

NOTICE OF OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET ACTION

Date 12/07/2017

Department of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

FOR CERTIFYING OFFICIAL: Rod Turk
FOR CLEARANCE OFFICER: Jennifer Jessup

In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act, OMB has taken action on your request received 08/30/2017

ACTION REQUESTED: Extension without change of a currently approved collection

TYPE OF REVIEW REQUESTED: Regular

ICR REFERENCE NUMBER: 201708-0648-002

AGENCY ICR TRACKING NUMBER:

TITLE: Northeast Region Observer Providers Requirements

LIST OF INFORMATION COLLECTIONS: See next page

OMB ACTION: Approved without change

OMB CONTROL NUMBER: 0648-0546

The agency is required to display the OMB Control Number and inform respondents of its legal significance in accordance with 5 CFR 1320.5(b).

EXPIRATION DATE: 12/31/2020

DISCONTINUE DATE:

BURDEN:	RESPONSES	HOURS	COSTS
Previous	32,409	5,675	46,601
New	29,809	5,252	44,936
Difference			
Change due to New Statute	0	0	0
Change due to Agency Discretion	0	0	0
Change due to Agency Adjustment	-2,600	-423	-1,665
Change due to PRA Violation	0	0	0

TERMS OF CLEARANCE:

OMB Authorizing Official: Dominic J. Mancini
Deputy and Acting Administrator,
Office Of Information And Regulatory Affairs

List of ICs

IC Title	Form No.	Form Name	CFR Citation
Observer deployment report			50 CFR 648.11
Observer availability report			50 CFR 648.11
Observer availability updates			50 CFR 648.11
Safety refusals			50 CFR 648.11
Raw observer data			50 CFR 648.11
Observer debriefings			50 CFR 648.11
Other (predominantly incident) reports			50 CFR 648.11
Biological samples			50 CFR 648.11
Renewal observer provider permit application			50 CFR 648.11
Applicant response to a denial			50 CFR 648.11
Request for observer training			50 CFR 648.11
Rebuttal of pending removal from list of approved observer providers			50 CFR 648.11
Request for an observer			50 CFR 648.11
Notification of unavailability of observers			50 CFR 648.11
Observer contact list updates			50 CFR 648.11
Service provider material submissions			50 CFR 648.11
Service provider contracts			50 CFR 648.11

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT SUBMISSION

Please read the instructions before completing this form. For additional forms or assistance in completing this form, contact your agency's Paperwork Clearance Officer. Send two copies of this form, the collection instrument to be reviewed, the supporting statement, and any additional documentation to: Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget, Docket Library, Room 10102, 725 17th Street NW, Washington, DC 20503.

<p>1. Agency/Subagency originating request</p>	<p>2. OMB control number b. <input type="checkbox"/> None a. _____ - _____</p>
<p>3. Type of information collection (<i>check one</i>)</p> <p>a. <input type="checkbox"/> New Collection</p> <p>b. <input type="checkbox"/> Revision of a currently approved collection</p> <p>c. <input type="checkbox"/> Extension of a currently approved collection</p> <p>d. <input type="checkbox"/> Reinstatement, without change, of a previously approved collection for which approval has expired</p> <p>e. <input type="checkbox"/> Reinstatement, with change, of a previously approved collection for which approval has expired</p> <p>f. <input type="checkbox"/> Existing collection in use without an OMB control number</p> <p>For b-f, note Item A2 of Supporting Statement instructions</p>	<p>4. Type of review requested (<i>check one</i>)</p> <p>a. <input type="checkbox"/> Regular submission</p> <p>b. <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency - Approval requested by _____ / _____ / _____</p> <p>c. <input type="checkbox"/> Delegated</p>
	<p>5. Small entities Will this information collection have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
	<p>6. Requested expiration date</p> <p>a. <input type="checkbox"/> Three years from approval date b. <input type="checkbox"/> Other Specify: _____</p>
<p>7. Title</p>	
<p>8. Agency form number(s) (<i>if applicable</i>)</p>	
<p>9. Keywords</p>	
<p>10. Abstract</p>	
<p>11. Affected public (<i>Mark primary with "P" and all others that apply with "x"</i>)</p> <p>a. <input type="checkbox"/> Individuals or households d. <input type="checkbox"/> Farms</p> <p>b. <input type="checkbox"/> Business or other for-profit e. <input type="checkbox"/> Federal Government</p> <p>c. <input type="checkbox"/> Not-for-profit institutions f. <input type="checkbox"/> State, Local or Tribal Government</p>	<p>12. Obligation to respond (<i>check one</i>)</p> <p>a. <input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary</p> <p>b. <input type="checkbox"/> Required to obtain or retain benefits</p> <p>c. <input type="checkbox"/> Mandatory</p>
<p>13. Annual recordkeeping and reporting burden</p> <p>a. Number of respondents _____</p> <p>b. Total annual responses _____</p> <p> 1. Percentage of these responses collected electronically _____%</p> <p>c. Total annual hours requested _____</p> <p>d. Current OMB inventory _____</p> <p>e. Difference _____</p> <p>f. Explanation of difference</p> <p> 1. Program change _____</p> <p> 2. Adjustment _____</p>	<p>14. Annual reporting and recordkeeping cost burden (<i>in thousands of dollars</i>)</p> <p>a. Total annualized capital/startup costs _____</p> <p>b. Total annual costs (O&M) _____</p> <p>c. Total annualized cost requested _____</p> <p>d. Current OMB inventory _____</p> <p>e. Difference _____</p> <p>f. Explanation of difference</p> <p> 1. Program change _____</p> <p> 2. Adjustment _____</p>
<p>15. Purpose of information collection (<i>Mark primary with "P" and all others that apply with "X"</i>)</p> <p>a. <input type="checkbox"/> Application for benefits e. <input type="checkbox"/> Program planning or management</p> <p>b. <input type="checkbox"/> Program evaluation f. <input type="checkbox"/> Research</p> <p>c. <input type="checkbox"/> General purpose statistics g. <input type="checkbox"/> Regulatory or compliance</p> <p>d. <input type="checkbox"/> Audit</p>	<p>16. Frequency of recordkeeping or reporting (<i>check all that apply</i>)</p> <p>a. <input type="checkbox"/> Recordkeeping b. <input type="checkbox"/> Third party disclosure</p> <p>c. <input type="checkbox"/> Reporting</p> <p> 1. <input type="checkbox"/> On occasion 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly</p> <p> 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Semi-annually 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Annually</p> <p> 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Biennially 8. <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe) _____</p>
<p>17. Statistical methods</p> <p>Does this information collection employ statistical methods</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>18. Agency Contact (person who can best answer questions regarding the content of this submission)</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Phone: _____</p>

19. Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions

On behalf of this Federal Agency, I certify that the collection of information encompassed by this request complies with 5 CFR 1320.9

NOTE: The text of 5 CFR 1320.9, and the related provisions of 5 CFR 1320.8(b)(3), appear at the end of the instructions. *The certification is to be made with reference to those regulatory provisions as set forth in the instructions.*

The following is a summary of the topics, regarding the proposed collection of information, that the certification covers:

- (a) It is necessary for the proper performance of agency functions;
- (b) It avoids unnecessary duplication;
- (c) It reduces burden on small entities;
- (d) It used plain, coherent, and unambiguous terminology that is understandable to respondents;
- (e) Its implementation will be consistent and compatible with current reporting and recordkeeping practices;
- (f) It indicates the retention period for recordkeeping requirements;
- (g) It informs respondents of the information called for under 5 CFR 1320.8(b)(3):
 - (i) Why the information is being collected;
 - (ii) Use of information;
 - (iii) Burden estimate;
 - (iv) Nature of response (voluntary, required for a benefit, mandatory);
 - (v) Nature and extent of confidentiality; and
 - (vi) Need to display currently valid OMB control number;
- (h) It was developed by an office that has planned and allocated resources for the efficient and effective management and use of the information to be collected (see note in Item 19 of instructions);
- (i) It uses effective and efficient statistical survey methodology; and
- (j) It makes appropriate use of information technology.

If you are unable to certify compliance with any of the provisions, identify the item below and explain the reason in Item 18 of the Supporting Statement.

Signature of Senior Official or designee

Date

Agency Certification (signature of Assistant Administrator, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Line Office Chief Information Officer, head of MB staff for L.O.s, or of the Director of a Program or StaffOffice)

Signature

Date

Signature of NOAA Clearance Officer

Signature

Date

SUPPORTING STATEMENT
NMFS GREATER ATLANTIC REGION OBSERVER PROVIDERS
OMB CONTROL NO. 0648-0546

A. JUSTIFICATION

1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.

Amendment 13 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop (scallop) Fishery Management Plan (FMP), developed by the applicable Fishery Management Council, as authorized by the [Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act](#), implemented an industry funded observer program which included reporting requirements for both observer service providers as well as the scallop fishing industry. Frameworks 19 and 24 further revised the scallop observer program and implemented additional information collection requirements to allow for more effective administration of the program.

Observer coverage in the scallop fishery is necessary to monitor the bycatch of finfish including yellowtail flounder, skates, monkfish, cod, and other species. Monitoring of yellowtail flounder and windowpane flounder bycatch is of particular concern because the scallop fishery is constrained by a catch allocation for these species under the Northeast Multispecies FMP. Observer coverage is also needed to monitor interactions of the scallop fishery with endangered and threatened sea turtles.

2. Explain how, by whom, how frequently, and for what purpose the information will be used. If the information collected will be disseminated to the public or used to support information that will be disseminated to the public, then explain how the collection complies with all applicable Information Quality Guidelines.

The information collections, which are a result of Amendment 13 and Frameworks 19 and 24, are reporting requirements used by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP). NMFS retains control over all information and safeguards it from improper access, modification, and destruction, consistent with NOAA standards for confidentiality, privacy, and electronic information. The information collection is designed to yield data that meet all applicable information quality guidelines. Prior to dissemination, the information would be subjected to quality control measures and pre-dissemination review pursuant to [Section 515 of Public law 106-554](#).

