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Title 50 —Wildlife and Fisheries

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

Part 600 —Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions

Subpart H —General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 561 and 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

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§ 600.745 Scientific research activity, exempted fishing, and exempted educational activity.

(a) **Scientific research activity.** Nothing in this part is intended to inhibit or prevent any scientific research activity conducted by a scientific research vessel. Persons planning to conduct scientific research activities on board a scientific research vessel in the EEZ or on the high seas are encouraged to submit to the appropriate Regional Administrator or Director, 60 days or as soon as practicable prior to its start, a scientific research plan for each scientific activity. The Regional Administrator or Director will acknowledge notification of scientific research activity by issuing to the operator or master of that vessel, or to the sponsoring institution, a Letter of Acknowledgment. This Letter of Acknowledgment is separate and distinct from any permit or consultation required by the MMPA, the ESA, or any other applicable law. The Regional Administrator or Director will include text in the Letter of Acknowledgment informing the applicant that such a permit may be required and should be obtained from the agency prior to embarking on the activity. If the Regional Administrator or Director, after review of a research plan, determines that it does not constitute scientific research but rather fishing, the Regional Administrator or Director will inform the applicant as soon as practicable and in writing. In making this determination, the Regional Administrator, Director, or designee shall consider: the merits of the individual proposal and the institution(s) involved; whether the proposed activity meets the definition of scientific research activity; and whether the vessel meets all the requirements for a scientific research vessel. The Regional Administrator or Director may also make recommendations to revise the research plan to ensure the activity will be considered to be scientific research activity or recommend the applicant request an EFP. The Regional Administrator or Director may designate a Science and Research Director, or the Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, to receive scientific research plans and issue Letters of Acknowledgment. In order to facilitate identification of the activity as scientific research, persons conducting scientific research activities are advised to carry a copy of the scientific research plan and the Letter of Acknowledgment on board the scientific research vessel and to make it available for inspection upon the request of any authorized officer. It is recommended that for any scientific research activity, any fish, or parts thereof, retained pursuant to such activity be accompanied, during any ex-vessel activities, by a copy of the Letter of Acknowledgment. Activity conducted in accordance with a scientific research plan acknowledged by such a Letter of Acknowledgment is presumed to be scientific research activity. An authorized officer may overcome this presumption by showing that an activity does not fit the definition of scientific research activity or is outside the scope of the scientific research plan.

(b) **Exempted fishing —**

(1) **General.** A NMFS Regional Administrator or Director may authorize, for limited testing, public display, data collection, exploratory fishing, compensation fishing, conservation engineering, health and safety surveys, environmental cleanup, and/or hazard removal purposes, the target or incidental harvest of species managed under an FMP or fishery regulations that would otherwise be prohibited.

Exempted fishing may not be conducted unless authorized by an EFP issued by a Regional Administrator or Director in accordance with the criteria and procedures specified in this section. Compensation fishing must be conducted under an EFP if the activity would otherwise be prohibited by applicable regulations unless the activity is specifically authorized under an FMP or a scientific research permit. Conservation engineering that does not meet the definition of scientific research activity, but does meet the definition of fishing must be conducted under an EFP if the activity would otherwise be prohibited by applicable regulations. Data collection designed to capture and land quantities of fish for product development, market research, and/or public display must be permitted under exempted fishing procedures. An EFP exempts a vessel only from those regulations specified in the EFP. All other applicable regulations remain in effect. The Regional Administrator or Director may charge a fee to recover the administrative expenses of issuing an EFP. The amount of the fee will be calculated, at least annually, in accordance with procedures of the NOAA Handbook for determining administrative costs of each special product or service; the fee may not exceed such costs. Persons may contact the appropriate Regional Administrator or Director to determine the applicable fee.

