

Executive Order 12866, Regulatory Review

This rule has been reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget in accordance with Executive Order 12866.

Lists of Subjects in 48 CFR Part 1652

Government employees, Government procurement, Health insurance, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

Kathie Ann Whipple,
Acting Director.

■ Accordingly, OPM is amending chapter 16 of title 48, Code of Federal Regulations, as follows:

CHAPTER 16—OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT FEDERAL EMPLOYEES HEALTH BENEFITS ACQUISITION REGULATION

Subchapter H—Clauses and Forms

PART 1652—CONTRACT CLAUSES

■ 1. The authority citation for part 1652 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 8913; 40 U.S.C. 486(c); 48 CFR 1.301.

Subpart 1652.2—Texts of FEHBP Clauses

■ 2. In § 1652.216–70, revise paragraphs (b)(2), (b)(3), (b)(4), and (b)(6), and add paragraphs (b)(7) and (b)(8) to read as follows:

§ 1652.216–70 Accounting and price adjustment.

* * * * *

(b) * * *

(2) The subscription rates agreed to in this contract shall be equivalent to the subscription rates given to the carrier's similarly sized subscriber groups (SSSGs) as defined in FEHBAR 1602.170–13. The subscription rates shall be determined according to the carrier's established policy, which must be applied consistently to the FEHBP and to the carrier's SSSGs. If an SSSG receives a rate lower than that determined according to the carrier's established policy, it is considered a discount. The FEHBP must receive a discount equal to or greater than the carrier's largest SSSG discount.

(3) If, at the time of the rate reconciliation, the subscription rates are found to be lower than the equivalent rates for the lower of the two SSSGs, the carrier may include an adjustment to the Federal group's rates for the next contract period, except as noted in paragraph (b)(7) of this clause.

(4) If, at the time of the rate reconciliation, the subscription rates are

found to be higher than the equivalent rates for the lower of the two SSSGs, the carrier shall reimburse the Fund, for example, by reducing the FEHB rates for the next contract term to reflect the difference between the estimated rates and the rates which are derived using the methodology of the lower rated SSSG, except as noted in paragraph (b)(7) of this clause.

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(6) For contract years beginning on or after January 1, 2009, in the event this contract is not renewed, the final rate reconciliation will be performed. The carrier must promptly pay any amount owed to OPM. Any amount recoverable by the carrier is limited to the amount in the contingency reserve for the terminating plan as of December 31 of the terminating year.

(7) Carriers may provide additional guaranteed discounts to the FEHBP that are not given to SSSGs. Any such guaranteed discounts must be clearly identified as guaranteed discounts. After the beginning of the contract year for which the rates are set, these guaranteed FEHBP discounts may not be adjusted.

(8) Carriers may not impose surcharges (loadings not defined based on an established rating method) on the FEHBP subscription rates or use surcharges in the rate reconciliation process irrespective of whether surcharges are applied to the SSSGs.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 229

[Docket No. 090213177–9179–01]

RIN 0648–XN40

Taking of Marine Mammals Incidental to Commercial Fishing Operations; Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries (AA), NOAA, announces temporary restrictions consistent with the requirements of the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan's (ALWTRP) implementing regulations. These regulations apply to lobster trap/

pot and anchored gillnet fishermen for 15 days in an area totaling approximately 1,920 nm² (6,586 km²) east of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The purpose of this action is to provide protection to an aggregation of North Atlantic right whales (right whales).

DATES: Effective beginning at 0001 hours [February 22, 2009], through 2400 hours [March 8, 2009].

ADDRESSES: Copies of the proposed and final Dynamic Area Management (DAM) rules, Environmental Assessments (EAs), Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) meeting summaries, and progress reports on implementation of the ALWTRP may also be obtained by writing Diane Borggaard, NMFS/Northeast Region, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Diane Borggaard, NMFS/Northeast Region, 978–281–9300 x6503; or Kristy Long, NMFS, Office of Protected Resources, 301–713–2322.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Electronic Access

Several of the background documents for the ALWTRP and the take reduction planning process can be downloaded from the ALWTRP web site at <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp/>.

