

JUSTIFICATION FOR CHANGE

NORTHEAST MULTISPECIES AMENDMENT 16

OMB CONTROL NO. 0648-0605

As part of Final Rule 0648-BF62, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS) proposes to modify the annual catch entitlement (ACE) transfer provision to allow sectors to convert eastern Georges Bank cod ACE into western Georges Bank cod ACE. Amendment 16 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP) established a provision to assign each limited access multispecies permit a potential sector contribution (PSC) based on landings from 1996-2006 (participants committed to existing sectors as of March 1, 2008 had GB cod PSCs based on landings from 1996-2001). Sectors are allocated ACE based upon the potential sector contribution (PSC) of its members. Amendment 16 also allows ACE to be traded between sectors to provide additional flexibility in the event that: 1) the initial portfolio of ACE for each sector does not match the sector's desired ACE portfolio; or 2) a sector exceeds its ACE and needs additional ACE to cover the overage and continue fishing. Under the program, sectors can request to transfer ACE at any point during the fishing year, and up to two weeks following the conclusion of the fishing year. Participants are required to complete and submit an ACE transfer form to NMFS for approval. This provision, among many other requirements, was approved for collection under OMB Control Number 0648-0605.

Framework Adjustment 55 to the NE Multispecies FMP proposes to allow a sector to transfer, or re-allocate, eastern GB cod ACE to the Western U.S./Canada Area. This measure is intended to increase flexibility for sector vessels and provide additional fishing opportunities. This measure will also help achieve optimum yield in the fishery by preventing the Western U.S./Canada Area from being closed prematurely before a sector has harvested its entire allocation. *To implement this measure, NMFS is requesting a change to the 0648-0605 information collection to add a new entry field to the ACE transfer request form to allow a sector to indicate how many pounds of eastern GB cod ACE it intends to convert to western GB cod ACE.* This change is necessary to allow a sector to apply for a GB cod ACE conversion in order to increase fishing opportunities in the Western U.S./Canada Area.

The ACE transfer/conversions requests are made via a paper form, or online through a secure database. The proposed change to this request form will not increase the time or cost burden associated with this requirement.