- (2) **Application.** An applicant for an EFP shall submit a completed application package to the appropriate Regional Administrator or Director, as soon as practicable and at least 60 days before the desired effective date of the EFP. Submission of an EFP application less than 60 days before the desired effective date of the EFP may result in a delayed effective date because of review requirements. The application package must include payment of any required fee as specified by paragraph (b)(1) of this section, and a written application that includes, but is not limited to, the following information:
- (i) The date of the application.
 - (ii) The applicant's name, mailing address, and telephone number.
 - (iii) A statement of the purposes and goals of the exempted fishery for which an EFP is needed, including justification for issuance of the EFP.
 - (iv) For each vessel to be covered by the EFP, as soon as the information is available and before operations begin under the EFP:
 - (A) A copy of the USCG documentation, state license, or registration of each vessel, or the information contained on the appropriate document.
 - (B) The current name, address, and telephone number of the owner and master, if not included on the document provided for the vessel.
 - (v) The species (target and incidental) expected to be harvested under the EFP, the amount(s) of such harvest necessary to conduct the exempted fishing, the arrangements for disposition of all regulated species harvested under the EFP, and any anticipated impacts on the environment, including impacts on fisheries, marine mammals, threatened or endangered species, and EFH.
 - (vi) For each vessel covered by the EFP, the approximate time(s) and place(s) fishing will take place, and the type, size, and amount of gear to be used.
 - (vii) The signature of the applicant.

- (viii) The Regional Administrator or Director, as appropriate, may request from an applicant additional information necessary to make the determinations required under this section. An incomplete application or an application for which the appropriate fee has not been paid will not be considered until corrected in writing and the fee paid. An applicant for an EFP need not be the owner or operator of the vessel(s) for which the EFP is requested.

(3) *Issuance.*

- (i) The Regional Administrator or Director, as appropriate, will review each application and will make a preliminary determination whether the application contains all of the required information and constitutes an activity appropriate for further consideration. If the Regional Administrator or Director finds that any application does not warrant further consideration, both the applicant and the affected Council(s) will be notified in writing of the reasons for the decision. If the Regional Administrator or Director determines that any application warrants further consideration, notification of receipt of the application will be published in the FEDERAL REGISTER with a brief description of the proposal. Interested persons will be given a 15- to 45-day opportunity to comment on the notice of receipt of the EFP application. In addition, comments may be requested during public testimony at a Council meeting. If the Council intends to take comments on EFP applications at a Council meeting, it must include a statement to this effect in the Council meeting notice and meeting agenda. Multiple applications for EFPs may be published in the same FEDERAL REGISTER document and may be discussed under a single Council agenda item. The notification may establish a cut-off date for receipt of additional applications to participate in the same, or a similar, exempted fishing activity. The Regional Administrator or Director will also forward copies of the application to the Council(s), the U.S. Coast Guard, and the appropriate fishery management agencies of affected states, accompanied by the following information:
 - (A) The effect of the proposed EFP on the target and incidental species, including the effect on any TAC.
 - (B) A citation of the regulation or regulations that, without the EFP, would prohibit the proposed activity.
 - (C) Biological information relevant to the proposal, including appropriate statements of environmental impacts, including impacts on fisheries, marine mammals, threatened or endangered species, and EFH.
- (ii) If the application is complete and warrants additional consultation, the Regional Administrator or Director may consult with the appropriate Council(s) concerning the permit application during the period in which comments have been requested. The Council(s) or the Regional Administrator or Director shall notify the applicant in advance of any public meeting at which the application will be considered, and offer the applicant the opportunity to appear in support of the application.
- (iii) As soon as practicable after receiving a complete application, including all required analyses and consultations (e.g., NEPA, EFH, ESA and MMPA), and having received responses from the public, the agencies identified in paragraph (b)(3)(i) of this section, and/or after the consultation, if any, described in paragraph (b)(3)(ii) of this section, the Regional Administrator or Director shall issue the EFP or notify the applicant in writing of the decision to deny the EFP and the reasons for the denial. Grounds for denial of an EFP include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (A) The applicant has failed to disclose material information required, or has made false statements as to any material fact, in connection with his or her application; or
 - (B) According to the best scientific information available, the harvest to be conducted under the permit would detrimentally affect the well-being of the stock of any regulated species of fish, marine mammal, threatened or endangered species, or EFH; or
 - (C) Issuance of the EFP would have economic allocation as its sole purpose (other than compensation fishing); or
 - (D) Activities to be conducted under the EFP would be inconsistent with the intent of this section, the management objectives of the FMP, or other applicable law; or
 - (E) The applicant has failed to demonstrate a valid justification for the permit; or
 - (F) The activity proposed under the EFP could create a significant enforcement problem.
- (iv) The decision of a Regional Administrator or Director to grant or deny an EFP is the final action of NMFS. If the permit, as granted, is significantly different from the original application, or is denied, NMFS may publish notification in the FEDERAL REGISTER describing the exempted fishing to be conducted under the EFP or the reasons for denial.
- (v) The Regional Administrator or Director should attach, as applicable, terms and conditions to the EFP, consistent with the purpose of the exempted fishing and as otherwise necessary for the conservation and management of the fishery resources and the marine environment, including, but not limited to:
- (A) The maximum amount of each regulated species that can be harvested and landed during the term of the EFP, including trip limitations, where appropriate.
 - (B) The number, size(s), name(s), and identification number(s) of the vessel(s) authorized to conduct fishing activities under the EFP.
 - (C) A citation of the regulations from which the vessel is exempted.
 - (D) The time(s) and place(s) where exempted fishing may be conducted.
 - (E) The type, size, and amount of gear that may be used by each vessel operated under the EFP.
 - (F) Whether observers, a vessel monitoring system, or other electronic equipment must be carried on board vessels operating under the EFP, and any necessary conditions, such as predeployment notification requirements.
 - (G) Data reporting requirements necessary to document the activities, including catches and incidental catches, and to determine compliance with the terms and conditions of the EFP and established time frames and formats for submission of the data to NMFS.
 - (H) Other conditions as may be necessary to assure compliance with the purposes of the EFP, consistent with the objectives of the FMP and other applicable law.
 - (I) Provisions for public release of data obtained under the EFP that are consistent with NOAA confidentiality of statistics procedures as set out in subpart E. An applicant may be required to waive the right to confidentiality of information gathered while conducting exempted fishing as a condition of an EFP.