Background

The ALWTRP was developed pursuant to section 118 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) to reduce the incidental mortality and serious injury of three endangered species of whales (right, fin, and humpback) due to incidental interaction with commercial fishing activities. In addition, the measures identified in the ALWTRP would provide conservation benefits to a fourth species (minke), which are neither listed as endangered nor threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ALWTRP, implemented through regulations codified at 50 CFR 229.32, relies on a combination of fishing gear modifications and time/area closures to reduce the risk of whales becoming entangled in commercial fishing gear (and potentially suffering serious injury or mortality as a result).

On January 9, 2002, NMFS published the final rule to implement the ALWTRP's DAM program (67 FR 1133). On August 26, 2003, NMFS amended the regulations by publishing a final rule, which specifically identified gear modifications that may be allowed in a DAM zone (68 FR 51195). The DAM program provides specific authority for NMFS to restrict temporarily on an

expedited basis the use of lobster trap/pot and anchored gillnet fishing gear in order to protect right whales and is applicable to areas north of 42° 30' N. lat. Under the DAM program, NMFS may: (1) require the removal of all lobster trap/pot and anchored gillnet fishing gear for a 15-day period; (2) allow lobster trap/pot and anchored gillnet fishing within a DAM zone with gear modifications determined by NMFS to sufficiently reduce the risk of entanglement; and/or (3) issue an alert to fishermen requesting the voluntary removal of all lobster trap/pot and anchored gillnet gear for a 15-day period and asking fishermen not to set any additional gear in the DAM zone during the 15-day period.

A DAM zone is triggered when NMFS receives a reliable report from a qualified individual of three or more right whales sighted within an area (75 nm² (139 km²)) such that right whale density is equal to or greater than 0.04 right whales per nm² (1.85 km²). A qualified individual is an individual ascertained by NMFS to be reasonably able, through training or experience, to identify a right whale. Such individuals include, but are not limited to, NMFS staff, U.S. Coast Guard and Navy personnel trained in whale identification, scientific research survey personnel, whale watch operators and naturalists, and mariners trained in whale species identification through disentanglement training or some other training program deemed adequate by NMFS. A reliable report would be a credible right whale sighting.

On February 10, 2009, a vessel survey reported an aggregation of 10 right whales in the general proximity of 43° 00' N latitude and 70° 11' W longitude. The position lies east of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in the vicinity of Jeffreys Ledge. After conducting an investigation, NMFS ascertained that the report came from a qualified individual and determined that the report was reliable. Thus, NMFS has received a reliable report from a qualified individual of the requisite right whale density to trigger the DAM provisions of the ALWTRP.

Once a DAM zone is triggered, NMFS determines whether to impose restrictions on fishing and/or fishing gear in the zone. This determination is based on the following factors, including but not limited to: the location of the DAM zone with respect to other fishery closure areas, weather conditions as they relate to the safety of human life at sea, the type and amount of gear already present in the area, and a review of recent right whale entanglement and mortality data.

NMFS has reviewed the factors and management options noted above relative to the DAM under consideration. As a result of this review, NMFS prohibits lobster trap/pot and anchored gillnet gear in this area during the 15-day restricted period unless it is modified in the manner described in this temporary rule.

The DAM zone is bounded by the following coordinates:
 43° 18' N., 70° 25.4' W. (NW Corner)
 43° 18' N., 69° 45' W.
 42° 56' N., 69° 45' W.
 42° 56' N., 69° 32' W.
 42° 30' N., 69° 32' W.
 42° 30' N., 70° 24' W.
 42° 40' N., 70° 24' W.
 42° 40' N., 70° 37' W.
 43° 04' N., 70° 37' W.
 43° 04.1' N., 70° 36.7' W.
 43° 18' N., 70° 25.4' W. (NW Corner)

In addition to those gear modifications currently implemented under the ALWTRP at 50 CFR 229.32, the following gear modifications are required in the DAM zone. If the requirements and exceptions for gear modification in the DAM zone, as described below, differ from other ALWTRP requirements for any overlapping areas and times, then the more restrictive requirements will apply in the DAM zone. Special note for gillnet fishermen: a portion of this DAM zone overlaps the year-round Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area for Northeast Multispecies found at 50 CFR 648.81(e). Due to this closure, sink gillnet is prohibited from this portion of the DAM zone.