There are 17 separate information collections that were implemented by Amendment 13 and Frameworks 19 and 24, the use of which is discussed here. All information collections are necessary for the successful operation of the scallop observer program.

1. *Observer deployment report:* The observer service provider deployment reports are used to inform NEFOP when, where, to whom, and to what scallop area an observer has been deployed within 24 hours of the observer's departure. The observer service provider also

must ensure that the observer reports back to the NEFOP its OBSCON data, as described in the certified observer training, within 12 hours of landing.

2. *Observer Availability Report:* The observer service provider availability reports are used to inform NEFOP of any occurrence of their inability to respond to an industry request for observer coverage due to the lack of available observers on staff by 5:00 pm, Eastern Standard Time, on any day with an industry request for observer coverage.
3. *Safety Refusals:* The observer service provider safety refusal reports are used to inform NEFOP of any trip that has been refused due to safety issues, e.g., failure to hold a valid USCG Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination Decal or meet the safety requirements of the observer's pre-trip vessel safety checklist, within 24 hours of the refusal.
4. *Raw observer data:* The submission of raw (unedited) data (via courier service eg. FedEx, DHL, etc.) collected by the observer to the NEFOP within 72 hours of trip landing is necessary for NEFOP to administer the observer program. This data is also used to monitor bycatch in the scallop fishery.
5. *Observer debriefing:* The observer service provider must ensure that the observer remains available to the NEFOP and/or NMFS Office for Law Enforcement for debriefing for two weeks following any observed trip. Observer debriefings ensure the data collected by the observer is as accurate as possible, and any potential issues are addressed. An observer that is at sea during the two-week period must contact the NEFOP upon his or her return if requested.
6. *Other reports:* Reports of possible observer harassment, discrimination, concerns about vessel safety or marine casualty, observer illness or injury, and any information, allegations, or reports regarding observer conflict of interest or breach of the standards of behavior must be submitted to the NEFOP in a timely manner.
7. *Biological samples:* The observer service provider must ensure that biological samples, including whole marine mammals, turtles and sea birds, are stored/handled properly and transported to the NEFOP within 7 days of landing.
8. *New permit application for observer provider:* Any third party provider that wishes to operate in the scallop observer program must submit a thorough application and gain approval from NMFS.
9. *Applicant response to a denial:* If an application for approval as an observer service provider is incomplete or does not meet the requirements of an approved observer service provider, the application will be provided with a written denial. Each applicant may present additional information to NMFS to rectify the deficiencies specified in the written denial within 30 days of the applicant's receipt of the denial notification.

10. *Request for observer training:* The observer service provider must submit a request for a certified training class at least 30 days prior to the beginning of the proposed training class to ensure that the NEFOP is provided with the necessary time and information to prepare for the training of candidate observers.
11. *Rebuttal of pending removal from list of approved observer providers:* An observer provider that fails to meet the requirements, conditions, and responsibilities of an approved observer service provider will be notified in writing that it is subject to removal from the list of approved observer service providers. An observer service provider that has received notification that it is subject to removal from the list of approved observer service providers may submit information to rebut the reasons for removal from the list within 30 days and must give written evidence that clearly disproves the reasons for removal.
12. *Request to observer service provider to procure an observer:* An owner of a scallop vessel required to carry an observer must arrange for carrying a NEFOP-certified observer from an approved observer service provider. The owner, operator, or vessel manager of a vessel selected to carry an observer must contact the observer service provider by phone and must provide at least 72 hours for the provider to arrange for observer deployment for a specified trip.
13. *Notification of unavailability of observers:* An owner, operator, or vessel manager of a vessel who cannot procure a certified observer within 72 hours of the notification to the provider, due to the unavailability of an observer, may request a waiver from the requirement for observer coverage for that trip, but only if the owner, operator, or vessel manager has contacted all of the available observer service providers to secure observer coverage. To request a waiver based on the unavailability of observers, an owner, operator, or vessel manager of the vessel must call the NEFOP. If the NEFOP confirms that no observers are available, it will issue a waiver within 24 hours.
14. *Observer contact list updates:* The updated observer contact list would facilitate the ability of NMFS/NEFOP to contact an observer when necessary. This list would be updated by the service provider as necessary.
15. *Observer availability updates:* The observer status report would facilitate the ability of NMFS/NEFOP to confirm observer availability, or the lack thereof, when a provider notifies NMFS/NEFOP of instances when no observers were available for deployment. This list would be updated by the service provider as necessary.
16. *Service provider material submissions:* NMFS/NEFOP may request service providers to provide copies of materials provided to the fishing industry. This would allow NMFS/NEFOP to ensure such materials are accurate and in keeping with the objectives of the program. This information would likely be solicited when changes to such materials are made.

17. *Service provider contracts:* NMFS/NEFOP may request service providers to provide a copy of each type of signed and valid contract between the observer provider and those entities requiring observer services. This would allow NMFS/NEFOP to resolve contract disputes between the provider and industry, and to ensure provider contracts with their employees are in keeping with the objectives of the observer program. This information would likely be solicited when changes to such materials are made.

3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological techniques or other forms of information technology.

The observer providers and vessels submit materials to NMFS/NEFOP via e-mail, fax or postal service. Instructions for vessels owners and providers are on the Greater Atlantic Region Web site at: <https://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/fsb/scallop/>

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication.

The application processes and information submissions for the observer provider and vessels are unique to the scallop observer program, and direct duplication with other collections does not exist.

5. If the collection of information involves small businesses or other small entities, describe the methods used to minimize burden.

This collection of information does not impose a significant impact on small entities. Only the minimum data to meet the requirements of the above data needs are requested from all participants.

6. Describe the consequences to the Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently.

All information is required for the efficient operation of the scallop observer program and must be submitted in the time frames requested. Collecting this information less frequently would jeopardize the goals and objectives of the observer program and the effective management of the scallop fishery.

7. Explain any special circumstances that require the collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with OMB guidelines.

Service providers would be required to submit observer contact and availability information as necessary, which may be more often than quarterly. This is to ensure NMFS/NEFOP observer data is accurate and up to date.

NMFS/NEFOP may request service provider materials as necessary, which may be more frequently than quarterly. This is to ensure materials provided to industry and observers are accurate, up to date, and in keeping with observer program objectives and policies.

8. Provide a copy of the PRA Federal Register notice that solicited public comments on the information collection prior to this submission. Summarize the public comments received in response to that notice and describe the actions taken by the agency in response to those comments. Describe the efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.

A Federal Register Notice published on April 17, 2017 (82 FR 18119) solicited public comments on this information collection. The comment period ended on June 16, 2017. No comments were received.

In addition, the Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator announced the open comment period at the North East Fishery Management Council meeting on April 17, 2017 and at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council meeting on June 6, 2017. The announcement included a summary of the information collections included in this renewal and encouraged affected parties to submit comments on the Federal Register Notice. This same information that was presented by the Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator was also available in physical form as a handout included with the meeting materials at all Council meetings. No comments were received. The status reports containing the information are included as supplementary documents.

9. Explain any decisions to provide payments or gifts to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

No payment or gift to respondents is provided under this program for observer service providers or vessel owners as a part of the scallop observer program.

10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.

The information collected is confidential under section 402(b) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1801, et seq.).

11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private.

This collection of information does not request any information that are of a sensitive nature.

12. Provide an estimate in hours of the burden of the collection of information.

The time and cost burden of this information collection is presented in Table 1 below. There are currently 512 Limited Access and Limited Access General Category permitted Scallop vessels that are subject to this information collection. As the time of this renewal, there are 3 providers that support the scallop observer program. Conversations with NEFOP staff indicated that it is

unlikely that any more service providers will enter the scallop observer program within the three years before this information collection is renewed. Therefore, the information collections here were analyzed for either 512 vessels or 3 scallop observer program providers. The estimated total number of hours for the entire scallop observer program is: **5,252 hours**. The burden hours for each information collection are presented here, as well as in Table 1:

1. *Observer deployment report*: Each provider is estimated to submit 250 observer deployment reports annually (once a day not including weekends) for a total of 750 reports annually (250 * 3 providers). Each report is estimated to take 10 minutes to fill out and email to NEFOP, for a **total of 125 hours**.
2. *Observer Availability Report*: Each provider is estimated to submit 150 observer availability reports annually (estimate from NEFOP) for a total of 450 reports annually (150 * 3 providers). Each report is estimated to take 10 minutes to fill out and email to NEFOP, for a **total of 75 hours**.
3. *Safety Refusals*: Each provider is estimated to submit a maximum of 25 safety refusal reports annually (estimate from NEFOP) for a total of 75 reports annually (25 * 3 providers). Each report is estimated to take 30 minutes to fill out and email to NEFOP, for a **total of 37.5 (38) hours**.
4. *Raw observer data*: Each provider is estimated to submit raw data to the NEFOP 250 times annually (once a day not including weekends) for a total of 750 total times annually (250 * 3 providers). Each report is estimated to take 5 minutes to fill out and send via express mail to NEFOP for a **total of 62.5 (63) hours**.
5. *Observer debriefing*: Each provider is estimated to have 70 debriefings with observers annually for a total of 210 observer briefings (70 * 3 providers). Each briefing is estimated to take 2 hours for a **total of 420 hours**.
6. *Other reports*: Each provider is estimated to submit 35 other reports (predominantly incident reports) annually for a total of 105 reports. Each report takes 30 minutes to fill out and email to NEFOP for a total of **52.5 (53) hours**.
7. *Biological samples*: Each provider is estimated to submit biological samples 250 times annually for a total of 750 times (250 * 3 providers). Each submission is estimated to take 5 minutes to mail to NEFOP for a **total of 62.5 (63) hours**.
8. *New permit application for observer provider*: Each provider is estimated to submit new permit applications once annually for a total of 3 new permit applications. Each application is estimated to take 10 hours to complete for a **total of 30 hours**.
9. *Applicant response to a denial*: NEFOP staff estimated that one new provider application would be denied annually (maximum) and have the opportunity to respond. Each response would take 10 hours to put together and submit to NEFOP for a total of 10 hours.

