[I.D. 022195A]

North Pacific Fishery Management Council; Team Meetings

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

ACTION: Notice of public meetings.

SUMMARY: A joint meeting of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish and crab plan teams will be held between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., March 21–22, 1995, in Rooms A and B, Building 9, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA. The teams will discuss the sources of crab mortality and habitat considerations relative to development of a rebuilding plan for depressed crab stocks. The meeting is open to the public.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: David Witherell, North Pacific Fishery Management Council, P.O. Box 103136, Anchorage, AK 99510; telephone: (907) 271–2809.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Helen Allen on (907) 271–2809, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: February 22, 1995.

David S. Crestin,

Acting Director, Office of Fisheries Conservation and Management, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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[I.D. 021495D]

Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery; Experimental Fishing Permits

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

ACTION: Receipt of experimental fishing permit applications; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS has received applications from the states of Washington, Oregon, and California for experimental fishing permits (EFPs) for vessels participating in bycatch observation programs. The purpose of the observation programs is to enumerate the bycatch of non-target species in the groundfish fishery. If granted, the EFPs would allow designated vessels operating in the groundfish fishery in the exclusive economic zone off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California to delay sorting, until offloading, of prohibited species and groundfish catch in excess of trip limits. The California program would allow participating vessels with observers to retain Pacific whiting in excess of the nearshore trip limit in the Eureka subarea. These activities would otherwise be prohibited by Federal regulations.

DATES: Comments must be received by February 27, 1995.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be addressed to and copies of the EFP applications are available from William Stelle, Jr., Regional Director, Northwest Region, National Marine Fisheries Service, 7600 Sand Point Way NE., BIN-C15700, Seattle, WA 98115–0070; or Hilda Diaz-Soltero, Director, Southwest Region, National Marine Fisheries Service, 501 W. Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200,

Long Beach, CA 90802–4213.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: William L. Robinson at 206–526–6140, or Rodney R. McInnis at 310–980–4030.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This action is authorized by the Pacific Coast Groundfish Management Plan and implementing regulations (50 CFR 663), which specify that EFPs may be issued to authorize fishing that would otherwise be prohibited by the FMP and regulations. The procedures for issuing EFPs are found at 50 CFR 663.10.

At the October 1994 meeting of the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), three EFP applications were received from the States of Oregon, California, and Washington (WOC) for vessels participating in observation programs.

The first application is from the State of Washington and is for the continuation of the observation program in which information is collected on the bycatch of salmon and other prohibited species in Pacific whiting harvests delivered to shoreside processing plants. This application differs from previous years in that there would be no observer coverage; all observer coverage would occur onshore after the catch is landed.

Under the second EFP application, submitted by California Department of Fish and Game, the focus is on shore-based whiting operations inside the 100 fathom contour in the Eureka subarea (from 43°00’00’’ N. lat. to 40°30’00’’ N. lat.), where large-scale whiting operations are currently prohibited in order to minimize the impacts on salmon (50 CFR 663.23(b)(3)(iii)). The California EFP application is for the collection of data on the relative incidental catch rates of salmon inside and outside 100 fathoms in the Eureka subarea. The applicant requests that vessels be allowed to fish for and retain Pacific whiting in excess of the nearshore 10,000–lb (4,536 kg) trip limit if an observer is on board at all times, even when the vessel operates outside the area.

The third EFP application, submitted by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife would allow the landing of unsorted catches taken in accordance with the proposed Oregon Trawl Commission data collection program that is planned to begin in 1995. The intent is to obtain representative bycatch and discard rates for groundfish and prohibited species. Observers would gather biological data on species’ age, length, weight, sex, maturity, viability and mortality rates. The Oregon program would be similar to the whiting observer program that has been in effect for three seasons. Groundfish regulations at 50 CFR 663.7(b) stipulate that prohibited species must be returned to sea as soon as practicable with a minimum of injury when caught and brought aboard. Groundfish trip limits restrict the amount of certain groundfish species that may be landed by a vessel (50 CFR 663.7(f)).

The EFPs, if granted, would authorize vessels participating in the observation program to land unsorted Pacific whiting at designated shoreside processing plants where the incidence of salmon and other bycatch species can be monitored, on the condition that the prohibited species and groundfish trip limit overages are turned over to the state of landing for disposition. The states anticipate that about 30 vessels may participate in the experimental fisheries from March 1, 1995, to December 31, 1995. Under the EFPs, unsorted Pacific whiting catch could be delivered to shoreside processing plants in Newport, Hammond, Charleston, and Warrenton, OR; Crescent City, CA; and Westport and Ilwaco, WA. State port samplers would monitor the offloading of unsorted Pacific whiting, collect biological information on salmon and other bycatch, and arrange for the disposal of salmon. Prohibited species taken could not be sold; disposal options, to be determined by the states, would include donation to charitable organizations or reduction to fish meal.

If 71,360 metric tons (mt) of Pacific whiting were landed under the EFPs, it is estimated that about 414 salmon would be caught incidentally, based on the observed salmon bycatch rate of 0.0058 salmon per mt of whiting observed in 1994 (the salmon bycatch rate was 0.0110 in 1993). The continuing shoreside monitoring