



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XF615]

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) application contains all of the required information and warrants further consideration. The EFP would allow federally permitted fishing vessels to fish outside fishery regulations in support of exempted fishing activities proposed by the Gloucester Marine Genomics Institute. Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative 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 the following method:

- Email: nmfs.gar.efp@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line "GMGI 2026 Lobster Genomics 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), 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: Caroline Potter, Fishery Resource Management Specialist, *Caroline.Potter@noaa.gov*, (978) 281-9325.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Gloucester Marine Genomics Institute 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 697.20(c)	Lobster Mutilation	Landing legs from ovigerous female lobsters

Table 2 -- Project Summary

Project title	Genomic population structure of American lobster in U.S. waters for stock delineation
Project start	06/01/2026
Project end	09/30/2027
Project objectives	To assess spatial stock structure and signals of natural selection of American lobster to improve management unit delineations
Project location	Statistical Areas 515, 562, 526, 537, and 616
Number of vessels	Maximum of 8
Number of trips	Approximately 6
Trip duration (days)	3
Total number of days	Approximately 18
Gear type(s)	Lobster pots
Number of tows or sets	30 per trip
Duration of tows or sets	1 day

Project narrative

This project would assess spatial stock structure and signals of natural selection of American lobster by using a population genomics approach. The intention is for the project to assist in improving management unit delineations for lobster in the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank, and Southern New England regions. To achieve this, the project

sets four aims: 1) Improve the chromosome-level reference genome assembly for the American lobster; 2) build collaborative partnerships with commercial lobstermen and regional lobster biologists by collecting lobster tissue samples from U.S. waters and one Canadian location; 3) assess genetic population structure and interpret responses to regional and environmental conditions recorded within the genome; and 4) disseminate results to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's American Lobster Technical Committee to improve stock delineations and management strategies.

Samples would be collected at six locations throughout the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank/Great South Channel, and Southern New England. At each of the six locations, fishermen would fish for lobster using standard lobster pots, which would be configured and set consistent with offshore lobster fishing practices. This fishing activity is planned to be conducted as part of the fishermen's regular fishing activity. Legal lobsters that are harvested during the trips would be landed for sale. For each late-stage egg-bearing female, the fishermen would remove for collection the smallest walking leg. After recording carapace length and latitude/longitude, the female would be released. A maximum of 240 samples would be collected from across the 6 locations, with a target sample size of 25 at each location. One trip would be taken for each location with each trip lasting 3 days.

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: April 6, 2026.

David R. Blankinship,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2026-06793 Filed: 4/8/2026 8:45 am; Publication Date: 4/9/2026]