments on CFF LAGC Modified Sweep EFP."

• Fax: (978) 281-9135.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Shannah Jaburek, Fisheries Management Specialist, 978-282-8456.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Coonamessett Farm Foundation (CFF) has submitted a proposal titled "Determining the Impacts of Dredge Bag Modifications on Flatfish Bycatch in the LAGC Scallop Fishery," that has been favorably reviewed and is pending final approval by NOAA's Grants Management Division under the 2016