

JUSTIFICATION

ALASKA PACIFIC HALIBUT AND SABLEFISH FISHERIES INDIVIDUAL FISHING QUOTAS (IFQs)

OMB CONTROL NO. 0648-0272

JUSTIFICATION FOR CHANGE: Changes to IFQ Registered Buyer Permit requirements due to restructured observer associated final rule, RIN 0648-BB42.

The North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program (Observer Program) provides the regulatory framework for NMFS-certified observers (observers) to obtain information necessary for the conservation and management of the groundfish fisheries managed under the fishery management plans (FMPs). The information collected by observers provides the best available scientific information for managing the fisheries and developing measures to minimize bycatch in furtherance of the purposes and national standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Observers collect biological samples and fishery-dependent information on total catch and interactions with protected species.

NMFS proposes regulations to implement Amendment 86 to the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI) FMP and Amendment 76 to the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) FMP. Amendments 86 and 76 would add a funding and deployment system for observer coverage to the existing Observer Program and amend existing observer coverage requirements for vessels and processing plants at 50 CFR 679.50. The new funding and deployment system would allow NMFS to determine when and where to deploy observers according to management and conservation needs, with funds provided through a system of fees based on the ex-vessel value of groundfish and halibut in fisheries covered by the new system.

In addition to the observer funding and deployment system, this action makes the following changes to the issuance of the Registered Buyer permit, most prominent is the change that observer fees must be paid before a Registered Buyer permit can be renewed:

- ◆ The Registered Buyer permit would be renewed electronically.
- ◆ The Registered Buyer permit holder must submit electronic payment to NMFS for his or her observer fee liability (see OMB 0648-0318) in order to receive a renewed Registered Buyer permit.
- ◆ The user for the Registered Buyer would be able to print their renewed permit upon payment of observer fee.

No burden or cost increase is anticipated as a result of this change, as the Registered Buyer permit application requires the same information from the participants. The costs may actually decrease due to electronic renewal of the permit and printing of the renewed permit onboard or onshore.