10. *Request for observer training:* Each provider is estimated to request observer training twice annually for a total of six times (2 * 3 providers). Each request is estimated to take 30 minutes for **a total of 3 hours**.
11. *Rebuttal of pending removal from list of approved observer providers:* NEFOP staff estimated that no more than one new provider would be removed from the list of approved providers and have the opportunity to rebut their removal. Each rebuttal is estimated to take 8 hours to complete and mail to NEFOP for **a total of 8 hours**.
12. *Request to observer service provider to procure an observer:* Each vessel is estimated to request an observer 50 times annually for a total of 25,600 requests (50 * 512 vessels). Each request is estimated to take 10 minutes to call the NEFOP for **a total of 4,267 hours annually**.
13. *Notification of unavailability of observers:* Each vessel is estimated to notify NEFOP of the unavailability of observers twice per year for a total of 1,024 times annually (512 * 2). Each notification is estimated to take 5 minutes to call NEFOP, for **a total of 85 hours**.
14. *Observer contact list updates:* Each provider is estimated to update their observer contact list 12 times annually (once a month) for a total of 36 times (12 * 3 providers). Each update is estimated to take 5 minutes to update and ? email to NEFOP for **a total of 3 hours**.
15. *Observer availability updates:* Each providers is estimated to update their observer availability list 12 times annually (once a month) for a total of 36 times (12 * 3 providers). Each update is estimated to take 5 minute5 to email to NEFOP for a total of 180 minutes (3 hours).
16. *Service provider material submissions:* Each providers is estimated to submit new materials to NEFOP twice annually for a total of 6 times (2 * 3 providers). Each update is estimated to take 30 minutes to mail to NEFOP for **a total of 3 hours**.
17. *Service provider contracts:* Each providers is estimated to submit service provider contracts to NEFOP twice annually for a total of 6 times (2 * 3 providers). Each contract is estimated to take 30 minutes to mail to NEFOP for **a total of 3 hours**.

13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to the respondents or record-keepers resulting from the collection (excluding the value of the burden hours in Question 12 above).

The total annual cost burden to the respondents from the scallop observer program is **\$44,935.25** (Table 1). These costs are exclusively mail or telephone costs associated with the information collections. Phone calls were estimated to cost \$0.10 per minute and stamps are currently \$0.49 each. Some information collections are required to be sent by express mail (ex. \$21.18 for an

express mail envelope) such as raw observer data for timely monitoring of particular bycatch species. The burden cost for each information collection is presented here as well as in Table 1:

1. *Observer deployment report*: sent via e-mail = \$0
2. *Observer Availability Report*: sent via e-mail = \$0
3. *Safety Refusals*: sent via e-mail = \$0
4. *Raw observer data*: \$21.18 per raw data mailing (express mail) times 750 mailings = \$15,885
5. *Observer debriefing*: \$12.00 per debriefing times 210 debriefings = \$2,520
6. *Other reports*: sent via e-mail = \$0
7. *Biological samples*: \$0.50 per sample times 750 samples = \$375
8. *New permit application for observer provider*: \$0.49 per application times 3 applications = \$1.47
9. *Applicant response to a denial*: \$0.49 per denial times 1 application = \$0.49
10. *Request for observer training*: \$1.80 per request times 6 requests = \$10.80
11. *Rebuttal of pending removal from list of approved observer providers*: \$0.49 per rebuttal time 1 estimated rebuttal = \$0.49
12. *Request to observer service provider to procure an observer*: \$1.00 per request times 25,600 requests = \$25,600
13. *Notification of unavailability of observers*: \$0.50 per notification times 1,256 notifications = \$512
14. *Observer contact list updates*: sent via e-mail = \$0
15. *Observer availability updates*: sent via e-mail = \$0
16. *Service provider material submissions*: \$2.50 per submission times 6 submissions = \$15.00
17. *Service provider contracts*: \$2.50 per contract times 6 contracts = \$15.00.

14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government.

The total annualized cost to the Federal government from the scallop observer program is **\$615,700**. This is the cost to the Federal government based on 1070.78 hours at a rate of \$35 per hour. The burden hours for each information collection are presented here as well as in Table 1:

1. *Observer deployment report:* 21 hours annually for a total of \$729
2. *Observer Availability Report:* 13 hours annually for a total of \$438
3. *Safety Refusals:* 19 hours annually for a total of \$665
4. *Raw observer data:* 32 hours annually for a total of \$1,103
5. *Observer debriefing:* 840 hours annually for a total of \$29,400
6. *Other reports:* 27 hours annually for a total of \$928
7. *Biological samples:* 32 hours annually for a total of \$1,103
8. *New permit application for observer provider:* 3 hours annually for a total of \$105
9. *Applicant response to a denial:* 0.02 hours annually for a total of \$1.00
10. *Request for observer training:* 0.05 hours annually for a total of \$2.00
11. *Rebuttal of pending removal from list of approved observer providers:* 0.05 hours annually for a total of \$2.00
12. *Request to observer service provider to procure an observer:* 43 hours annually for a total of \$1,067
13. *Notification of unavailability of observers:* 43 hours annually for a total of \$1,067
14. *Observer contact list updates:* 0.10 hours annually for a total of \$4.00
15. *Observer availability updates:* 0.05 hours annually for a total of \$2
16. *Service provider material submissions:* 0.25 hours annually for a total of \$9.00
17. *Service provider contracts:* 0.10 hours annually for a total of \$4.00

15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments.

General changes to burden and costs:

Changes in the costs from the previous renewal are due to the increased cost of postage (i.e., the cost of mailing an express package increased from \$20 to \$21.18). There are no new additional information collections introduced during this renewal.

Changes to the number of providers:

As the time of this renewal there are 3 providers that support the scallop observer program (i.e., no change from what was estimated in the previous renewal). Conversations with NEFOP staff indicated that it is unlikely that more service providers will enter the scallop observer program within the three years before this information collection is renewed.

Changes to the number of vessels:

The previous renewal estimated 562 vessels subject to reporting requirements as a part of this information collection. In 2016 there were 335 limited access scallop vessels and 253 limited access general category scallop vessels with individual fishing quota (IFQ) permits. Since the last renewal, a few IFQ permitted vessels have sold their quota to other IFQ permit holders and have permanently relinquished their empty permits. In addition, because IFQ can be leased from permits that are not on active vessels, about 30% of permit holders do not actively fish any of their IFQ and therefore do not have to call in to the observer program. We now estimate that there are 177 active limited access general category IFQ vessels to which these reporting requirements apply. As a result, the number of affected vessels has decreased to 512 (335 + 177) permitted limited access and limited access general category scallop vessels.

Updates to this information collection resulted in the following changes:

Change in Burden and Cost from 2014 to 2017

	2014 Renewal	2017 Renewal	Change in Burden
Number of Respondents	562	512	-47
Number of Responses	32,409	29,809	- 2,600
Total annual hours	5,675	5,252	-423
Total annual costs	\$46,600	\$44,935.25	-1664.75

16. For collections whose results will be published, outline the plans for tabulation and publication.

NMFS has no plans to tabulate the results of this information collection

17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons why display would be inappropriate.

No forms are available in this collection. The information is collected through e-mail, reports without forms, and by phone. NMFS will display the OMB Control Number and expiration date on information outlining the requirements provided to prospective observer service providers.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement.

No exceptions to the certification statement are requested.

B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS

This collection does not employ statistical methods.

Table 1

Information Collection	Number of Entities	Items per Entity	Total # of Items	Public						Government			
				Response Time (Minutes)	Total Time Burden (Hours)	Cost per Hour	Total Time Burden Cost	Total Actual Costs per Entity (phone call (\$0.10/min) unless noted)	Total Actual Costs	Response Time (Minutes)	Total Time Burden (Hours)	Cost per Hour	Total Cost
Observer deployment report	3	250	750	10	125	\$25	\$3,125	e-mail	\$0.00	10	21	\$35	\$729
Observer availability report	3	150	450	10	75	\$25	\$1,875	e-mail	\$0.00	10	13	\$35	\$438
Safety refusals	3	25	75	30	38	\$25	\$950.00	e-mail	\$0.00	30	19	\$35	\$665
Raw observer data	3	250	750	5	63	\$25	\$1,575	\$21.18	\$15,885.00	30	32	\$35	\$1,103
Observer debriefing	3	70	210	120	420	\$25	\$10,500	\$12.00	\$2,520.00	120	840	\$35	\$29,400
Other reports	3	35	105	30	53	\$25	\$1,325	e-mail	\$0.00	30	27	\$35	\$928
Biological samples	3	250	750	5	63	\$25	\$1,575	\$0.50	\$375.00	30	32	\$35	\$1,103
Request to observer service provider to procure an observer	512	50	25600	10	4267	\$15	\$64,000	\$1.00	\$25,600.00	5	43	\$25	\$1,067
Notification of unavailability of observers	512	2	1024	5	85	\$15	\$1,280	\$0.50	\$512.00	5	43	\$25	\$1,067
New permit application for observer provider	3	1	3	600	30	\$25	\$750	\$0.49	\$1.47	60	3	\$35	\$105
Applicant response to denial	1	1	1	600	10	\$25	\$250	\$0.49	\$0.49	1	0.02	\$35	\$1
Request for observer training	3	2	6	30	3	\$25	\$75	\$1.80	\$10.80	1	0.05	\$35	\$2
Rebuttal of pending removal from list of approved observer providers	1	1	1	480	8	\$25	\$200	\$0.49	\$0.49	3	0.05	\$35	\$2
Observer Contact List Updates	3	12	36	5	3	\$0	\$0	e-mail	\$0.00	2	0.10	\$35	\$4
Observer Availability Updates	3	12	36	5	3	\$0	\$0	e-mail	\$0.00	1	0.05	\$35	\$2
Service Provider Material Submissions	3	2	6	30	3	\$0	\$0	\$2.50	\$15.00	5	0.25	\$35	\$9
Service Provider Contracts	3	2	6	30	3	\$0	\$0	\$2.50	\$15.00	2	0.10	\$35	\$4



National Marine Fisheries Service
Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
Sustainable Fisheries Division
www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov



Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Actions

Prepared for the June 6-8, 2017
Meeting of the
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

June 6, 2017

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New England Council Actions

Small-Mesh Multispecies

None at this time

Groundfish

Approval of Groundfish Sectors for Fishing Years 2017 and 2018

NMFS published an interim final rule in the Federal Register on April 30, 2017 (82 FR 19618) to approve groundfish sector operations plans for 2017 and 2018. This rule approved operations plans for 20 sectors in fishing years 2017 and 2018. A 30-day public comment period on the rule closed May 30, 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.

