

SUMMARY: The Regional Administrator, West Coast Region, NMFS, has made a preliminary determination that two Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) applications warrant further consideration. Both applications are from the California Wetfish Producers Association and request an exemption from the expected prohibition on primary directed fishing for Pacific sardine during the 2023–2024 fishing year to collect Pacific sardine as part of industry-based scientific research. NMFS requests public comment on the applications.

DATES: Comments must be received by June 20, 2023.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA–NMFS–2023–0069, by the following method:

- **Electronic Submissions:** Submit all public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to www.regulations.gov and enter NOAA–NMFS–2023–0069 in the Search box. Click the “Comment” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments. The EFP applications will be available under Supporting and Related Materials through the same link.

Instructions: Comments sent by any other method or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NMFS. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Taylor Debevec, West Coast Region, NMFS, (562) 980–4066, taylor.debevec@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This action is authorized by the Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and regulations at 50 CFR 600.745, which allow NMFS Regional Administrators to authorize exempted fishing permits (EFPs) for fishing activities that would otherwise be prohibited.

At its April 2023 meeting, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) recommended that NMFS approve two EFP applications for the 2023–2024 Pacific sardine fishing year. Both applications are from the California Wetfish Producers Association (CWPA) and are renewal requests for an

exemption from the expected prohibition on primary directed fishing for Pacific sardine during the 2023–2024 fishing year; the purpose of the requests are to collect Pacific sardine as part of industry-based scientific research. The Council considered these EFP applications concurrently with the 2023–2024 annual harvest specifications for Pacific sardine because Pacific sardine catch under each EFP would be accounted for under the proposed 2023–2024 annual catch limit (ACL), which is 3,953 metric tons (mt). A summary of each EFP application is provided below:

(1) *Proposal for renewal of exempted fishery permit (EFP) to allow take of Pacific sardine (for point sets) in 2023–24 nearshore research program:* The CWPA submitted a renewal application for their CPS Nearshore Cooperative Survey (NCS) program. The purpose of this EFP project is to continue to develop sampling methodology for estimating CPS biomass in shallow waters that are not accessible to NOAA survey ships. Since 2012, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, in partnership with the CWPA, has been conducting aerial surveys to estimate the biomass and distribution of Pacific sardine and certain other CPS in nearshore waters in the Southern California Bight, and in the Monterey–San Francisco area since the summer of 2017. Currently, there is uncertainty in the biomass estimates from aerial spotter pilots. The CPS–NCS survey aims to quantify that level of uncertainty by capturing CPS schools identified by aerial spotter pilots and validating the biomass and species composition of the schools. If approved, this EFP would allow up to five participating vessels to directly harvest a total of 150 mt of Pacific sardine during the 2023–2024 fishing year. A portion of each point set (i.e., an individual haul of fish captured with a purse seine net) would be retained for biological sampling, and the remainder would be sold by participating fishermen and processors to offset research costs and avoid unnecessary discard.

(2) *Request for renewal of exempted fishery permit (EFP) to allow fishing of Pacific sardine for biological samples in 2023–24 nearshore research program:* The CWPA submitted a renewal application for their biological sampling EFP project. The primary directed fishery for Pacific sardine has been closed since 2015, and consequently, scientists at the Southwest Fisheries Science Center (Science Center) have a limited amount of fishery-dependent data to use in their stock assessment. The goal of this EFP project is to

provide fishery-dependent catch data, including biological data (i.e., age and length data from directed harvest), for potential use in Pacific sardine stock assessments. An additional goal for this year is to collaborate with the Science Center in a research project designed to enhance understanding of stock structure by collecting year-round data. If approved, this EFP would allow up to five participating vessels to directly harvest up to 520 mt of Pacific sardine during the 2023–2024 fishing year. A portion of each landing would be retained for biological sampling by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the remainder would be sold by participating fishermen and processors to offset research costs and avoid unnecessary discard.

Altogether, these EFP projects total 670 mt. If NMFS does not issue one or more of these EFPs, the requested tonnage would be available for harvest by other permissible fishing activities during the 2023–2024 fishing year (e.g., live bait or minor directed harvest).

After publication of this notice in the **Federal Register**, NMFS may approve and issue permits to participating vessels after the close of the public comment period. NMFS will consider comments submitted in deciding whether to approve the applications as requested. NMFS may approve the applications in their entirety or may make any alterations needed to achieve the goals of the EFP projects and the FMP. NMFS may also approve different amounts of Pacific sardine allocation for each EFP project if any changes are made to the 2023–2024 proposed sardine harvest specifications before final implementation.

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

Dated: May 15, 2023.

