

contain any reporting, recordkeeping, or other compliance requirements. This action is taken under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and regulations at 50 CFR part 648.

One comment was submitted on the proposed rule, but it was not specific to the IRFA. NMFS has responded to the comment in the Comments and Responses section of the preamble to this final rule. No changes were made to the proposed rule as a result of the comment received.

Commercial landings for bluefish are reported from Maine through North Carolina through NMFS Northeast dealer reports, and from South Carolina through Florida through a state trip ticket commercial landings reporting program. An active participant in the commercial sector was defined as being any vessel that reported having landed one or more pounds of bluefish during calendar year 2001. All vessels are considered to be small entities. Of the active vessels in 2001, 846 landed bluefish from Maine to North Carolina. The dealer data do not cover vessel activity in the South Atlantic. State trip ticket report data indicate that 1,092 vessels landed bluefish in North Carolina. Bluefish landings in South Carolina and Georgia represented less than 1/10 of 1 percent of total landings. Therefore, the analysis assumed that no vessels from those states would be affected by this proposed action. In addition, 214 vessels landed bluefish to dealers on Florida's east coast in 2001. In recent years, approximately 2,063 party/charter vessels caught bluefish.

The Council analyzed three TAL alternatives. The preferred alternative examined the impacts on the industry that would result from a TAL of 37.293 million lb (16.916 million kg), allocated to the commercial sector (10.460 million lb (4.74 million kg)) and recreational sector (26.691 million lb (12.107 million kg)), with an RSA of 141,900 million lb (64,356 kg). Alternative 2 considered a TAL of 37.293 million lb (16.916 million kg), allocated to the commercial sector (6.315 million lb (2.864 million kg)) and recreational sector (30.835 million lb (13.986 million kg)), with an RSA of 141,900 lb (64,365 kg). Alternative 3 provides for a lower commercial quota and higher

recreational quota than Alternative 1. Starting from the same TAL of 37.293 million lb (16.916 million kg), the commercial quota in this alternative is 9.546 million lb (4.329 million kg), and the recreational quota is 27.604 million lb (12.521 million kg), with an RSA of 141,900 lb (64,365 kg).

On a coastwide basis, the preferred alternative would allow for less than a 1-percent decrease in total allowable commercial landings for bluefish in 2003 versus the 2002 commercial quota, due to the amount specified for the RSA. The 2003 recreational harvest limit would be 63 percent higher than the estimated recreational landings in 2002. According to dealer data, 650 federally permitted commercial vessels would be expected to incur revenue losses of less than 5 percent and 193 commercial vessels would incur revenue gains of 24 percent. The revenue increase expected in 2003 are primarily due to the fact that the New York quota was adjusted downward in 2002 due to overages in 2001. Thus, New York shows a positive proportional change in quota from 2002 to 2003 (see section 5.1.3 of the RIR/FRFA). In addition, economic analysis of South Atlantic Trip Ticket Report data indicated that changes in quota levels from 2002 to 2003 are expected to result in small reductions in revenue for fishermen that land bluefish in North Carolina (1.44 percent) and minimal reductions for fishermen that land bluefish in Florida (0.07 percent).

Alternative 2 would result in a 40-percent decrease in the total allowable commercial landings for bluefish in 2003 versus 2002. The 2003 recreational harvest limit would be 88 percent higher than the estimated recreational landings in 2002. Under this scenario, according to Northeast dealer data, a total of 103 commercial vessels would incur revenue losses of 5 to 39 percent, and 740 commercial vessels would incur revenue losses of less than 5 percent of their total ex-vessel revenue. Also, evaluation of South Atlantic Trip Ticket Reports indicate an average of 6.1 and 0.03-percent reductions in revenue for fishermen that land bluefish in North Carolina and Florida, respectively.

Alternative 3 would result in a 9-percent decrease in the total allowable commercial landings for bluefish in 2003 versus 2002. The 2003 recreational harvest limit would be 69 percent higher than the estimated recreational landings in 2002. Under this scenario, based on Northeast dealer data, a total of 28 commercial vessels would incur revenue losses from 5 to 10 percent, 626 commercial vessels would incur revenue losses of less than 5 percent and 189 commercial vessels would incur an increase in revenue of 14 percent. The revenue increase for these 189 vessels expected in 2003 is primarily due to the fact that the New York quota was adjusted downward in 2002 due to overages in 2001. Thus, New York shows a positive proportional change in quota from 2002 to 2003 (see section 5.3.3 of the RIR/FRFA). Also, evaluation of South Atlantic Trip Ticket Reports indicate reduction in revenues of 1.44 and 0.07-percent for fishermen that land bluefish in North Carolina and Florida, respectively.

The Council further analyzed the impacts on revenues of the proposed RSA amount for all three alternatives. The social and economic impacts of this proposed RSA are minimal. Assuming the full RSA is allocated for bluefish, the set-aside amount could be worth as much as \$45,480 dockside, based on a 2001 price of \$0.32 per pound. Assuming an equal reduction among all 834 active dealer reported vessels, this could mean a reduction of about \$55 per individual vessel. Changes in the recreational harvest limit would be insignificant (less than 1 percent decrease), if 2 percent of the TAL is used for research. It is unlikely that there would be negative impacts. A copy of this analysis is available from the Regional Administrator (see **ADDRESSES**) and is also available at the following web site: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov>.

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

Dated: May 6, 2003.

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