Possession and Trip Limit Implementation for the Groundfish Common Pool Fishery

On May 1, 2017, NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register (82 FR 20285) that set the initial Fishing Year 2017 possession and trip limits for the common pool groundfish fishery. The initial 2017 possession and trip limits were the same as the initial 2016 trip limits, with the exception of Georges Bank (GB) cod, Gulf of Maine (GOM) haddock, Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) yellowtail flounder, and witch flounder. Initial GB cod and witch flounder trip and possession limits were reduced relative to 2016 initial trip limits, while initial SNE/MA yellowtail flounder and GOM haddock trip and possession limits were increased relative to 2016 initial trip limits. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov

Trimester TAC Closure for American Plaice

On May 24, 2017, NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register (82 FR 24569) closing the Trimester Total Allowable Catch (TAC) area for American plaice to groundfish common pool vessels fishing with trawl gear. This closure affects statistical areas 512, 513, 514, 515, 521, 522, and 525. This closure is required when catch information shows the common pool fishery has harvested 90 percent of its Trimester 1 TAC for American plaice. The area will reopen at the start of Trimester 2 on September 1, 2017. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov

Scallops

None at this time

Monkfish

Framework Adjustment 10

We published a Proposed Rule in the Federal Register on May 9, 2017, (82 FR 21498) soliciting public comment on Framework Adjustment 10. The public comment period closed on May 24, 2017. Framework 10 would set monkfish specifications for fishing years 2017-2019. It would also increase current days-at-sea allocations and trip limits to provide additional operational flexibility and fishing opportunities. NMFS anticipates publishing a final rule shortly. For additional information, please contact William Whitmore at (978) 281-9182 or email at William.Whitmore@noaa.gov.

Herring

None at this time

Skate

None at this time

Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab

None at this time

Mid-Atlantic Council Actions

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass

Revised Black Sea Bass Specifications for 2017 and 2018

NMFS published a final rule in the Federal Register on May 25, 2017, (82 FR 24078) that revises black sea bass specifications for the 2017 and 2018 fishing years, as well as the removes a previously implemented accountability measure. Updated scientific information from the 2016 stock assessment indicates that higher catch limits should be implemented to obtain optimum yield, and that the accountability measure to account for commercial sector overages in 2015 is no longer necessary or appropriate. The revised specifications represent a 53-percent increase in the 2017 commercial black sea bass quota established in 2015, and a 52-percent increase in the 2017 recreational harvest limit. The Mid-Atlantic Council will revisit its decision on the 2018 specifications following the SSC's review next summer, and if no changes are necessary, this action will remain unchanged. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Proposed Rule for the 2017 Summer Flounder and Scup Recreational Management Measures

NMFS published a rule in the Federal Register on April 19, 2017 (82 FR 18411), proposing 2017 summer flounder and scup recreational management measures for the 2017 fishing year. Based on the recommendations from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, NMFS proposed to continue the use of summer flounder conservation equivalency measures to all the states, through the Commission, to determine the most appropriate measures to constrain the landings to the 2017 recreational harvest limit. NMFS proposed maintaining status quo measures for the 2017 recreational scup fishery. The comment period for this action closed on May 4, 2017, and we anticipate a final rule will publish with a final determination in late June or early July. For additional information, please contact Emily Gilbert at (978) 281-9244 or email at Emily.Gilbert@noaa.gov.

Commercial Summer Flounder Quota Transfer – North Carolina to Virginia

NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on May 18, 2017, (82 FR 22761) allowing a transfer of 2,510 lb of commercial summer flounder quota from North Carolina to Virginia. The revised summer flounder quotas for calendar year 2017 are: North Carolina, 1,539,693 lb; Virginia, 1,219,912 lb. This transfer was requested by North Carolina to repay landings by a North Carolina-permitted vessel that landed in Virginia under a safe harbor agreement. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Atlantic Bluefish

None at this time

Spiny Dogfish

None at this time

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog ITQ Cost Recovery

On May 10, 2017, NMFS announced the 2017 cost recovery tag fees for the surfclam and ocean quahog individual transferable quota (ITQ) fisheries. This is the start of the new cost recovery program for the surfclam and ocean quahog ITQ fisheries. The 2017 tag fees are \$0.32 per surfclam tag and \$0.20 per ocean quahog tag. The fee to the ITQ shareholder will be based on how many cage tag numbers initial allocated to each shareholder are used to land clams, even if some or all of those tags are leased or otherwise transferred to another individual who uses them to land clams. NMFS will issue ITQ shareholders a single bill in March 2018 based on all of the cage tags used during 2017. Shareholders who do not use any tags will not receive a bill. The tag fee announcement is available online at:

www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/clam/. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish

Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Chub Mackerel

NMFS published a notice of intent in the Federal Register on March 22, 2017, (82 FR 14694) documenting the Mid-Atlantic Council's intent to prepare an environmental impact statement to support integrating Atlantic chub mackerel into the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan. This action would consider implementing annual catch limits, accountability measures, essential fish habitat designations, and a definition of the management unit for this species. The Council may also consider other measures such as permit requirements, annual catch targets, possession limits, minimum fish size restrictions, gear restrictions and reporting requirements. The comment period on the notice of intent closed on May 31, 2017. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141, or email at douglas.christel@noaa.gov.

Tilefish

Tilefish Framework 2

This action would modify the incidental possession limit, clarify allowed gear for recreational fishing, and make several improvements to the tilefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. We are currently preparing a proposed rule to seek public comment on the action. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Other Actions

Paperwork Reduction Act

Comment Period for New Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment Data Collections

NMFS published a proposed rule for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment in the Federal Register on April 24, 2017, (82 FR 18882) requesting comments on new collection of information requirements associated with this action. The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 requires the Department of Commerce to attempt to reduce paperwork and respondent burden on proposed and continuing data collections. Comments are invited on the necessity of the collections, the accuracy of the agency's estimate of burden, ways to enhance the collection, and ways to minimize the burden on respondents. Direct all written comments to OIRA_Submission@omb.eop.gov, or fax to (202) 395-5806. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141 or email at douglas.christel@noaa.gov.

Comment Period for Renewal of Atlantic Sea Scallop Northeast Region Observer Providers Requirements Data Collections

We published a notice in the Federal Register on April 17, 2017, (82 FR 18119) requesting comments under the Paperwork Reduction Act to renew the collection of information requirements associated with Atlantic Sea Scallop Northeast Region Observer Providers Requirements. Comments are invited on the necessity of the collections, the accuracy of the agency's estimate of burden, ways to enhance the collection, and ways to minimize the burden on respondents. The comment period for the information collection is open through June 16, 2017. Direct all written comments to Jennifer Jessup, Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer, Department of Commerce, Room 6616, 14th and Constitution Avenue NW., Washington, DC 20230 (or via the Internet at JJessup@doc.gov). For additional information, please contact Alyson Pitts at (978) 281-9352, or email at Alyson.Pitts@noaa.gov.

Forage Species

Notice of Availability for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment

NMFS published a notice of availability for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment in the Federal Register on March 28, 2017 (82 FR 15311). The Forage Fish Amendment would: Set a 1,700 lb/trip cumulative possession limit for certain previously unmanaged forage species in Mid-Atlantic Federal waters; establish a 2.86 million lb annual landing limit for Atlantic chub mackerel and a 40,000 lb incidental trip limit once the annual landing limit is reached; require a Federal commercial vessel, operator, and dealer permit to fish for, possess, land, and purchase forage species or Atlantic chub mackerel in or from Mid-Atlantic Federal waters; require vessel operators and dealers to report catch and landings of forage species and chub mackerel on logbooks and dealer reports, respectively; allow vessels to transit Mid-Atlantic waters with forage species and chub mackerel caught outside of the Mid-Atlantic Federal waters; and specify certain measures that can be revised through a future framework action. The comment period on the notice of availability closed on May 30, 2017. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141, or email at douglas.christel@noaa.gov.

Proposed Rule for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment

NMFS published a proposed rule for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment in the Federal Register on April 24, 2017 (82 FR 18882). This amendment would implement measures to prevent the expansion of existing commercial fisheries for certain previously unmanaged forage species and Atlantic chub mackerel. As noted above, proposed measures include possession limits, an annual landing limit for chub mackerel, permit and reporting requirements, a transiting provision, and a list of allowable framework measures. The comment period on this rule closed on May 30, 2017. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141 or email at douglas.christel@noaa.gov.

Lobster

None at this time

Jonah Crab

None at this time

Blueline Tilefish

Blueline Tilefish Amendment

This action would add blueline tilefish to the Tilefish Fishery Management Plan and establish management measures for the resource in the Mid-Atlantic. We are currently preparing a proposed rule to seek public comment on the action. For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or email at Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Industry Funded Monitoring Omnibus Amendment

None at this time

Electronic Vessel Trip Report Omnibus Framework

NMFS published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on May 24, 2017, (83 FR 23774) that would implement a requirement for charter and party vessels that hold a Federal permit to fish for species managed by a Mid-Atlantic Council FMP, while on a trip carrying passengers for hire, to submit VTRs by electronic means. Vessels would also be required to submit these reports within 48 hours following the completion of a fishing trip. The comment period for this proposed rule will close on June 23, 2017. For additional information, please contact Dan Luers at 978-282-8457 or Daniel.Luers@noaa.gov.

