

18. *Third Party Verification.* The Commission is considering additional requirements which would address issues we have seen in the enforcement of our slamming rules, and we therefore seek comment on the need for additional minimum requirements for third party verification calls and of the impact of any additional requirements on small entities. We especially seek information addressing the possible financial impact on smaller carriers.

*F. Federal Rules That May Duplicate, Overlap, or Conflict With the Proposed Rules*

19. None.

**List of Subjects in 47 CFR Part 64**

Telephone.

Federal Communications Commission.

**William F. Caton,**

*Deputy Secretary.*

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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**50 CFR Part 600**

[I.D. 040703D]

**Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Application for Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs)**

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

**ACTION:** Notification of a proposal for EFPs to conduct experimental fishing; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS announces that the Administrator, Northeast Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator) has made a preliminary determination that an application to issue EFPs to six longline and tub trawl vessels, submitted by the

Maine Department of Marine Resources (Maine DMR), contains all the information required by the regulations governing exempted experimental fishing under the provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) and, therefore, warrants further consideration. The Regional Administrator has also made a preliminary determination that the activities authorized under these EFPs would be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and is within the scope of earlier analyses of the impacts. However, further review and consultation may be necessary before a final determination is made to issue six EFPs. Therefore, NMFS announces that the Regional Administrator proposes to issue EFPs that would allow six commercial longline or tub trawl vessels to conduct fishing operations that are otherwise restricted by the regulations governing the fisheries of the Northeastern United States.

Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Act require publication of this notification to provide interested parties the opportunity to comment on applications for proposed EFPs.

**DATES:** Comments on this notification must be received at the appropriate address or fax number (*see ADDRESSES*) on or before May 5, 2003.

**ADDRESSES:** Written comments should be sent to Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope "Comments on Maine Halibut EFP Proposal." Comments may also be sent via facsimile to (978) 281-9135. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or the Internet.

Copies of the Draft 2003 Supplement to the Environmental Assessment (EA) Prepared for the 2002 Experimental Halibut Fishery in Groundfish Closed Areas in the Eastern Gulf of Maine are available from the Northeast Regional Office at the same address.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Susan Chinn, Fishery Management Specialist, 978-281-9218.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** NMFS announces that the Regional Administrator intends to issue EFPs to allow six federally permitted vessels to fish for, land, and possess Atlantic halibut (*Hippoglossus hippoglossus*) in excess of the allowable landing and possession limit specified at 50 CFR 648.86(c) within a portion of the Gulf of Maine Regulated Mesh Area (GOM RMA). The EFPs would also allow these vessels to possess temporarily Atlantic halibut less than the minimum size requirement of 36 inches (91.4 cm) specified at § 648.83(a)(1) for purposes of collecting scientific information. In addition, the EFPs would allow vessels access to GOM Rolling Closure Area IV.

Maine DMR submitted a proposal on December 1, 2002, to conduct an experimental Atlantic halibut fishery in a portion of the GOM RMA. The industry collaborative experiment involves Maine DMR, with consultation provided by the NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center (Center). The purpose of the experiment is to continue the collection of data on the distribution, relative abundance, migration, stock definition, mortality rates, stock size, yield, and other significant biological reference points of the Atlantic halibut resource to be used in the long-term management of the species. In addition, the experiment proposes to collect information on age and growth, size and sex composition, and rate and onset of sexual maturity. The proposed experiment is a continuation of experimental fisheries conducted by Maine DMR in 2000, 2001, and 2002.

Maine DMR proposed that the study would occur from April 1 through May 31, 2003, or for 60 consecutive days beginning from the actual start date, and would take place in a portion of the GOM RMA defined by the following coordinates:

Area Point	N. Latitude	W. Longitude
HAL 1 .....	Mainland Maine Coastline	69° 00"
HAL 2 .....	43° 12.3"	69° 00"
HAL 3 .....	43° 58.3"	67° 21.5"
HAL 4* .....	Mainland Maine Coastline and U.S./Canada Maritime Boundary	Mainland Maine Coastline and U.S./Canada Maritime Boundary

\*Between points HAL 3 and HAL 4, the area follows the U.S./Canada maritime boundary.