

Utilization Technical Committee will meet in Seattle, WA.

DATES: The meetings will be held on August 25, 26, 2003, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and August 27, 2003, from 9 a.m. to noon.

ADDRESSES: The meetings will be held at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Building 9 (Auditorium), Seattle, WA 98115.

Council address: North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 605 W. 4th Ave., Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501-2252.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Council staff, Phone: 907-271-2809.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Committee is scheduled to discuss implementation aspects of a minimum groundfish retention standard, and development of fishery cooperatives, including the following: (1) review action on Amendment C and discuss implementation issues; (2) ID options to achieve pollock maximum retainable bycatch allowance (adjustment) objectives; (3) discuss and develop options for the <125' Head & Gut boats; and (4) review discussion paper/alternatives/analytical approach for Amendment A and provide recommendations in October.

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

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Gail Bendixen at 907-271-2809 at least 7 working days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: July 25, 2003.

Richard W. Surdi,

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

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 061003A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone off Alaska; Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska; Exempted Fishing Permit

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

ACTION: Issuance of an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP).

SUMMARY: NMFS announces the issuance of EFP 03-01 to Mr. John Gauvin, principal investigator, and Mr. Brent Paine, Executive Director of the United Catcher Boats Association (applicants). The EFP authorizes the applicants to conduct an experiment in the Bering Sea that will test the effectiveness of salmon excluder devices to reduce salmon bycatch rates in the pollock trawl fishery without significantly lowering catch rates of pollock. This EFP is necessary to provide information not otherwise available through research or commercial fishing operations. The intended effect of this action is to promote the purposes and policies of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

ADDRESSES: Copies of the EFP and the Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the EFP are available from Lori J. Durall, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Melanie Brown, 907-586-7228 or melanie.brown@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area authorizes the issuance of EFPs to fish for groundfish in a manner that would otherwise be prohibited under existing regulations. The procedures for issuing EFPs are set out at 50 CFR 679.6 and 600.745(b).

On April 15, 2003, NMFS announced in the **Federal Register** the receipt of an application for an EFP (68 FR 18187). The applicants requested authorization to test the effectiveness of salmon excluder devices intended to reduce salmon bycatch rates in the pollock trawl fishery, without reducing the catch of pollock. The purpose of this research is to assist industry in developing gear modifications that will

reduce the bycatch of salmon in the pollock fishery in the Bering Sea. This EFP will provide information not otherwise available through research or commercial fishing operations because it is not economically feasible for vessels to participate in an experiment of this extent and rigor during the commercial fisheries.

The Regional Administrator has approved the EFP application and has issued EFP 03-01 to the applicants. Details of the experiment are in the environmental assessment prepared for this action (see **ADDRESSES**). The experiment will take place in two parts to allow for testing of devices specific to chum salmon and chinook salmon for approximately 12-15 days each. The chum salmon field test portion of the EFP is expected to occur mid-September through October 2003. The chinook salmon excluder test is expected to occur January 20, 2004, through March 31, 2004. The location for the test will be the common areas for catcher vessels to fish for pollock in the Bering Sea at those times of the year.

In order to conduct the test in accordance with the experimental design developed in cooperation with NMFS Alaska Fisheries Science Center, the applicants are exempted from several groundfish fisheries regulations at 50 CFR part 679. Salmon taken during the experiment will not be counted toward the chinook and non-chinook bycatch limits under 50 CFR 679.21(e)(1)(vii) and (viii). The majority of the non-chinook salmon taken is chum salmon. The taking of salmon during the experiment is crucial for determining the effectiveness of the device. The potential exists that the amount of pollock trawl salmon bycatch taken by the industry during the EFP period will approach or exceed the salmon bycatch limits. The additional salmon taken during the experiment would create an additional burden on the pollock trawl industry, if the EFP salmon is counted toward the salmon bycatch limits.

Groundfish taken under the EFP will not be applied to the total allowable catch (TAC) limit specified in the annual harvest specifications (§ 679.20). The amount taken is expected to result in total harvests well below the acceptable biological catch (ABC) amounts for the BSAI. The applicants have also requested an exemption from closures of the Chinook Salmon Savings Area and the Chum Salmon Savings Area. (§§ 679.21(e)(7)(vii) and (viii), and 679.22(a)(10)). The experiment must be conducted in areas of salmon concentration to ensure a sufficient sample size. Known concentrations of