Protected Resources Actions

None at this time

Research Permits and Acknowledgments - Applications Under Review

GMRI submitted an initial application for an exempted fishing permit (EFP) on April 10, 2017, in support of research associated with a 2016 Saltonstall-Kennedy Program (SK) Project titled “Complementary testing of off-bottom trawls to target Georges Bank haddock”. The overall goal of this project is to test the efficacy of an off-bottom trawl to access healthy groundfish stocks using a trawl that is highly-selective, fuel-efficient, and reduces environmental impacts. One vessel, the F/V *Teresa Marie IV*, would test the off-bottom trawl with two different codends; a 4.5-inch diamond mesh codend used when targeting redfish, and a 5.1-inch square mesh codend when targeting haddock. The proposed off-bottom trawl would require an exemption from the Northeast Multispecies minimum mesh size requirements at 50 CFR 648.80(a)(3)(ii). For additional information, please contact Emily Keiley at (978)-281-9116 or email at emily.keiley@noaa.gov.

On March 29, 2017, NMFS received a complete application from Coonamessett Farm Foundation for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) for a project titled: “Optimizing the Georges Bank Scallop Fishery by Maximizing Meat Yield and Minimizing Bycatch” to be considered for the 2017 Scallop Research Set-Aside program. The application being considered would conduct a seasonal survey using scallop dredges to collect data on the distribution of bycatch species and examine scallop meat quality; in addition to conducting biological sampling of American lobsters. The EFP would exempt participating vessels from several fisheries regulations, including: Atlantic sea scallop days-at-sea, crew size, observer program requirements, gear restrictions, possession and size limits, and access to restricted areas on Georges Bank. For additional information, please contact Alyson Pitts at (978) 281-9352 or email at Alyson.Pitts@noaa.gov.

On April 3, 2017, NMFS received a complete application from Coonamessett Farm Foundation for an EFP for a project titled: “Development of an Extended Link Apron: A Broad Range Tool for Bycatch Reduction” to be considered for the 2017 Scallop Research Set-Aside program. The application being considered would determine the efficacy of an extended link apron at reducing the capture of yellowtail and windowpane flounder using a commercial scallop dredge. The EFP would exempt participating vessels from several fisheries regulations, including: Atlantic sea scallop days-at-sea, crew size, observer program requirements, possession and size limits, and access to restricted areas on Georges Bank and southern New England. For additional information, please contact Alyson Pitts at (978) 281-9352 or email at Alyson.Pitts@noaa.gov.

Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Regulatory Actions

On February 6, 2017, the University of Rhode Island submitted a complete EFP application for a project to conduct gear research to reduce flatfish bycatch in the scallop dredge. The project has been funded through a grant as part of the 2016 Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program. The project would need exemptions from the scallop fishery observer program requirements, along with minimum fish sizes and possession limits for sampling purposes only. All research would be conducted on limited access general category individual fishing quota (IFQ) vessels under normal commercial fishing conditions. All catch within regulatory limits will be kept, sold, and counted towards the vessel's yearly IFQ allocation. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978) 282-8456 or email at Shannah.jaburek@noaa.gov.

On March 7, 2017, NMFS received an initial EFP request from the Environmental Defense Fund and Gulf of Marine Research Institute to test a maximized retention electronic monitoring (EM) program. A revised and complete EFP request was submitted on April 17, 2017. If the EFP is approved, participating vessels would be exempt from commercial minimum fish sizes and be required to retain all allocated groundfish catch, regardless of size. Vessels would run EM on 100 percent of trips; the video footage would be used to verify compliance with retention requirements. Catch would be sampled through a dockside monitoring program for all EFP trips. Participating vessels may be granted access to closed areas and exemptions from gear requirements. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978)281-9255, or email at claire.fitz-gerald@gmail.com.

On April 5, 2017, NMFS received an EFP request from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to expand on TNC's existing electronic monitoring program. Participating vessels would use EM, and adhere to catch handling and reporting requirements, on 100 percent of sector trips. Data collected through this EFP would be used to further explore an audit-based EM model, in which a subset of EM video footage is reviewed to ensure accurate reporting. Participating vessels may be granted access to closed areas and other measures to improve business flexibility. Vessels are in four separate sectors and use trawl, gillnet, tub trawl, and handline gear. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978)281-9255, or email at claire.fitz-gerald@noaa.gov.

On May 16, 2017, NMFS published a notice in the Federal Register (82 FR 22515) that three commercial fishermen submitted separate and complete applications requesting an EFP to conduct independent projects testing the economic viability of using hook gear to selectively target healthy pollock and haddock stocks in the Western Gulf of Maine and Cashes Ledge Closure Areas (excluding Cashes Ledge Habitat Closed Area), while avoiding bycatch of cod and other bycatch species; the comment period closed May 31, 2017. The applicants will leverage this exemption to explore and develop premium markets for their catch. If issued, these EFPs would authorize three commercial fishing vessels to fish a combined total of 200 trips in these closure areas. Participating vessels would be required carry 100 percent observer coverage on EFP trips. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978)281-9255, or email at claire.fitz-gerald@noaa.gov.

On November 29, 2016, NMFS received a request for an EFP from William G. Brown in support of a study investigating the economic viability of electronic jigging machines to target pollock. NMFS published a notice for comment in the Federal Register on March 16, 2017 (82 FR 13977), and public comment closed on March 31, 2017. The participating commercial fishing vessel would conduct sampling using electronic jigging machines in the Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area between June and August of 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.

Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Regulatory Actions

On May 25, 2017, NMFS received a request for a letter of acknowledgement (LOA) from the University of Maine in support of its' ongoing sentinel survey in the eastern Gulf of Maine. The participating commercial fishing vessels would conduct survey work using longline and jig gear in the Gulf of Maine during the summer of 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.

On May 23, 2017, NMFS received a request for an LOA from the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) to perform scientific research testing of an experimental, off-bottom trawl net. This project has been funded by the 2015 Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program. Testing of the off-bottom trawl would occur in July and August 2017. For additional information please contact Emily Keiley at (978)281-9116 or email at Emily.Keiley@noaa.gov.

A UNH representative submitted an application on May 11, 2017, for authorization of exempted educational activities. The Exempted Educational Activity Authorization (EEAA) would be conducted to support the Shoals Marine Laboratory's academic program through UNH as part of two courses: Sustainable Marine Fisheries and Marine Immersion. Both courses are intended for students interested in marine conservation, and explore the theory and practice of fisheries sustainability through lectures, field work, and interactions with the fishing community. One day of trawling and two days of gill-netting would occur during the period of June 11-28, 2017, and one day of trawling would occur during the week of August 14-21, 2017. For additional information please contact Emily Keiley at (978)281-9116 or email at Emily.Keiley@noaa.gov.

On April 25, 2017, NMFS received a request for an EFP from the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries to complete the second year of a whiting study. This EFP allows up to eight commercial vessels to use standard raised-footrope gear to fish for whiting within a portion of Small-Mesh Area 1, two weeks prior to the start of the open season. The study would analyze if whiting stocks can be more effectively targeted within the study area before the start of the open season. This EFP would exempt the participating vessels from minimum mesh size gear requirements found at 50 CFR 648.80(a)(3), and from the possession limits and minimum size requirements specified at 50 CFR part 648, subparts B and D through O. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 281-9112 or email at Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov.

On April 17, 2017, Coonamessett Farm Foundation submitted a complete application for an EFP to complete work on a 2016 scallop RSA seeding and enhancement project on Georges Bank titled "Drivers of Dispersal and Retention in Recently Seeded Sea Scallops." The goal of the project is to demonstrate the feasibility of a seeding program to enhance and stabilized scallop recruitment on Georges Bank while documenting the factors that affect seed survival. The EFP would exempt vessels from the Atlantic sea scallop crew size restrictions, observer program requirements, closed area requirements for Nantucket Lightship and Closed Area I, and minimum fish sizes and possession limits for biological sampling only. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978) 282-8456 or email at Shannah.jaburek@noaa.gov.

On May 23, 2017, CFF submitted a complete application for an EFP, to conduct an optical and dredge survey in the NGOM Scallop Management Area. The project titled “An Optical Assessment of Sea Scallop Abundance and Distribution in Select Areas of the Northern Gulf of Maine Scallop Management Area” would be funded through the Scallop Research Set-Aside Program. The primary survey instrument will be the HabCam imaging system, but a scallop survey dredge would be deployed to enable collection of biological information. One vessel would conduct the survey in early July 2017 over the course of four days-at-sea. The EFP would exempt the vessel from the Northern Gulf of Maine management program requirements, days-as-sea allocations, crew size exemptions, observer program requirements, and dredge gear restrictions. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978) 282-8456 or email at Shannah.jaburek@noaa.gov.

Research Permits and Acknowledgments - Application Review Completed

On March 30, 2017, NMFS issued an LOA to the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) to conduct an industry-based survey (IBS) on Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod. This LOA authorizes MA DMF to contract one fishing vessel to conduct monthly cruises from April through July, and from October through January. Each cruise will be approximately 10 days, with an average of 5 30-minute tows each day. All cruises will be accompanied by at least one chief scientist and trained contracted sampler, or a MA DMF staff member. Prohibited species will be returned to the water as quickly as possible. Commercially valuable species will be sampled and sold; proceeds from the sale will be used to support this research. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978) 281-9255, or email at claire.fitz-gerald@noaa.gov.

