



BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XG129

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries;

Application for Exempted Fishing Permits

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

ACTION: Notice; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Acting Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Greater Atlantic Region, NMFS, has made a preliminary determination that Exempted Fishing Permits, to facilitate the use of fishing year 2018 monkfish research set-aside days-at-sea, warrants further consideration. This notice provides interested parties the opportunity to comment on the proposed Exempted Fishing Permits.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before [INSERT DATE 15 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

ADDRESSES: You may submit written comments by any of the following methods:

- *Email:* NMFS.GAR.EFP@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line "Comments on 2018 Monkfish RSA EFP."

- *Mail:* Michael Pentony, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope "Comments on 2018 Monkfish RSA EFP."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Cynthia Hanson, Fishery Management Specialist, 978-281-9180, Cynthia.Hanson@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) that waive monkfish landing limits have been routinely approved since 2007 to increase operational efficiency and optimize research funds generated from the Monkfish Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program. These EFPs would facilitate compensation fishing in support of the projects funded under the 2018 monkfish RSA competition. Project proposals for this year are currently under review, with selection expected in late April, just prior to the May 1 start of the 2018 fishing year. Consistent with previous years of the monkfish RSA program, these RSA compensation fishing EFPs would authorize an exemption for participating vessels from days-at-sea (DAS) landing limit restrictions in the Monkfish Northern and Southern Fishery DAS would be allowed to harvest monkfish in excess of the usual landing limits associated with their Federal permits.

The monkfish RSA program is allocated 500 monkfish RSA DAS annually, as established by the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils in Amendment 2 to the Monkfish FMP (70 FR 21929; April 28, 2005). Each year, these monkfish RSA DAS may be divided between research award recipients and sold to fishermen to fund approved monkfish research projects. Award recipients receive an allocation of RSA DAS and a maximum amount that may be landed under available DAS. Projects are constrained to the total DAS, maximum available landing weight, or award timetable, whichever is reached first. To calculate a maximum weight allocation that is similar to the Councils' original intent to be harvested under the allocated 500

RSA DAS, NMFS uses twice the landing limit for Permit Category A and C monkfish vessel fishing in the Southern Fishery Management Area (4,074 lb (2 mt) whole weight) for each RSA DAS. This means that annually, a maximum of 2,037,000 lb (924 mt) of whole weight may be harvested across all Monkfish RSA projects. Allowing vessels an exemption from monkfish landing limits provides an incentive for vessels to purchase and fish under RSA DAS to catch more monkfish per trip, while constraining each project to a maximum available harvest limit ensures that the overall monkfish RSA catch will not be an excessive burden on the fishery as a whole.

If approved, the applicants may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate completion of the proposed research and have minimal impacts that do not change the scope of the initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

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

Dated: April 11, 2018.

Jennifer M. Wallace,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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