- (4) **Acknowledging permit conditions.** Upon receipt of an EFP, the permit holder must date and sign the permit, and retain the permit on board the vessel(s). The permit is not valid until signed by the permit holder. In signing the permit, the permit holder:
 - (i) Agrees to abide by all terms and conditions set forth in the permit, and all restrictions and relevant regulations; and
 - (ii) Acknowledges that the authority to conduct certain activities specified in the permit is conditional and subject to authorization and revocation by the Regional Administrator or Director.
- (5) **Duration.** Unless otherwise specified in the EFP or a superseding notice or regulation, an EFP is valid for no longer than 1 year. EFPs may be renewed following the application procedures in this section.
- (6) **Alteration.** Any permit that has been altered, erased, or mutilated is invalid.
- (7) **Inspection.** Any EFP issued under this section must be carried on board the vessel(s) for which it was issued. The EFP must be presented for inspection upon request of any authorized officer. Any fish, or parts thereof, retained pursuant to an EFP issued under this paragraph must be accompanied, during any ex-vessel activities, by a copy of the EFP.
- (8) **Inspection.** Any EFP issued under this section must be carried on board the vessel(s) for which it was issued. The EFP must be presented for inspection upon request of any authorized officer.
- (9) **Sanctions.** Failure of a permittee to comply with the terms and conditions of an EFP may be grounds for revocation, suspension, or modification of the EFP with respect to all persons and vessels conducting activities under the EFP. Any action taken to revoke, suspend, or modify an EFP for enforcement purposes will be governed by 15 CFR part 904, subpart D.

(c) **Reports.**

- (1) NMFS requests that persons conducting scientific research activities from scientific research vessels submit a copy of any report or other publication created as a result of the activity, including the amount, composition, and disposition of their catch, to the appropriate Science and Research Director and Regional Administrator or Director.
- (2) Upon completion of the activities of the EFP, or periodically as required by the terms and conditions of the EFP, persons fishing under an EFP must submit a report of their catches and any other information required, to the appropriate Regional Administrator or Director, in the manner and within the time frame specified in the EFP, but no later than 6 months after concluding the exempted fishing activity. Persons conducting EFP activities are also requested to submit a copy of any publication prepared as a result of the EFP activity.

(d) **Exempted educational activities –**

- (1) **General.** A NMFS Regional Administrator or Director may authorize, for educational purposes, the target or incidental harvest of species managed under an FMP or fishery regulations that would otherwise be prohibited. The trade, barter or sale of fish taken under this authorization is prohibited. The decision of a Regional Administrator or Director to grant or deny an exempted educational activity authorization is the final action of NMFS. Exempted educational activities may not be conducted unless authorized in writing by a Regional Administrator or Director in accordance with the criteria and procedures specified in this section. Such authorization will be issued without charge.