Lobster Trap/pot Gear

Fishermen utilizing lobster trap/pot gear within portions of Northern Inshore State Trap/Pot Waters, Northern Nearshore Trap/Pot Waters, and Stellwagen Bank/Jeffreys Ledge Restricted Area that overlap with the DAM zone are required to utilize all of the following gear modifications while the DAM zone is in effect:

1. Groundlines must be made of sinking line. Floating groundlines are prohibited;
2. All buoy lines must be made of sinking line, except the bottom portion of the line, which may be a section of floating line not to exceed one-third the overall length of the buoy line;
3. Fishermen are allowed to use two buoy lines per trawl; and
4. A weak link with a maximum breaking strength of 600 lb (272.4 kg) must be placed at all buoys.

Fishermen utilizing lobster trap/pot gear within the portion of the Offshore Lobster Waters Area that overlap with the DAM zone are required to utilize all of the following gear modifications while the DAM zone is in effect:

1. Groundlines must be made of sinking line. Floating groundlines are prohibited;
2. All buoy lines must be made of sinking line, except the bottom portion of the line, which may be a section of floating line not to exceed one-third the overall length of the buoy line;
3. Fishermen are allowed to use two buoy lines per trawl; and
4. A weak link with a maximum breaking strength of 1,500 lb (680.4 kg) must be placed at all buoys.

Anchored Gillnet Gear

Fishermen utilizing anchored gillnet gear within the portions of the Other Northeast Gillnet Waters Area and the Stellwagen Bank/Jeffreys Ledge Restricted Area that overlap with the DAM zone are required to utilize all the following gear modifications while the DAM zone is in effect:

1. Groundlines must be made of sinking line. Floating groundlines are prohibited;
2. All buoy lines must be made of sinking line, except the bottom portion of the line, which may be a section of floating line not to exceed one-third the overall length of the buoy line;
3. Fishermen are allowed to use two buoy lines per string;
4. The breaking strength of each net panel weak link must not exceed 1,100 lb (498.8 kg). The weak link requirements apply to all variations in net panel size. One weak link must be placed in the center of the floatline and one weak link must be placed in the center of each of the up and down lines at both ends of the net panel. Additionally, one weak link must be placed as close as possible to each end of the net panels on the floatline; or, one weak link must be placed between floatline tie-loops between net panels and one weak link must be placed where the floatline tie-loops attach to the bridle, buoy line, or groundline at each end of a net string;
5. A weak link with a maximum breaking strength of 1,100 lb (498.8 kg) must be placed at all buoys; and
6. All anchored gillnets, regardless of the number of net panels, must be securely anchored with the holding power of at least a 22 lb (10.0 kg) Danforth-style anchor at each end of the net string.

The restrictions will be in effect beginning at 0001 hours [February 22, 2009], through 2400 hours [March 8, 2009], unless terminated sooner or extended by NMFS through another notification in the **Federal Register**.

The restrictions will be announced to state officials, fishermen, ALWTRT members, and other interested parties

through e-mail, phone contact, NOAA website, and other appropriate media immediately upon issuance of the rule by the AA.

Classification

In accordance with section 118(f)(9) of the MMPA, the Assistant Administrator (AA) for Fisheries has determined that this action is necessary to implement a take reduction plan to protect North Atlantic right whales.

Environmental Assessments for the DAM program were prepared on December 28, 2001, and August 6, 2003. This action falls within the scope of the analyses of these EAs, which are available from the agency upon request.

