

information and warrants further consideration. This exempted fishing permit would allow two commercial fishing vessels participating in an electronic monitoring program to fish in the Southern New England Regulated Mesh Area with a 6-inch (15.24 cm) diamond mesh codend. Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require publication of this notification to provide interested parties the opportunity to comment on applications for proposed exempted fishing permits.

**DATES:** Comments must be received on or before August 19, 2020.

**ADDRESSES:** You may submit written comments by the following method:

- *Email: nmfs.gar.epf@noaa.gov.*

Include in the subject line "6-INCH MESH CODEND EM EFP."

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Spencer Talmage, Fishery Management Specialist, 978-281-9232.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** On June 5, 2020, the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance (Alliance) submitted an application for a renewal of an exempted fishing permit (EFP) which would exempt two trawl vessels from the codend minimum mesh size restriction in the Southern New England (SNE) Regulated Mesh Area (RMA), as found in 50 CFR 648.80(b)(2)(i), to conduct an exploratory fishing project. Fishermen have reported a seasonally appearing abundance of haddock in the SNE RMA, and a 6-inch (15.24-cm) diamond mesh codend is intended to increase harvest of haddock while reducing discards of flounder species, relative to the current codend minimum mesh size of 6.5 inches (16.51 cm).

We issued the fishing year 2019 EFP in December 2019, and the EFP ended on April 30, 2020. The study period under the 2019 EFP did not provide sufficient time for participating vessels to fish for haddock with the 6-inch (15.24-cm) diamond mesh codend. Vessels completed only one tow on a single trip with the gear and encountered no haddock. The Alliance submitted a renewal application so that exploratory fishing could be completed, and requests an expanded study period from September 1, 2020, through April 30, 2021. This would provide an opportunity for participating vessels to locate and fish for seasonally available haddock when present. This EFP would be identical to the EFP issued for the 2019 fishing year.

Participating vessels would conduct commercial fishing with the 6-inch (15.24-cm) diamond mesh codend in SNE, specifically statistical areas 537, 539, 611, and 613. The application

estimates that each of the two vessels participating with the exemption from minimum codend mesh size would take 35 day-trips during the project. Of the 35 trips that each vessel plans to take during that time period, the number of trips taken with a 6-inch (15.24-cm) mesh codend under the proposed EFP would vary, based on the presence of haddock. On EFP trips, four to five hauls would be made per day, with each tow length averaging 2 to 3 hours. While on these trips, vessels may switch back to a standard 6.5-inch (16.51-cm) mesh codend to retain operational flexibility.

The applicant states that a switch from a 6.5-inch (16.51-cm) square mesh codend to the 6-inch (15.24-cm) diamond mesh codend would improve catch of haddock, a healthy stock, while reducing catch of several flounder species. Based on a codend mesh selectivity study which compared retention length and size selection range for 6.5- and 6-inch (16.51- and 15.24-cm) square and diamond mesh, the applicant additionally states that 6-inch (15.24-cm) diamond mesh is unlikely to retain undersized haddock (He, 2007).

The participating vessels must also participate in the audit-model electronic monitoring (EM) program, and participating vessels are required to use EM on 100 percent of trips. Vessels must adhere to a vessel-specific monitoring plan detailing at-sea catch handling protocols. Vessels also submit haul-level electronic vessel trip reports (eVTR) with count and weight estimates for all groundfish discards. The Alliance would compare the discard data collected from trips taken by vessels fishing with a 6-inch (15.24-cm) diamond mesh codend to trips with the standard 6.5-inch (16.51-cm) mesh codend. The Alliance states that this comparison would also demonstrate the usefulness of EM systems as tools for research.

If approved, the applicant may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate completion of the proposed research and have minimal impacts that do not change the scope or impact of the initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

**References**

- He, P. (2007). Selectivity of large mesh trawl codends in the Gulf of Maine: I. Comparison of square and diamond mesh. *Fisheries Research*, 83(1), 44-59.

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

Dated: July 29, 2020.

**Jennifer M. Wallace,**

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

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**BILLING CODE 3510-22-P**

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[RTID 0648-XA284]

**Fisheries of the South Atlantic; South Atlantic Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting**

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

**ACTION:** Notice of a public meeting.

**SUMMARY:** The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council/SAFMC) will hold a meeting of its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) via webinar. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION.**

**DATES:** The SSC meeting will take place from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Wednesday, August 19, 2020.

**ADDRESSES:**

*Meeting address:* The meeting will be held via webinar.