On April 25, 2017, NMFS issued a revision to Rutgers University’s LOA to conduct a hook and line black sea bass spatial dynamics survey. The project surveys five sites from Rhode Island to North Carolina at different depths using the recreational fishery and volunteer anglers. This revision removed three vessels from the LOA and added two new vessels. The overall effort and scope of the research project remains unchanged by this modification, and runs through November, 2017. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

On May 10, 2017, NMFS issued a LOA to the University of Rhode Island to conduct a new phase of the Southern New England Cooperative Ventless Trap Survey, which seeks to understand the distribution and habitat usage of American lobster and Jonah crab in the RI/MA Wind Energy Area in Lobster Management Area 2. Three active vessels will survey lobsters and Jonah crabs at 24 established sampling sites within the study area, using eight standard trawls with 10 traps (6 ventless, 6 standard) per trawl, for a total of 80 traps per vessel. One trawl will be deployed at each of the fixed sample sites, and fished twice a month from May through November 2017, with a soak time of five days. During sampling, detailed biological information will be recorded for all lobsters and up to 10 Jonah crabs from each trap, and other bycatch species will also be enumerated, weighed, and measured. All species will be returned promptly to the water after sampling. No catch from this project will be landed for sale. Biologists from URI will direct survey activities for all trips conducted under this LOA. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov

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On May 19, 2017, NMFS issued a revision to an EFP originally issued to Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) on May 18, 2017, replacing an incorrect vessel with the correct one. The EFP was issued to allow MA DMF to conduct a 2-year scientific study with experimental gear and lobster possession and landing that would otherwise be restricted under the Federal lobster regulations. The purpose of the survey is to provide fishery-independent data on lobster growth and abundance within the Massachusetts state waters of stat. area 514, and state and Federal waters of stat. areas 537 and 538. Funding is provided by MA DMF through their commercial and recreational lobster license fees. This survey has been conducted since 2006 in MA state waters, and an EFP has been issued for the survey since 2014. The EFP would allow five federally permitted lobster vessels to set, haul, and retain on-board lobster traps without escape vents during setting and sampling activity. The vessels would also be exempt from trap limits, trap tag requirements, size requirements, and V-notch and berried female possession requirements for research purposes only. Sampling will occur from June through October of 2017 and 2018. For additional information, please contact Carrie Wein at (978) 978-281-9225 or email at Carrie.Wein@noaa.gov.

On April 18, 2017, NMFS issued a one year EFP extension to the University of New England for an existing EFP after receiving a no cost extension of the Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program grant funding this study. The original EFP was issued on April 29, 2016. This study will assess the injuries of cod captured in lobster traps while fishing for lobster, and was designed to obtain information for fisheries managers to more accurately predict cod discard mortality in the GOM lobster fishery. This EFP allows exemption from 50 CFR 648.86(b)(5) and § 648.83(a), while sampling and tagging cod. For additional information, please contact Carrie Wein at (978) 978-281-9225 or email at Carrie.Wein@noaa.gov.

NMFS issued a LOA to Northeastern University on April 28, 2017, to conduct a cod population dynamics study. A revised LOA for this project was issued on May 31, 2017, to incorporate a small change to the project's research design. For additional information please contact Emily Keiley at (978)281-9116 or email at Emily.Keiley@noaa.gov.

On April 27, 2017, NMFS issued a LOA to the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) in support of a halibut tagging study. The participating vessels will conduct sampling using longline gear in the Gulf of Maine in June and July, 2017. DMR staff will accompany all research trips. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.

On April 20, 2017, NMFS issued a Scientific Research Permit (SRP) from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) in support of NOAA's Gulf of Maine Bottom Longline Survey. The chartered commercial fishing vessels will conduct survey work using longline gear in the Gulf of Maine in Spring and Fall of 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.

On April 26, 2017, NMFS issued an EFP to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. The EFP supports the ongoing NEFSC Study Fleet biological sampling program. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov

Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Regulatory Actions

On May 12, 2017, NMFS issued an Exempted Educational Activity Authorization (EEAA) to the University of New Hampshire in support of the Shoals Marine Laboratory (SML) programs, which included high school and college marine science courses, public educational programs, and a marine science workshop for teachers. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov

On May 31, 2017, NMFS issued EFPs to the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, School for Marine Science and Technology and The Nature Conservancy. The EFPs support a project conducted with funding from the Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program studying Atlantic halibut stock structure, seasonal movement, behavior, and life history. The EFPs allow participating vessels to land Atlantic halibut under the minimum size limit and in excess of possession limits. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov

On June 1, 2017, NMFS issued an EFP to The Nature Conservancy renewing an EFP issued in fishing year 2016. This EFP authorizes 14 vessels to continue using electronic monitoring (EM) in lieu of human at-sea monitors (ASM) on trips selected for ASM coverage for fishing year 2017. All video from these selected trips will be reviewed and used to identify and enumerate discards of groundfish species. A continuation of this project will enable The Nature Conservancy and its partners to further improve the functionality of EM, refine fish handling protocols, and support future implementation of EM. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978) 281-9255, or email at claire.fitz-gerald@gmail.com.



National Marine Fisheries Service
Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
Sustainable Fisheries Division
www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov



Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Actions

Prepared for the April 18-20, 2017
Meeting of the
New England Fishery Management Council

April 17, 2017

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New England Council Actions

Small-Mesh Multispecies

None at this time

Groundfish

Amendment 18 to the Multispecies FMP

One March 6, 2017, NOAA Fisheries approved Amendment 18 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. Amendment 18 establishes accumulation limits for limited access groundfish permits and removes several limited access handgear vessel restrictions. A final rule implementing the Amendment should be publishing soon.

Inseason Action to Increase the Common Pool Possession and Trip Limit of Gulf of Maine Cod and Haddock

On March 16, 2017, NMFS filed a temporary rule in the Federal Register increasing the possession and trip limit for Gulf of Maine cod and haddock through April 30, 2017. NMFS took these actions because catch data indicated that the common pool was not expected to fully harvest its annual quota for these stocks at the trip limit already in place. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov

Final Adjustment to the Yellowtail Flounder Allocations for the Groundfish and Scallop Fisheries

On March 13, 2017, NMFS filed a temporary rule in the Federal Register that transferred unused quota of Georges Bank and Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder from the scallop fishery to the commercial groundfish fishery for the 2016 fishing year, through April 30, 2017. NMFS transferred 40 metric tons of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder, and 15 metric tons of Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder, to the groundfish fishery (sector and common pool vessels). For additional information, please contact Emily Keiley at (978)281-9116 or Emily.Keiley@noaa.gov.

Reimbursement of Sector At-Sea Monitoring Costs

For the 2016 fishing year, NMFS has been able to fully fund our SBRM monitoring program and is using remaining funds to offset some of industry's costs for the groundfish at-sea monitoring program through a cooperative agreement with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The ASMFC has been reimbursing sectors for 85 percent of their ASM and electronic monitoring costs for sector trips beginning on or after July 1, 2016. To date, all 14 sectors actively fishing have submitted invoices and been reimbursed for ASM trips, on a total of 1,114 days, that occurred from July through March, including applicable EM trips. We are actively monitoring and evaluating the spend-down of available funds consistent with projected effort for the remainder of the fishing year. For additional information, please contact Liz Sullivan at [\(978\) 282-8493](tel:(978)282-8493) or email at Liz.Sullivan@noaa.gov.

Scallops

Final Rule for Framework 28

NMFS published a final rule approving and implementing Framework 28 in the Federal Register on March 27, 2017 (82 FR 15155). Framework 28: sets specifications for the scallop fishery for fishing year 2017; revises the way we allocate catch to the limited access general category individual fishing quota fleet to reflect spatial management of the scallop fishery; and implements a 50-bushel shell stock possession limit for limited access vessels inshore of the days-at- sea demarcation line north of 42° 20' N. lat. For additional information, please contact Travis Ford at (978) 281-9233 or email at travis.ford@noaa.gov.

2017 Closure of the Northern Gulf of Maine Scallop Management Area

On March 23, 2017, NMFS announced that the Northern Gulf of Maine Scallop Management Area will close for the remainder of the 2017 fishing year (82 FR 15164). The closure ensures that the scallop fleet will not overharvest the 2017 total allowable catch set for the management area. For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at (978) 282-8456 or email at Shannah.jaburek@noaa.gov.

Monkfish

None at this time

Herring

None at this time

Skate

Commercial Skate Wing and Skate Bait Possession Limit Increase

NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on March 14, 2017, (82 FR 13564) which increased the skate wing possession limit from 500 lb to 4,100 lb of skate wings per trip, and increased the skate bait possession limit from 1,135 lb to 9,307 lb per trip, effective March 15, 2017, through April 30, 2017. Adjusting these possession limits were necessary to allow fishermen the opportunity to fully harvest the remaining skate wing and skate bait annual commercial quota. For additional information, please contact Reid Lichwell at (978) 281-9112 or email at Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov.

Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab

Atlantic Deep-Sea Red Crab Specifications for Fishing Years 2017-2019

NMFS published a final rule in the Federal Register on February 22, 2017, (82 FR 11322) approving the 2017 Atlantic deep-sea red crab quota and projecting quotas for 2018-2019. Based on the recommendation from the New England Fishery Management Council, we are continuing the existing red crab fishery quota of 1,775 metric tons for fishing years 2017. This action is necessary to establish allowable red crab harvest levels that will prevent overfishing and allow harvesting of optimum yield. Because the final rule did not publish before the start of the 2017 fishing year (March 1, 2017), rollover specifications were in effect and were replaced when the final rule became effective on March, 24, 2017. For additional information, please contact Allison Murphy at (978) 281-9122 or email at Allison.Murphy@noaa.gov.

