



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XF628]

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 Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF). 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 "MA DMF 2026 Ventless Trap Survey". 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: Elise Scholl, Fishery Management

Specialist, elise.scholl@noaa.gov, 978-281-9189.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The applicant 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 697.21(c)(1) and (2)	Gear specification requirements for Lobster Management Areas 1 and 2	To allow for the use of traps without escape vents
50 CFR 697.19(a) and (b)	Trap limit requirements for Areas 1 and 2	To allow for trap limits to be exceeded for up to 360 traps in Area 1 and 96 traps for Area 2
50 CFR 697.19(j)	Trap tag requirements	To allow for alternatively tagged traps
50 CFR 697.20(a)(2), 697.20(b)(2), 697.20(a)(3), and 697.20(b)(3)	Minimum and maximum carapace length requirements for Areas 1 and 2	To allow sub-legal and over-sized lobsters to be landed for research purposes
50 CFR 697.20(g)(1) and (3)	V-notch possession requirement for Areas 1 and 2	To allow landing of female lobsters for research purposes
50 CFR 697.20(d)(1) and (3)	Berried female possession requirements	To allow landing of egg-bearing female lobsters for research purposes
50 CFR 697.20(h)(1)	Minimum carapace width requirements	To allow sub-legal Jonah crabs to be landed for research purposes
50 CFR 697.20(h)(2)(i) and (ii)	Berried female possession requirement	To allow landing of egg-bearing female Jonah crabs for research purposes

Table 2 -- Project Summary

Project title	2026 Ventless Trap Survey
Project start	5/01/2026
Project end	10/31/2026
Project objectives	To provide fishery-independent data on lobster and Jonah crab growth and abundance within Massachusetts State waters
Project location	Statistical Areas 514 and 538
Number of vessels	5
Number of trips	70
Trip duration (days)	1
Total number of days	70

Gear type(s)	Lobster Traps
Number of tows or sets	16 per trip
Duration of tows or sets	3-day soak

Project narrative

The purpose of this survey is to provide fishery-independent data on lobster and Jonah crab growth and abundance within Massachusetts State waters of statistical areas 514 and 538. MA DMF funds this lobster abundance survey through its commercial and recreational lobster license fees. This survey has occurred annually since 2006.

Each trawl consists of six traps, with three vented and three ventless traps alternated along the string. The escape vents in vented traps are standardized throughout all survey areas to one rectangular vent in the parlor, size 1 ¹⁵/₁₆" x 5 ³/₄" (Lobster Conservation Management Area 1 regulation sized vent). All gear would be Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan compliant and meet Federal protected-species related regulations. Survey traps would be tagged as "MA DMF Research Traps". At least one MA DMF scientist would be on board for the sampling trips. MA DMF personnel would not be on board when traps are baited and deployed. Exemptions would not substantively change vessel operations. Catch is expected to be low compared with the biomass and, aside from samples retained for research purposes, returned to sea alive. All catch during sampling trips would be retained temporarily to collect biological data. MA DMF staff may collect lobster and/or Jonah crab, including undersized, oversized, v-notched, and egg-bearing lobsters. Collected samples would be used for research projects on growth and maturity. No catch from the experimental traps would be landed for sale.

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 8, 2026.

David R. Blankinship,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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