

prohibited from using trawl nets with codend mesh smaller than 5.0-inches in diameter. The Council has developed a range of alternatives for potential modifications to the GRA boundaries. The APs will provide feedback on those alternatives and may propose additional alternatives. More information, including a detailed agenda can be found at: www.mamfc.org.

Special Accommodations

The meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aid should be directed to M. Jan Saunders, (302) 526-5251, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: December 24, 2015.

Tracey L. Thompson,

Acting Deputy Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2015-32866 Filed 12-29-15; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

New England Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice; public meeting.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) is scheduling a public meeting of its Scientific & Statistical Committee to consider actions affecting New England fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Recommendations from this group will be brought to the full Council for formal consideration and action, if appropriate.

DATES: This meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 20, 2016 beginning at 9 a.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Hilton Garden Inn, Boston Logan, 100 Boardman Street, Boston, MA 02128; phone: (617) 567-6789.

Council address: New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill 2, Newburyport, MA 01950.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council; telephone: (978) 465-0492.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Agenda

The SSC will meet to: Consider identifying an ABC for witch flounder

that is not bound by 75% of FMSY; comment on draft terms of reference for a 2016 benchmark stock assessment for witch flounder; receive an update on groundfish catch advice project; receive an update on the Council risk policy working group including an overview of current control rules. They will discuss other business as needed.

Although non-emergency issues not contained in this agenda may come before this group for discussion, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during this meeting. Action will be restricted to those issues specifically listed in this notice and any issues arising after publication of this notice that require emergency action under section 305(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take final action to address the emergency.

Special Accommodations

This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director, at (978) 465-0492, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

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

Dated: December 24, 2015.

Tracey L. Thompson,

Acting Deputy Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Extension of Deep Seabed Exploration Licenses: Response to Comments

AGENCY: Office for Coastal Management, National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Response to comments.

SUMMARY: Due to a clerical error, comments submitted by the Center for Biological Diversity on a requested extension of Deep Seabed Hard Mineral Resources Act exploration licenses were not considered until after the licenses were extended. After reviewing and considering those comments, NOAA has found that they provide no basis for reconsidering the requested license extensions or revising the now-extended licenses.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Contact Kerry Kehoe, Office for Coastal

Management, National Ocean Service, 301-563-1151, kerry.kehoe@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On February 28, 2012, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration published a notice in the **Federal Register** advising the public of a request from Lockheed Martin Corporation (Lockheed Martin) to extend its two deep seabed mining exploration licenses (USA-1 and USA-4) issued under the Deep Seabed Hard Mineral Resources Act (DSHMRA). See 77 FR 12245. Comments on the proposed extensions were requested at that time. Following the February 28, 2012, Notice, NOAA published a second notice in the **Federal Register** announcing the extension of Licenses USA-1 and USA-4 through 2017, and discussing several comments received on the extensions. See 77 FR 40586 (July 10, 2012).

Comments submitted by the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), however, were not discussed in the July 10, 2012, notice. The CBD comments were received by NOAA but, due to a clerical error, the comments were not routed to the license extension reviewers who were unaware of CBD's comments until after an inquiry was received from CBD following the July 10, 2012, publication of the extension notice. Upon review and consideration of CBD's comments, NOAA determined that the extension of the exploration licenses should stand without modification as CBD's comments were based on a misunderstanding of the nature and scope of the license extensions.

Following the discovery of CBD's comments, the relevant Staff from NOAA discussed the substance of the comments with CBD and described why CBD's concerns as articulated in the comments were not relevant to the USA-1 and USA-4 license extensions. In addition, NOAA is now publishing a response to the CBD comments to address any public misconceptions about the extension of the deep seabed mining exploration Licenses USA-1 and USA-4.

General Response to the CBD Comments

The CBD comments pertain to activities not presently authorized pursuant to the license extensions. Instead, the CBD comments are relevant to at-sea exploration activities that, if pursued, would first require additional NOAA approvals. See 77 FR 12246. As discussed below, the extension of the Lockheed Martin exploration licenses merely serves to preserve the legal status and any domestic and international priority of rights that