Mid-Atlantic Council Actions

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass

Revised Black Sea Bass Specifications for 2017 and 2018

NMFS published a proposed rule in the Federal Register (82 FR 17964) on April 14, 2017, that proposes revised black sea bass specifications for the 2017 and 2018 fishing years, as well as the removal of a previously implemented accountability measure. Updated scientific information from the 2016 stock assessment indicates that higher catch limits should be implemented to obtain optimum yield, and that the accountability measure to account for commercial sector overages in 2015 is no longer necessary or appropriate. The revised specifications represent a 53-percent increase in the 2017 commercial black sea bass quota established in 2015, and a 52-percent increase in the 2017 recreational harvest limit. The Council will revisit its decision on the 2018 specifications following the SSC's review next summer, and if no changes are necessary, this action will remain unchanged. The comment period ends on May 1, 2017. The 2017 black sea bass recreational measures are currently in development, and will be published in a separate rule later this Spring. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Commercial Summer Flounder Quota Transfer – North Carolina to Virginia

NMFS published a temporary rule in the Federal Register on February 22, 2017, (82 FR 11321) allowing a transfer of 11,030 lb of commercial summer flounder quota from North Carolina to Virginia. The revised summer flounder quotas for calendar year 2017 are: North Carolina, 1,542,203 lb; Virginia, 1,217,402 lb. This transfer was requested by North Carolina to repay landings by a North Carolina-permitted vessel that landed in Virginia under a safe harbor agreement. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Atlantic Bluefish

2017 Atlantic Bluefish Sector Quota Transfer Adjustment

NMFS published a rule in the Federal Register on March 13, 2017, (82 FR 13402) that revises the sector quota transfer amount from the recreational to the commercial bluefish fishery to account for 2016 harvest information. As a result of the updated harvest information, we have increased the sector quota transfer by 2,471,354 lb; resulting in a revised recreational harvest limit of 9,653,715 lb, and a revised commercial quota of 8,542,221 lb. The individual state quota allocations have been updated to reflect the sector transfer, and the recreational season and daily possession limits for 2017 remain unchanged. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

Spiny Dogfish

None at this time

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog ITQ Cost Recovery

The 2017 fishing year marks the start of the new cost recovery program for the surfclam and ocean quahog individual transferable quota (ITQ) fisheries. At the end of 2017, ITQ shareholders will be responsible for a fee based on how many of their 2017 cage tags are used to land surfclams or ocean quahogs throughout the year. The fee to the ITQ shareholder will be based on the cage tag numbers initial allocated to each shareholder, even if some or all of those tags are leased or otherwise transferred to another individual who uses them to land clams. We will announce the new fees per tag shortly, and will issue bills in March 2018, based on all of the cage tags used in 2017. Details about the new cost recovery program were published in the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Amendment 17 final rule (81 FR 38969; June 15, 2016). For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov.

Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish

Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Chub Mackerel

NMFS published a notice of intent in the Federal Register on March 22, 2017, (82 FR 14694) documenting the Mid-Atlantic Council's intent to prepare an environmental impact statement to support integrating Atlantic chub mackerel into the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan. This action would consider implementing annual catch limits, accountability measures, essential fish habitat designations, and a definition of the management unit for this species. The Council may also consider other measures such as permit requirements, annual catch targets, possession limits, minimum fish size restrictions, gear restrictions and reporting requirements. The comment period on the notice of intent closes on May 31, 2017. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141, or email at douglas.christel@noaa.gov.

Tilefish

None at this Time

Other Actions

Paperwork Reduction Act

Comment Period for New Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment Data Collections

NMFS expects to publish a proposed rule for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment in the Federal Register soon, requesting comments on new collection of information requirements associated with this action. The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 requires the Department of Commerce to attempt to reduce paperwork and respondent burden on proposed and continuing data collections. Comments are invited on the necessity of the collections, the accuracy of the agency's estimate of burden, ways to enhance the collection, and ways to minimize the burden on respondents. Direct all written comments to OIRA_Submission@omb.eop.gov, or fax to (202) 395-5806. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141 or email at douglas.christel@noaa.gov.

Comment Period for Renewal of Atlantic Sea Scallop Northeast Region Observer Providers

Requirements Data Collections: We published a notice in the Federal Register on April 17, 2017, (82 FR 18119) requesting comments under the Paperwork Reduction Act to renew the collection of information requirements associated with Atlantic Sea Scallop Northeast Region Observer Providers Requirements. Comments are invited on the necessity of the collections, the accuracy of the agency's estimate of burden, ways to enhance the collection, and ways to minimize the burden on respondents. The comment period for the information collection is open through June 16, 2017. Direct all written comments to Jennifer Jessup, Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer, Department of Commerce, Room 6616, 14th and Constitution Avenue NW., Washington, DC 20230 (or via the Internet at JJessup@doc.gov). For additional information, please contact Alyson Pitts at (978) 281-9352, or email at Alyson.Pitts@noaa.gov.

Forage Species

Notice of Availability for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment

NMFS published a notice of availability for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment in the Federal Register on March 28, 2017 (82 FR 15311). The Forage Fish Amendment would: Set a 1,700 lb/trip cumulative possession limit for certain previously unmanaged forage species in Mid-Atlantic Federal waters; establish a 2.86 million lb annual landing limit for Atlantic chub mackerel and a 40,000 lb incidental trip limit once the annual landing limit is reached; require a Federal commercial vessel, operator, and dealer permit to fish for, possess, land, and purchase forage species or Atlantic chub mackerel in or from Mid-Atlantic Federal waters; require vessel operators and dealers to report catch and landings of forage species and chub mackerel on logbooks and dealer reports, respectively; allow vessels to transit Mid-Atlantic waters with forage species and chub mackerel caught outside of the Mid-Atlantic Federal waters; and specify certain measures that can be revised through a future framework action. The comment period on the notice of availability closes on May 30, 2017. A proposed rule is expected to publish soon. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141, or email at douglas.christel@noaa.gov.

Proposed Rule for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment

NMFS expects to publish a proposed rule for the Unmanaged Forage Fish Omnibus Amendment in the Federal Register soon. This amendment would implement measures to prevent the expansion of existing commercial fisheries for certain previously unmanaged forage species and Atlantic chub mackerel. As detailed above, proposed measures include possession limits, an annual landing limit for chub mackerel, permit and reporting requirements, a transiting provision, and a list of allowable framework measures. For additional information, please contact Douglas Christel at (978) 281-9141 or email at douglas.christel@noaa.gov.

Lobster

None at this time

Jonah Crab

None at this time

Blueline Tilefish

None at this time

Industry Funded Monitoring Omnibus Amendment

None at this time

Protected Resources Actions

None at this time

Research Permits and Acknowledgments - Applications Under Review

On March 28, 2017, NMFS published a notice and request for comments in the Federal Register (82 FR 15329) for an application for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) submitted by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC). The EFP application under consideration would support the NEFSC Study Fleet Program. It would exempt participating vessels from several fisheries regulations, including: Minimum fish size restrictions; fish possession limit; gear specific fish possession restrictions for the purpose of at-sea sampling; and retaining and landing of prohibited fish species. The comment period for this notice closed on April 12, 2017. For additional information, please contact Spencer Talmage at (978) 281-9232 or email at Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov

On March 31, 2017, NMFS received a request for a letter of acknowledgement (LOA) from the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) in support of a tagging study of adult halibut. The participating commercial fishing vessels would conduct halibut for tagging using longline gear in the Gulf of Maine in June and July, 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.

Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Regulatory Actions

On April 14, 2017, NMFS published a notice and request for comments in the Federal Register (82 FR 17972) for an application for an EFP submitted by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The EFP would be a renewal of last year's project to allow TNC and its partners to further develop electronic monitoring (EM) for the groundfish fishery. The 2017 EFP would allow vessels an exemption from their sector's monitoring plan to use EM in lieu of an at-sea monitor (ASM) when selected for ASM coverage. The comment period for this notice closes on May 1, 2017. For additional information, please contact Brett Alger at (978) 675-2153 or email at Brett.Alger@noaa.gov

On April 3, 2017, NMFS received an EFP request from the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance and several partners to further develop EM. The request proposes access to groundfish closed areas and exemptions from certain gear requirements, and would require vessels to utilize EM on all sector trips (i.e., 100-percent monitoring). For additional information, please contact Brett Alger at (978) 675-2153 or email at Brett.Alger@noaa.gov.

On February 27, 2017, NMFS received an EFP request from the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) to explore the maximized retention model for EM. Since that time, they have added additional participation and exemptions to their request. On April 17, 2017, EDF resubmitted their request that proposes access to groundfish closed areas, exemptions from certain gear requirements, and exemptions from minimum fish sizes, and would require vessels to utilize EM on all sector trips (i.e., 100-percent monitoring). For additional information, please contact Brett Alger at (978) 675-2153 or email at Brett.Alger@noaa.gov.

On March 30, 2017, NMFS received a request for a Scientific Research Permit (SRP) from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) in support of NOAA's Gulf of Maine Bottom Longline Survey. The chartered commercial fishing vessels would conduct survey work using longline gear in the Gulf of Maine in Spring and Fall of 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.

On March 20, 2017, NMFS received an EFP request from commercial fisherman, Jim Ford. The request proposes to test the viability of using hook gear to selectively target pollock and haddock, while avoiding catch of cod. Mr. Ford proposes to conduct his research in the Western Gulf of Maine and Cashes Ledge Closure Areas (excluding the Cashes Ledge Habitat Closure Area), as it is believed that these areas contain high levels of haddock and pollock. If issued, Mr. Ford would carry 100 percent observer coverage on EFP trips to collect data on catch composition; Mr. Ford would also collect dealer data to explore market viability for his product. The proposal requests a total of 40 trips, with an average duration of 24 hours or less. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978) 281-9255 or email at claire.fitz-gerald@noaa.gov.

On March 20, 2017, NMFS received an EFP request from commercial fisherman, Tim Rider. The request proposes to test the viability of using hook gear to selectively target pollock and haddock, while avoiding catch of cod. Additionally, the request proposes to examine differences in catch composition inside and outside closed areas. Mr. Rider proposes to conduct his research in the Western Gulf of Maine and Cashes Ledge Closure Areas (excluding the Cashes Ledge Habitat Closure Area). If issued, Mr. Rider would carry 100 percent observer coverage on EFP trips to collect data on catch composition; Mr. Rider would also sell his catch through his business, New England Fishmongers, and collect market data to assess the viability of distributing to New Hampshire-based restaurants. The proposal requests a total of 60 trips, with an average duration of 24 hours or less. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978) 281-9255 or email at claire.fitz-gerald@noaa.gov.

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On March 24, 2017, NMFS received an EFP request from commercial fisherman, Richard Burgess. The request proposes to test the viability of using hook gear to selectively target pollock and haddock, while avoiding catch of cod. Additionally, the request proposes to use specialized handling protocols in an effort to access sashimi markets. Mr. Burgess proposes to conduct his research in the Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area, as it is believed that this area contains high levels of haddock and pollock. If issued, Mr. Burgess would carry 100 percent observer coverage on EFP trips to collect data on catch composition; Mr. Burgess would also collect dealer data to evaluate the viability of the sashimi market against traditional markets. The proposal requests 15 trips per month from June through December, with an average duration of 24 hours or less. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978) 281-9255 or email at claire.fitzgerald@noaa.gov.