Jennifer M. Wallace,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XC953]

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Application for Exempted Fishing Permits

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

ACTION: Notice; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Greater Atlantic Region, NMFS, has made a preliminary determination that Exempted Fishing Permits to facilitate the use of fishing year 2023 and 2024 monkfish research set-aside days-at-sea warrant further consideration. This notice provides interested parties the opportunity to comment on the proposed Exempted Fishing Permits.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before June 5, 2023.

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

- *Email:* NMFS.GAR.EFP@noaa.gov.

Include in the subject line "Comments on 2023 Monkfish RSA EFP."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Spencer Talmage, Fishery Policy Analyst, 978-281-9232, *spencer.talmage@noaa.gov*.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Exempted Fishing Permits (EFP) that waive monkfish landing limits have been routinely approved since 2007 to increase operational efficiency and optimize research funds generated from the Monkfish Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program. These EFPs would facilitate compensation fishing in support of the projects funded under the 2023/2024 monkfish RSA competition. Consistent with previous years of the monkfish RSA program, these RSA compensation fishing EFPs would authorize an exemption for participating vessels from days-at-sea (DAS) landing limit restrictions in the Monkfish Northern and Southern Fishery Management Areas found at 50 CFR 648.94(b)(1) and (2). Vessels fishing under an RSA DAS would be allowed to harvest monkfish in excess of the usual landing limits associated with their Federal permits.

The Monkfish RSA Program is allocated 500 monkfish RSA DAS annually, as established by the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils in Amendment 2 to the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) (70 FR 21929, April 28, 2005). These monkfish RSA DAS are awarded through a competitive grant program in support of monkfish research. Award recipients sell RSA DAS to limited access monkfish vessel owners to fund approved monkfish RSA research projects. Award recipients receive an allocation of RSA DAS and a maximum amount of monkfish that may be landed under available DAS. Projects are constrained to the total DAS, maximum available landing weight, or grant award timetable, whichever is reached first. To calculate

a maximum weight allocation that is similar to the Councils' original intent to be harvested under the allocated 500 RSA DAS, NMFS uses twice the landing limit for Permit Category A and C monkfish vessel fishing in the Southern Fishery Management Area (4,074 lb (2 mt) whole weight) for each RSA DAS. Annually, a maximum of 2,037,000 lb (924 mt) of whole weight may be harvested across all Monkfish RSA projects. Allowing vessels an exemption from monkfish landing limits provides an incentive for vessels to purchase and fish under RSA DAS to catch more monkfish per trip, while constraining each project to a maximum available harvest limit ensures that the overall monkfish RSA catch will not be an excessive burden on the fishery as a whole.

If approved, grant awardees may request minor modifications and extensions to their EFPs 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 of the initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

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

Dated: May 15, 2023.

Jennifer M. Wallace,

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

[FR Doc. 2023-10681 Filed 5-18-23; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XD023]

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council; Public Meetings

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

ACTION: Notice of public meetings.

SUMMARY: The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) will hold meetings of the following: Citizen Science Committee, Mackerel Cobia Committee, Dolphin Wahoo Committee, and Snapper Grouper Committee. The meeting week will also include a formal public comment session and a meeting of the Full Council.

DATES: The Council meeting will be held from 8:30 a.m. on Monday, June

12, 2023 until 12 p.m. on Friday, June 16, 2023.

ADDRESSES:

Meeting address: The meetings will be held at the World Golf Village Renaissance, 500 Legacy Trail, St. Augustine, FL; phone: (904) 635-940-8000. The meeting will also be available via webinar. Registration is required. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**.

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, SAFMC; phone: (843) 302-8440 or toll free: (866) SAFMC-10; fax: (843) 769-4520; email: *kim.iverson@safmc.net*.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Meeting information, including agendas, overviews, and briefing book materials will be posted on the Council's website at: <http://safmc.net/safmc-meetings/council-meetings/>. Webinar registration links for the meeting will also be available from the Council's website.

Public comment: Public comment on agenda items may be submitted through the Council's online comment form available from the Council's website at: <http://safmc.net/safmc-meetings/council-meetings/>. Written comments will be accepted from May 26, 2023 until June 16, 2023. These comments are accessible to the public, part of the Administrative Record of the meeting, and immediately available for Council consideration. A formal public comment session will also be held during the Council meeting.

The items of discussion in the individual meeting agendas are as follows:

Council Session I, Monday, June 12, 2023, 8:30 a.m. Until 12 p.m. (Closed Session)

The Council will meet in Closed Session to receive a litigation brief, review and discuss advisory panel applications, appointments to the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and SEDAR Pool, and consider selection of the 2022 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.

Council Session I, Monday, June 12, 2023, 1:30 p.m. Until 4 p.m. (Open Session)

The Council will receive reports from state agencies, Council liaisons, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, and the U.S. Coast Guard. The Council will receive an update on Highly Migratory Species, the Commercial Electronic Logbook Amendment, and the Council's Research and Monitoring Plan,