NMFS provided prior notice and an opportunity for public comment on the regulations establishing the criteria and procedures for implementing a DAM zone. Providing prior notice and opportunity for comment on this action, pursuant to those regulations, would be impracticable because it would prevent NMFS from executing its functions to protect and reduce serious injury and mortality of endangered right whales. The regulations establishing the DAM program are designed to enable the agency to help protect unexpected concentrations of right whales. In order to meet the goals of the DAM program, the agency needs to be able to create a DAM zone and implement restrictions on fishing gear as soon as possible once the criteria are triggered and NMFS determines that a DAM restricted zone is appropriate. If NMFS were to provide prior notice and an opportunity for public comment upon the creation of a DAM restricted zone, the aggregated right whales would be vulnerable to entanglement which could result in serious injury and mortality. Additionally, the right whales would most likely move on to another location before NMFS could implement the restrictions designed to protect them, thereby rendering the action obsolete. Therefore, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), the AA finds that good cause exists to waive prior notice and an opportunity to comment on this action to implement a DAM restricted zone to reduce the risk of entanglement of endangered right whales in commercial lobster trap/pot and anchored gillnet gear as such procedures would be impracticable.

For the same reasons, the AA finds that, under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), good cause exists to waive the 30-day delay in effective date. If NMFS were to delay for 30 days the effective date of this action, the aggregated right whales would be vulnerable to entanglement, which could cause serious injury and

mortality. Additionally, right whales would likely move to another location between the time NMFS approved the action creating the DAM restricted zone and the time it went into effect, thereby rendering the action obsolete and ineffective. Nevertheless, NMFS recognizes the need for fishermen to have time to either modify or remove (if not in compliance with the required restrictions) their gear from a DAM zone once one is approved. Thus, NMFS makes this action effective 2 days after the date of publication of this document in the **Federal Register**. NMFS will also endeavor to provide notice of this action to fishermen through other means upon issuance of the rule by the AA, thereby providing approximately 3 additional days of notice while the Office of the **Federal Register** processes the document for publication.

NMFS determined that the regulations establishing the DAM program and actions such as this one taken pursuant to those regulations are consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the approved coastal management program of the U.S. Atlantic coastal states. This determination was submitted for review by the responsible state agencies under section 307 of the Coastal Zone Management Act. Following state review of the regulations creating the DAM program, no state disagreed with NMFS' conclusion that the DAM program is consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the approved coastal management program for that state.

The DAM program under which NMFS is taking this action contains policies with federalism implications warranting preparation of a federalism assessment under Executive Order 13132. Accordingly, in October 2001 and March 2003, the Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs, Department of Commerce, provided notice of the DAM program and its amendments to the appropriate elected officials in states to be affected by actions taken pursuant to the DAM program. Federalism issues raised by state officials were addressed in the final rules implementing the DAM program. A copy of the federalism Summary Impact Statement for the final rules is available upon request (**ADDRESSES**).

The rule implementing the DAM program has been determined to be not significant under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.* and 50 CFR 229.32(g)(3)

Dated: February 17, 2009.

Samuel D. Rauch III,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. E9-3669 Filed 2-17-09; 4:15 pm]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 660

[Docket No.0812171612-9134-02]

RIN 0648-XM21

Fisheries Off West Coast States; Coastal Pelagic Species Fisheries; Annual Specifications

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Final rule; closure of directed fishing for Pacific sardine.

SUMMARY: NMFS issues this final rule to implement the annual harvest guideline (HG) and management measures for Pacific sardine in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off the Pacific coast for the fishing season of January 1, 2009, through December 31, 2009. This HG has been determined according to the regulations implementing the Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and establishes allowable harvest levels for Pacific sardine off the Pacific coast. This rule also announces that the directed fishing harvest total for the first allocation period (January 1 - June 30) has been reached and therefore directed fishing for Pacific sardine is now closed until July 1, 2009.

DATES: Effective February 20, 2009 through December 31, 2009, except for the directed harvest closure that is effective through June 30, 2009.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the report "Assessment of Pacific Sardine Stock for U.S. Management in 2008" or the Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (FRFA) prepared for this final rule may be obtained from the Southwest Regional Office, Rodney R. McInnis, Regional Administrator, Southwest Region, NMFS, 501 West Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA 90802.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Joshua Lindsay, Southwest Region, NMFS, (562) 980-4034.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The CPS FMP, which is implemented by regulation at 50 CFR part 660, subpart