On November 29, 2016, NMFS received a request for an EFP from William G. Brown in support of a study investigating the economic viability of electronic jigging machines to target pollock. The participating commercial fishing vessel would conduct sampling using electronic jigging machines in the Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area between June and August of 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov

On March 29, 2017, NMFS received a request from Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) to conduct a 2-year scientific study with experimental gear and lobster possession and landing that would otherwise be restricted under the Federal lobster regulations. The purpose of the survey is to provide fishery-independent data on lobster growth and abundance within the Massachusetts state waters of stat. area 514, and state and Federal waters of stat. areas 537 and 538. Funding is provided by MA DMF through their commercial and recreational lobster license fees. This survey has been conducted since 2006 in MA state waters, and an EFP has been issued for the survey since 2014. The EFP would allow five federally permitted lobster vessels to set, haul, and retain on-board lobster traps without escape vents during setting and sampling activity. The vessels would also be exempt from trap limits, trap tag requirements, size requirements, and V-notch and berried female possession requirements for research purposes only. Sampling will occur from June through October of 2017 and 2018. The Federal Register notice published on April 17, 2017, (82 FR 18117) and the public comment period ends on May 2, 2017. For additional information, please contact Carrie Wein at (978) 978-281-9225 or email at Carrie.Wein@noaa.gov.

On March 28, 2017, we received a request from University of New England to grant an extension to the existing EFP for one year beyond the originally proposed project period after receiving a no cost extension of the grant funding this study. The original EFP was issued on April 29, 2016. This study will assess the injuries of cod captured in lobster traps while fishing for lobster, and was designed to obtain information for fisheries managers to more accurately predict cod discard mortality in the GOM lobster fishery. The Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program funds this project. For additional information, please contact Carrie Wein at (978) 978-281-9225 or email at Carrie.Wein@noaa.gov.

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GMRI submitted an initial application for an EFP on April 10, 2017, in support of research associated with a 2016 Saltonstall-Kennedy Program (SK) Project titled “Complementary testing of off-bottom trawls to target Georges Bank haddock”. The overall goal of this project is to test the efficacy of an off-bottom trawl to access healthy groundfish stocks using a trawl that is highly-selective, fuel-efficient, and reduces environmental impacts. One vessel, the F/V *Teresa Marie IV*, would test the off-bottom trawl with two different codends; a 4.5-inch diamond mesh codend used when targeting redfish, and a 5.1-inch square mesh codend when targeting haddock. The proposed off-bottom trawl would require an exemption from the Northeast Multispecies minimum mesh size requirements at 50 CFR 648.80(a)(3)(ii). [For additional information, please contact Emily Keiley at \(978\)-281-9116 or email at emily.keiley@noaa.gov.](mailto:emily.keiley@noaa.gov)

Northeastern University submitted a complete application for an LOA on April 3, 2017. The proposed study will examine fine-scale population structure of Gulf of Maine cod by identifying genetic loci that affect growth and migratory behavior. The study will also test if spatial management is inadvertently selecting for resident genotypes. To achieve the goals of this study 220 cod, ranging from 20 to 90 cm in length, will be collected across five geographic areas in collaboration with commercial fisherman. [For additional information, please contact Emily Keiley at \(978\)-281-9116 or email at emily.keiley@noaa.gov.](mailto:emily.keiley@noaa.gov)

On March 29, 2017, NMFS received a complete application from Coonamessett Farm Foundation for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) for a project titled: “Optimizing the Georges Bank Scallop Fishery by Maximizing Meat Yield and Minimizing Bycatch” to be considered for the 2017 Scallop Research Set-Aside program. The application being considered would conduct a seasonal survey using scallop dredges to collect data on the distribution of bycatch species and examine scallop meat quality; in addition to conducting biological sampling of American lobsters. The EFP would exempt participating vessels from several fisheries regulations, including: Atlantic sea scallop days-at-sea, crew size, observer program requirements, gear restrictions, possession and size limits, and access to restricted areas on Georges Bank. [For additional information, please contact Alyson Pitts at \(978\) 281-9352 or email at Alyson.Pitts@noaa.gov.](mailto:Alyson.Pitts@noaa.gov)

On April 3, 2017, NMFS received a complete application from Coonamessett Farm Foundation for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) for a project titled: “Development of an Extended Link Apron: A Broad Range Tool for Bycatch Reduction” to be considered for the 2017 Scallop Research Set-Aside program. The application being considered would determine the efficacy of an extended link apron at reducing the capture of yellowtail and windowpane flounder using a commercial scallop dredge. The EFP would exempt participating vessels from several fisheries regulations, including: Atlantic sea scallop days-at-sea, crew size, observer program requirements, possession and size limits, and access to restricted areas on Georges Bank and southern New England. [For additional information, please contact Alyson Pitts at \(978\) 281-9352 or email at Alyson.Pitts@noaa.gov.](mailto:Alyson.Pitts@noaa.gov)

On February 6, 2017, the University of Rhode Island submitted a complete EFP application for a project to conduct gear research to reduce flatfish bycatch in the scallop dredge. The project has been funded through a grant as part of the 2016 Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program. The project would need exemptions from the scallop fishery observer program requirements, along with minimum fish sizes and possession limits for sampling purposes only. All research would be conducted on limited access general category individual fishing quota (IFQ) vessels under normal commercial fishing conditions. All catch within regulatory limits will be kept, sold, and counted towards the vessel’s yearly IFQ allocation. [For additional information, please contact Shannah Jaburek at \(978\) 282-8456 or email at Shannah.jaburek@noaa.gov.](mailto:Shannah.jaburek@noaa.gov)

Research Permits and Acknowledgments - Application Review Completed

On February 23, 2017, NMFS issued a Letter of Acknowledgement (LOA) to the Cornell Cooperative Extension Marine Program to conduct an evaluation of new conservation gear technology designed to reduce black sea bass bycatch in the small-mesh longfin squid fishery. Seven research days are planned from May through September, and the participating vessel will conduct six to eight hour-long tows per day out of Point Judith, RI, comparing both experimental and control (standard squid fishery) nets. Longfin squid and black sea bass catch from this study may be retained for sale. All other catch will be discarded as soon as possible. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

On March 2, 2017, NMFS issued a revision to the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF) "American Lobster Ventless Trap Study" Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) issued on August 24, 2015, to allow three additional vessels to join the survey fleet full time, and nine additional ventless traps to be deployed in Area 3 for the remainder of this project. The study period, sampling protocol, requested Federal exemptions, and overall project remain the same. Increased survey coverage in Area 3 is in response to reports of recruitment failure in the Southern New England lobster stock, and the need for more information on population abundance in offshore regions (such as Area 3). For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

On March 27, 2017, NMFS issued an LOA to Rutgers University to conduct a trap survey of black sea bass, tautog, and lobster on two artificial reefs (Sea Girt and Little Egg Inlet) off the coast of New Jersey. For three phases from April through November, 22 ventless fish traps will be deployed at each site for 4-5 weeks per phase; and hauled and sampled every 5-9 days during research phases. Over the course of the year's research, a random sample of 150 black sea bass, 150 tautog, and 100 lobsters will be retained for further sampling, and everything else will be promptly returned to the sea. No fish from this project will be landed for sale. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Hanson at (978) 281-9180, or email at Cynthia.hanson@noaa.gov.

An EFP extension was issued on April 7, 2017, to the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) extending their 2016 Monkfish Research Set-Aside Program until April 30, 2018. This project will allow vessels to conduct compensation fishing to support funding for monkfish research. The EFP exempts vessels from monkfish DAS possession limits in the Northern and Southern Monkfish Fishery Management Areas. Fishing activity will otherwise be conducted under normal monkfish commercial fishing practices. Extending the EFP will allow flexibility for the industry and will assist in harvesting the entire set-aside awarded. Vessels that are collectively operating under this EFP could use up to 250 monkfish RSA DAS or catch 888,000 lb of whole monkfish, whichever occurs first. For additional information, contact Reid Lichwell at (978)-281-9112, or e-mail at Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov.

On March 28, 2017, NMFS received a request for an LOA from Normandeau Associates Inc. (NAI) in support of an ongoing winter flounder assessment survey in Western Cape Cod Bay. The participating commercial fishing vessel would conduct sampling using trawl gear in areas off Plymouth Bay, Massachusetts in April and May of 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov

Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Regulatory Actions

On January 15, 2017, NMFS received a request for an LOA from UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) in support of conservation engineering project testing the use of a “Sort-X grid” to reduce catch of juvenile groundfish in the Georges Bank haddock fishery. The participating commercial fishing vessel would conduct sampling using modified trawl gear on Georges Bank on two trips between March and October of 2017. For additional information, please contact Kyle Molton at (978) 281-9236 or email at Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov.

An EFP extension was issued on April 7, 2017, to Cornell University extending their 2016 Monkfish Research Set-Aside Program until April 30, 2018. This project will allow vessels to conduct compensation fishing to support funding for monkfish research. The EFP exempts vessels from monkfish DAS possession limits in the Northern and Southern Monkfish Fishery Management Areas. Fishing activity will otherwise be conducted under normal monkfish commercial fishing practices. Extending the EFP will allow flexibility for the industry and will assist in harvesting the entire set-aside awarded. Vessels that are collectively operating under this EFP could use up to 250 monkfish RSA DAS or catch 888,000 lb of whole monkfish, whichever occurs first. For additional information, contact Reid Lichwell at (978)-281-9112, or e-mail at Reid.Lichwell@noaa.gov.

On March 30, 2017, NMFS issued an LOA to the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) to conduct an industry-based survey (IBS) on Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod. This LOA authorizes MA DMF to contract one fishing vessel to conduct monthly cruises from April through July, and from October through January. Each cruise will be approximately 10 days, with an average of 5 30-minute tows each day. All cruises will be accompanied by at least one chief scientist and trained contracted sampler, or a MA DMF staff member. Prohibited species will be returned to the water as quickly as possible. Commercially valuable species will be sampled and sold; proceeds from the sale will be used to support this research. For additional information, please contact Claire Fitz-Gerald at (978) 281-9255, or email at claire.fitz-gerald@noaa.gov.