



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XF645]

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 Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Greater Atlantic Region, NMFS, has made a preliminary determination that an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) to facilitate the use of fishing year (FY) 2026 and 2027 monkfish research set-aside (RSA) days-at-sea (DAS) warrants further consideration. The EFP would allow federally permitted fishing vessels to fish outside fishery regulations in support of exempted fishing activities proposed by Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance (CCCFA). 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 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 email: nmfs.gar.efp@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line "CCCFA Monkfish RSA EFP." All comments received are a part of the public record and may be posted for public viewing without change. All personal identifying information (*e.g., name, address, etc.*), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will

be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter "anonymous" as the signature if you wish to remain anonymous).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Christine Ford, Fishery Management Specialist, *christine.ford@noaa.gov*, 978-281-9185.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: CCCFA submitted a complete application for an EFP to conduct commercial fishing activities that the regulations would otherwise restrict. This EFP would exempt the participating vessels from the following Federal regulations:

Table 1 -- Requested Exemptions

CFR Citation	Regulation	Need for exemption
50 CFR 648.94(b)(1)	Trip limits for vessels fishing under the monkfish DAS program in the Northern Fishery Management Area	Needed to allow RSA DAS to have no trip limit, consistent with the design of the Monkfish RSA program
50 CFR 648.94(b)(2)	Trip limits for vessels fishing under the monkfish DAS program in the Southern Fishery Management Area	Needed to allow RSA DAS to have no trip limit, consistent with the design of the Monkfish RSA program

Table 2 -- Project Summary

Project title	Incorporating Fishermen’s Knowledge into a Standardized Catch Per Unit Effort Index for the Commercial Monkfish Gillnet Fishery
Project start	05/01/2026 or Upon Issuance
Project end	04/30/2027
Project objectives	Enable monkfish RSA DAS compensation fishing in support of a project that is developing standardized catch per unit effort (CPUE) indices for the commercial directed monkfish gillnet fishery and possibly the multispecies trawl fishery to be used for stock assessment purposes.
Project location	All Regulated Mesh Areas
Number of vessels	N/A
Number of trips	N/A
Trip duration (days)	N/A
Total number of days	216 2025 RSA DAS; approximately 240 2026 RSA DAS
Gear type(s)	Sink gillnet
Number of tows or sets	N/A
Duration of tows or sets	N/A

Project narrative

Monkfish RSA compensation fishing EFPs that waive monkfish landing limits have been routinely approved since 2007 to increase operational efficiency and to optimize research funds generated from the Monkfish RSA Program. This EFP would facilitate the continuation of compensation fishing in support of the project originally funded and awarded 500 RSA DAS under the 2023-2024 monkfish RSA competition.

The Monkfish RSA Program is allocated 500 monkfish RSA DAS annually as established in Amendment 2 of the Monkfish FMP (70 FR 21929, April 28, 2005). These monkfish RSA DAS may be awarded to applicants, and sold to limited access monkfish vessel owners to fund approved monkfish RSA projects. Award recipients receive an allocation of RSA DAS and a maximum amount of weight that may be landed under available RSA DAS.

Projects are constrained to the total DAS, maximum available landing weight, or grant 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, we have associated twice the landing limit for Permit Category A and C monkfish vessel fishing in the Southern Fishery Management Area 4,074 lb (1,848 kg) whole weight for each RSA DAS. Annually, a maximum of 2,037,000 lb (923,968 kg) of whole weight may be harvested under Monkfish RSA. 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.

Both 2023- and 2024-awarded monkfish RSA DAS were available for this project to use. Only 34 2023-awarded monkfish RSA DAS were used through April 30, 2025. The 2024-awarded monkfish RSA DAS were authorized to be used by this project in FY2025. In order to continue the use of awarded RSA DAS, this EFP would extend the original DAS awards. This EFP would authorize the use of the 216 unused 2023-awarded DAS in FY2026, to expire on April 30, 2027. Unused 2024-awarded RSA DAS (number

to be determined after the expiration of the current EFP), would be available in FY2027, to expire on April 30, 2028.

If approved, the applicant 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 or impact 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: March 31, 2026.

David R. Blankinship,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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