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Title 50 –Wildlife and Fisheries

Chapter VI –Fishery Conservation and Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce

Part 648 –Fisheries of the Northeastern United States

Subpart I –Management Measures for the Black Sea Bass Fishery

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Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

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Editorial Note: Nomenclature changes to part 648 appear at 62 FR 14651, Mar. 27, 1997.

§ 648.144 Black sea bass gear restrictions.

(a) *Trawl gear restrictions* –

(1) *General.*

(i) Otter trawlers whose owners are issued a black sea bass moratorium permit and that land or possess 500 lb (226.8 kg) or more of black sea bass from January 1 through March 31, or 100 lb (45.4 kg) or more of black sea bass from April 1 through December 31, must fish with nets that have a minimum mesh size of 4.5-inch (11.43-cm) diamond mesh applied throughout the codend for at least 75 continuous meshes forward of the terminus of the net, or for codends with less than 75 meshes, the entire net must have a minimum mesh size of 4.5-inch (11.43-cm) diamond mesh throughout.

(ii) Mesh sizes shall be measured pursuant to the procedure specified in § 648.108(a)(2).

(2) **Net modifications.** No vessel subject to this part shall use any device, gear, or material, including, but not limited to, nets, net strengtheners, ropes, lines, or chafing gear, on the top of the regulated portion of a trawl net except that one splitting strap and one bull rope (if present) consisting of line or rope no more than 3 inches (7.6 cm) in diameter may be used if such splitting strap and/or bull rope does not constrict, in any manner, the top of the regulated portion of the net, and one rope no greater than 0.75 inches (1.9 cm) in diameter extending the length of the net from the belly to the terminus of the codend along the top, bottom, and each side of the net. “Top of the regulated portion of the net” means the 50 percent of the entire regulated portion of the net that (in a hypothetical situation) will not be in contact with the ocean bottom during a tow if the regulated portion of the net were laid flat on the ocean floor. For the purpose of this paragraph, head ropes shall not be considered part of the top of the regulated portion of a trawl net.

(3) **Mesh obstruction or constriction.**

(i) A fishing vessel may not use any mesh configuration, mesh construction, or other means on or in the top of the net, as defined in paragraph (a)(2) of this section, that obstructs the meshes of the net in any manner, or otherwise causes the size of the meshes of the net while in use to diminish to a size smaller than the minimum established pursuant to paragraph (a)(1)(i) of this section.

- (ii) No person on any vessel may possess or fish with a net capable of catching black sea bass in which the bars entering or exiting the knots twist around each other.
 - (4) **Stowage of nets.** Otter trawl vessels subject to the minimum mesh-size requirement of paragraph (a)(1)(i) of this section may not have “available for immediate use” any net or any piece of net that does not meet the minimum mesh size requirement, or any net, or any piece of net, with mesh that is rigged in a manner that is inconsistent with the minimum mesh size requirement. Nets must be stowed and not available for immediate use as defined in § 648.2.
 - (5) **Roller gear.** Rollers used in roller rig or rock hopper trawl gear shall be no larger than 18 inches (45.7 cm) in diameter.
- (b) **Pot and trap gear restrictions –**
- (1) **Gear marking.** The owner of a vessel issued a black sea bass moratorium permit must mark all black sea bass pots or traps with the vessel's USCG documentation number or state registration number.
 - (2) All black sea bass traps or pots must have two escape vents placed in lower corners of the parlor portion of the pot or trap that each comply with one of the following minimum size requirements: 1.375 inches by 5.75 inches (3.49 cm by 14.61 cm); a circular vent of 2.5 inches (6.4 cm) in diameter; or a square vent with sides of 2 inches (5.1 cm), inside measure; however, black sea bass traps constructed of wooden laths instead may have escape vents constructed by leaving spaces of at least 1.375 inches (3.49 cm) between two sets of laths in the parlor portion of the trap. These dimensions for escape vents and lath spacing may be adjusted pursuant to the procedures in § 648.140.
 - (3) **Ghost panel.**
 - (i) Black sea bass traps or pots must contain a ghost panel affixed to the trap or pot with degradable fasteners and hinges. The opening to be covered by the ghost panel must measure at least 3.0 inches (7.62 cm) by 6.0 inches (15.24 cm). The ghost panel must be affixed to the pot or trap with hinges and fasteners made of one of the following degradable materials:
 - (A) Untreated hemp, jute, or cotton string of $\frac{3}{16}$ inches (4.8 mm) diameter or smaller; or
 - (B) Magnesium alloy, timed float releases (pop-up devices) or similar magnesium alloy fasteners; or
 - (C) Ungalvanized or uncoated iron wire of 0.094 inches (2.4 mm) diameter or smaller.
 - (ii) The use of a single non-degradable retention device designed to prevent loss of the ghost panel after the degradable materials have failed is permitted, provided the device does not impair the egress design function of the ghost panel by obstructing the opening or by preventing the panel from opening at such time that the degradable fasteners have completely deteriorated.

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