



BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RTID 0648-XX055

Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management 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 Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Greater Atlantic Region, NMFS, has made a preliminary determination that an Exempted Fishing Permit application from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center contains all the required information and warrants further consideration. Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act require publication of this notice to provide interested parties the opportunity to comment on applications for 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 NEFSC Ropeless Fishing EFP."

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

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Laura Hansen, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 281-9225.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) submitted a complete application for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) on March 9, 2020, to conduct fishing activities that the regulations would otherwise restrict. NEFSC is requesting an exemption from Federal lobster regulations that would authorize five federally permitted commercial lobster vessels to participate in a ropeless lobster gear study in Lobster Conservation Management Area 3. NEFSC is requesting an exemption from gear marking requirements at 50 CFR 697.21(b)(2) to allow for the use of a single buoy marker on a trawl of more than three traps.

The purpose of this study is to test a prototype ropeless fishing system as a potential technique to prevent entanglements of protected species, primarily North Atlantic right whales.

The EFP would authorize five participating vessels to modify some of their existing trawls, consisting of 35-45 traps. Experimental trawls would either have a rope spool, a buoy and stowed rope system, or a lift bag system fitted with an acoustic release, deployed on one end of the trawl, with a buoy line attached to the other. Soak time would be between 4-8 days, but may be modified depending on what each fisherman decides is appropriate for fishing. Sampling would occur from May to October, 2020.

Initial deployments would be overseen by an engineering team. NEFSC estimated there would be approximately 96 deployments of experimental trawls.

If approved, the applicant may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the year. We may grant 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 or impact of the initially approved EFP request. The EFP would prohibit any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activities.

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

Dated: May 18, 2020.

Hélène M.N. Scalliet,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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