

proven to be effective in improving the stock status of several species, in particular of GB haddock. Spawning stock biomass for GB haddock declined from 69,000 mt in 1978 to 11,000 mt by 1993, and has since increased to 74,000 mt in 2001. Fishing pressure has been reduced by days-at-sea management, mesh sizes, and trip limits.

In their EFP application, the applicants indicated that common knowledge within the fishing and scientific communities suggests that cod are less available than haddock in certain portions of CA I. The applicants believe that there is a need to support this knowledge with scientific data, potentially enabling the rebuilt GB haddock resource to be utilized without impacting the management programs that currently protect the rebuilding of GB cod.

### Proposed EFP

On August 7, 2003, CCCHFA, in collaboration with Massachusetts DMF and Manomet, submitted a complete application for 18 EFPs. Of the 18 EFPs, 11 would be issued to longline vessels (including 1 alternate) and 7 would be issued to jig vessels (including 1 alternate). Although 18 EFPs would be issued, only 16 vessels would take part in this study, as 2 vessels would be used as alternates only. The purpose of this study is to determine if a directed hook-gear fishery for haddock in GB CA I can occur with minimal impact to GB cod. Exemptions would be necessary to relieve vessels from the CA I restrictions specified under 50 CFR 648.81(a) and hook gear restrictions under 50 CFR 648.80(a)(4)(v) of the FMP.

The proposed study would occur in a specified area within the northwest portion of CA I, defined by the following Loran coordinates: 13700 X 43820; 13625 X 43820; 13625 X 43680; 13700 X 43680. The experiment would occur during the months of October and December 2003, during which approximately 3 longline and 2 jig trips would occur weekly, for a total of 64 day trips for the study. Participating vessels would be prohibited from fishing in areas outside of CA I during an experimental fishing trip. This study would follow normal fishing practices. A total allowable catch (TAC) of 15 mt for GB cod and 100 mt for GB haddock would be allowed for the experimental fishery. The applicant estimates that longline trips would average 1,500 to 3,000 lb (680 kg to 1,360 kg, respectively) of haddock and less than 300 lb (136 kg) of cod daily. Jig trips are estimated to land a maximum of 2,000 lb (907 kg) of haddock and less than 100 lb (45 kg) of cod daily. All fish landed

would be subject to the minimum size and trip limit requirements.

Manomet scientific staff would be present on board each participating vessel, equating to 100-percent observer coverage for this experimental fishery. Observers would be responsible for collecting all biological and environmental data on NMFS observer forms. Manomet will also be developing a full report of results and will submit this information to the Regional Administrator monthly. The EFPs would contain a provision authorizing the Regional Administrator to continue the proposed experimental fishery on a month-by-month basis, e.g., if the cod TAC of 15 mt, or haddock TAC of 100 mt, is exceeded or projected to be exceeded by the end of December 2003.

A draft EA has been prepared that analyzes the impacts of the proposed experimental fishery on the human environment. This draft EA concludes that the activities proposed to be conducted under the requested EFPs are consistent with the goals and objectives of the FMP, would not be detrimental to the well-being of any stocks of fish harvested, and would have no significant environmental impacts. The draft EA also concludes that the proposed experimental fishery would not be detrimental to Essential Fish Habitat, marine mammals, or protected species.

EFPs would be issued to up to 18 vessels exempting them from the CA I, and 3,600-hook limit restrictions of the FMP.

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

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

**Dated:** August 19, 2003.

**Bruce C. Morehead,**

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

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 081803C]

### 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), Department of Commerce.

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

**SUMMARY:** The Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Northeast Region, NMFS (Assistant Regional Administrator), has made a preliminary determination that the subject EFP application contains all the required information and warrants further consideration. The Assistant Regional Administrator has also made a preliminary determination that the activities authorized under the EFP would be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

However, further review and consultation may be necessary before a final determination is made to issue the EFP. Therefore, NMFS announces that the Assistant Regional Administrator proposes to recommend that an EFP be issued that would allow one vessel to conduct fishing operations that are otherwise restricted by the regulations governing the fisheries of the Northeastern United States. The EFP would allow for exemption from the Georges Bank cod landing limit for one commercial vessel, for not more than 26 days-at-sea (DAS). The experiment would test the effectiveness of two cod-avoiding flatfish trawl designs for reducing bycatch of cod (*Gadus morhua*) and sub-legal size yellowtail flounder (*Limanda ferruginea*) while maintaining catch rates of legal-sized yellowtail flounder.

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

**DATES:** Comments on this document must be received on or before September 10, 2003.

**ADDRESSES:** Written comments should be sent to Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, 1 Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope "Comments on Massachusetts DMF Cod-Avoiding Trawl Net EFP Proposal." Comments may also be sent via facsimile (fax) to (978) 281-9135.

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

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) submitted an application for an EFP on June 9, 2003,