*Council address:* South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201, N Charleston, SC 29405.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Kim Iverson, Public Information Officer, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201, North Charleston, SC 29405; phone: (843) 571-4366 or toll free: (866) SAFMC-10; fax: (843) 769-4520; email: [kim.iverson@safmc.net](mailto:kim.iverson@safmc.net).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The meeting is open to the public via webinar as it occurs. Webinar registration is required. Information regarding webinar registration will be posted to the Council's website at: <http://safmc.net/safmc-meetings/scientific-and-statistical-committee-meetings/> as it becomes available. The meeting agenda, briefing book materials, and online comment form will be posted to the Council's website two weeks prior to the meeting. Written comment on SSC agenda topics is to be distributed to the Committee through the Council office, similar to all other briefing materials. Written comment to be considered by the SSC shall be provided to the Council office no later than one week prior to an SSC meeting. For this meeting, the deadline for

submission of written comment is 12 p.m., Wednesday, August 12, 2020.

The following agenda items will be addressed by the SSC during the meeting:

1. Review and approve Statements of Work for the 2023 Snowy Grouper and Tilefish stock assessments;
2. An update on the operational assessment and research track development;
3. Replace an open SSC representative seat on the Citizen Science Operations Committee;
4. Discussion of other business as needed.

The SSC will provide guidance to staff and recommendations for Council consideration as appropriate.

Multiple opportunities for comment on agenda items will be provided during SSC meetings. Open comment periods will be provided at the start of the meeting and near the conclusion. Those interested in providing comment should indicate such in the manner requested by the Chair, who will then recognize individuals to provide comment. Additional opportunities for comment on specific agenda items will be provided, as each item is discussed, between initial presentations and SSC discussion. Those interested in providing comment should indicate such in the manner requested by the Chair, who will then recognize individuals to provide comment. All comments are part of the record of the meeting.

Although non-emergency issues not contained in the meeting 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 identified in this notice and any issues arising after publication of this notice that require emergency action under section 305(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, provided the public has been notified of the intent to take final action to address the emergency.

### Special Accommodations

This meeting is accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for auxiliary aids should be directed to the SAFMC office (see **ADDRESSES**) at least 5 business days prior to the meeting.

**Note:** The times and sequence specified in this agenda are subject to change.

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

Dated: July 30, 2020.

**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

[RTID 0648-XV184]

#### Notice of Availability of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group Final Restoration Plan/Environmental Assessment #5: Living Coastal and Marine Resources—Marine Mammals and Oysters

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

**ACTION:** Notice of availability.

**SUMMARY:** The *Deepwater Horizon* Federal natural resource trustee agencies for the Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group (Louisiana TIG) have prepared a Final Restoration Plan/Environmental Assessment (RP/EA #5): Living Coastal and Marine Resources—Marine Mammals and Oysters. The Final RP/EA #5 describes, and, in conjunction with the associated Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), selects the preferred restoration projects considered by the Louisiana TIG to restore natural resources and ecological services injured or lost as a result of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. The Federal Trustees of the Louisiana TIG have determined that the implementation of the Final RP/EA #5 is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the context of the NEPA. They have concluded a FONSI is appropriate, and, therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

**ADDRESSES:** *Obtaining Documents:* You may download the Final RP/EA #5 at: <http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-areas/louisiana>. Alternatively, you may request a CD of the Final RP/EA #5 (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** below). Also, you may view the document at any of the public facilities listed in Appendix A of the Final RP/EA #5.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration—Mel Landry, NOAA

Restoration Center, 225-425-0583, [mel.landry@noaa.gov](mailto:mel.landry@noaa.gov).

### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

#### Introduction

On April 20, 2010, the mobile offshore drilling unit *Deepwater Horizon*, which was being used to drill a well for BP Exploration and Production, Inc. (BP), in the Macondo prospect (Mississippi Canyon 252-MC252), experienced a significant explosion, fire, and subsequent sinking in the Gulf of Mexico, resulting in an unprecedented volume of oil and other discharges from the rig and from the wellhead on the seabed. The *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill is the largest off shore oil spill in U.S. history, discharging millions of barrels of oil over a period of 87 days. In addition, well over one million gallons of dispersants were applied to the waters of the spill area in an attempt to disperse the spilled oil. An undetermined amount of natural gas was also released into the environment as a result of the spill.

The *Deepwater Horizon* Federal and State natural resource trustees (Trustees) conducted the natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) for the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill under OPA (OPA; 33 U.S.C. 2701 *et seq.*). Pursuant to OPA, Federal and State agencies act as trustees on behalf of the public to assess natural resource injuries and losses and to determine the actions required to compensate the public for those injuries and losses. OPA further instructs the designated trustees to develop and implement a plan for the restoration, rehabilitation, replacement, or acquisition of the equivalent of the injured natural resources under their trusteeship, including the loss of use and services from those resources from the time of injury until the time of restoration to baseline (the resource quality and conditions that would exist if the spill had not occurred) is complete.

The *Deepwater Horizon* Trustees are:

- U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), as represented by the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management;
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), on behalf of the U.S. Department of Commerce;
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA);
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- State of Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), Oil Spill Coordinator's Office (LOSCO), Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ), Department of Wildlife