

- b. Report on Monk Seal Recovery Team Meeting (15–17 April, 2003)
 - 3. Crustaceans Fisheries
 - a. Status of the fishery
 - b. Report on Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) lobster research
 - i. Report on MULTIFAN-CL stock assessment analyses
 - ii. Report on slipper lobster tagging research
 - iii. Report on analyses of outstanding lobster cruise data
 - c. NMFS annual lobster research cruise plan
 - d. MHI lobster stock assessment
 - e. Plan Team report
 - 4. Precious Corals
 - Plan Team report
- Wednesday, May 7, 2003, 8:30 a.m.*
- 5. Quantitative assessment of capacity in Hawaii's fisheries.
 - 6. Pelagic Fisheries
 - a. 2002 Annual Report
 - b. Report on American Samoa scientific data collection program
 - c. Report on phase two of chute trials for Seabird conservation
 - d. Turtle/Fishery conservation alternatives
 - e. Marlin management
 - f. Status of Environmental Impact Statements (EISs)
 - i. Supplemental Pelagic EIS
 - ii. MHI Turtle EIS
 - g. International Meetings and Issues
 - i. Food & Agriculture Organization Committee on Fisheries (COFI) meeting
 - ii. NMFS Turtle bycatch meeting
 - iii. 23rd Turtle symposium
 - h. Plan Team report
- Thursday, May 8, 2003, 8:30 a.m.*
- 7. Taape (blue lined snapper) interactions with reef fish
 - 8. Ecosystem and Habitat
 - a. NOS NWHI Reserve Science Workshop
 - b. NMFS/Council NWHI Symposium
 - c. Report from Council Marine Protected Area Working Group
 - d. Report on Secretariat of the Pacific Community Coastal Fishery Management Meeting
 - e. Report on Plan Team meeting
 - 9. Other Business

Report from the Social Science Research Committee 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 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 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 Kitty M. Simonds, 808–522–8220 (voice) or 808–522–8226 (fax), at least 5 days prior to meeting date.

Dated: April 15, 2003.

Matteo J. Milazzo,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[ID. 040703E]

Fisheries Off West Coast States and in the Western Pacific; Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery; Application for an Exempted Fishing Permit

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

ACTION: Notice of receipt of an exempted fishing permit application; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces the receipt of an exempted fishing permit (EFP) application for a cooperative project between the Oregon State Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and the NMFS Northwest Fishery Science Center. If awarded, this EFP would allow qualifying vessels to harvest and retain federally managed groundfish in closed rockfish conservation areas and to retain federally managed groundfish species in excess of cumulative trip limits. These activities are otherwise prohibited. Vessels fishing under these EFPs will be required to carry a Federal fisheries observer while conducting EFP fishing. This EFP proposal is intended to promote the objectives of the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) by assessing the effectiveness of a fishing gear configuration that was designed to harvest flatfish stocks while reducing the incidental catch of low abundance rockfish species.

DATES: Comments must be received by May 6, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the EFP application are available from Becky Renko Northwest Region, NMFS, 7600 Sand Point Way N.E., Bldg. 1, Seattle, WA 98115–0070.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Becky Renko (206)526–6110 or Carrie Nordeen (206) 526–6144.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This action is authorized by the FMP and implementing regulations at 50 CFR 600.745 and 50 CFR 660.350.

Dover sole, petrale sole, English sole, rex sole, and arrowtooth flounder are abundant and important flatfish species in the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery. These flatfish species have historically been caught by vessels using trawl gear in depths of 50–150 fathoms (91–274 meters). Beginning in 2003, many of the areas where these flatfish species have historically been harvested are within the Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) where fishing with bottom trawl gear is prohibited. Rockfish conservation areas are gear-specific, large-scale depth-related areas where low abundance (overfished) rockfish species are commonly found. It was necessary to define these areas to restrict fishing so the 2003 optimum yield (OY) levels for the overfished rockfish species are not exceeded.

The purpose of the exempted fishing activity is to measure the rate at which un-targeted species, particularly canary, darkblotched, yelloweye and widow rockfish, are taken by commercial fishers using an experimental trawl net. This experimental net was specifically designed to be more selective in the harvest of flatfish species than the trawl net configurations that are currently used in the fishery.

In 2001 and 2002, ODFW chartered commercial fishing vessels to develop and test new trawl net designs. Testing was conducted to compare the new net design with trawl net configurations that are typically used in the fishery. During the initial testing, significant reductions in the catch of overfished rockfish species relative to flatfish catch were observed. ODFW believes that this gear design, which meets the requirements of small footrope bottom trawl gear as defined by regulations at 50 CFR 660, could become an effective way for fishery participants to reduce rockfish bycatch in the flatfish fishery.

To encourage fishers to use this gear, increased trip limits for flatfish would be available to vessels that are willing to modify their existing gear or purchase new gear that is consistent with the design requirements, as defined by