

National Marine Fisheries Service  
Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office  
Sustainable Fisheries Division  
[www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov](http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov)



# Status Report of Greater Atlantic Region Actions

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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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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/](http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/clam/). For additional information, please contact Doug Potts at 978-281-9341 or [Douglas.Potts@noaa.gov](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:JJessup@doc.gov)). For additional information, please contact Alyson Pitts at (978) 281-9352, or email at [Alyson.Pitts@noaa.gov](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](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 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).



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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).

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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:Kyle.Molton@noaa.gov).

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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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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-at-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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:Spencer.Talmage@noaa.gov)

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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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:claire.fitz-gerald@gmail.com).