- (2) **Application.** An applicant for an exempted educational activity authorization shall submit to the appropriate Regional Administrator or Director, at least 15 days before the desired effective date of the authorization, a written application that includes, but is not limited to, the following information:
- (i) The date of the application.
 - (ii) The applicant's name, mailing address, and telephone number.
 - (iii) A brief statement of the purposes and goals of the exempted educational activity for which authorization is requested, including a general description of the arrangements for disposition of all species collected.
 - (iv) Evidence that the sponsoring institution is a valid educational institution, such as accreditation by a recognized national or international accreditation body.
 - (v) The scope and duration of the activity.
 - (vi) For each vessel to be covered by the authorization:
 - (A) A copy of the U.S. Coast Guard documentation, state license, or registration of the vessel, or the information contained on the appropriate document.
 - (B) The current name, address, and telephone number of the owner and master, if not included on the document provided for the vessel.
 - (vii) The species and amounts expected to be caught during the exempted educational activity, and any anticipated impacts on the environment, including impacts on fisheries, marine mammals, threatened or endangered species, and EFH.
 - (viii) For each vessel covered by the authorization, the approximate time(s) and place(s) fishing will take place, and the type, size, and amount of gear to be used.
 - (ix) The signature of the applicant.
 - (x) The Regional Administrator or Director may request from an applicant additional information necessary to make the determinations required under this section. An incomplete application will not be considered until corrected in writing.
- (3) **Issuance.**
- (i) The Regional Administrator or Director, as appropriate, will review each application and will make a determination whether the application contains all of the required information, is consistent with the goals, objectives, and requirements of the FMP or regulations and other applicable law, and constitutes a valid exempted educational activity. The applicant will be notified in writing of the decision within 5 working days of receipt of the application.
 - (ii) The Regional Administrator or Director should attach, as applicable, terms and conditions to the authorization, consistent with the purpose of the exempted educational activity and as otherwise necessary for the conservation and management of the fishery resources and the marine environment, including, but not limited to:
 - (A) The maximum amount of each regulated species that may be harvested.
 - (B) A citation of the regulations from which the vessel is being exempted.
 - (C) The time(s) and place(s) where the exempted educational activity may be conducted.

- (D) The type, size, and amount of gear that may be used by each vessel operated under the authorization.
 - (E) Data reporting requirements necessary to document the activities and to determine compliance with the terms and conditions of the exempted educational activity.
 - (F) Such other conditions as may be necessary to assure compliance with the purposes of the authorization, consistent with the objectives of the FMP or regulations.
 - (G) Provisions for public release of data obtained under the authorization, consistent with NOAA confidentiality of statistics procedures in subpart E. An applicant may be required to waive the right to confidentiality of information gathered while conducting exempted educational activities as a condition of the authorization.
- (iii) The authorization will specify the scope of the authorized activity and will include, at a minimum, the duration, vessel(s), persons, species, and gear involved in the activity, as well as any additional terms and conditions specified under paragraph (d)(3)(ii) of this section.
- (4) **Duration.** Unless otherwise specified, authorization for an exempted educational activity is effective for no longer than 1 year, unless revoked, suspended, or modified. Authorizations may be renewed following the application procedures in this section.
- (5) **Alteration.** Any authorization that has been altered, erased, or mutilated is invalid.
- (6) **Transfer.** Authorizations issued under this paragraph (d) are not transferable or assignable.
- (7) **Inspection.** Any authorization issued under this paragraph (d) must be carried on board the vessel(s) for which it was issued, or be in the possession of at least one of the persons identified in the authorization, who must be present while the exempted educational activity is being conducted. The authorization must be presented for inspection upon request of any authorized officer. Activities that meet the definition of "fishing," despite an educational purpose, are fishing. An authorization may allow covered fishing activities; however, fishing activities conducted outside the scope of an authorization for exempted educational activities are illegal. Any fish, or parts thereof, retained pursuant to an authorization issued under this paragraph must be accompanied, during any ex-vessel activities, by a copy of the authorization.
- (e) **Observers.** NMFS-sanctioned observers or biological technicians conducting activities within NMFS-approved sea sampling and/or observer protocols are exempt from the requirement to obtain an EFP. For purposes of this section, NMFS-sanctioned observers or biological technicians include NMFS employees, NMFS observers, observers who are employees of NMFS-contracted observer providers, and observers who are employees of NMFS-permitted observer providers.

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