

Dated: August 31, 2023.

Samuel D. Rauch, III,

*Deputy Assistant Administrator for
Regulatory Programs, National Marine
Fisheries Service.*

For the reasons set out in the preamble, NMFS amends 50 CFR part 622 as follows:

PART 622—FISHERIES OF THE CARIBBEAN, GULF OF MEXICO, AND SOUTH ATLANTIC

■ 1. The authority citation for part 622 continues to read as follows:

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

■ 2. In § 622.378, revise paragraph (a) to read as follows:

§ 622.378 Seasonal closures of the Gulf migratory group king mackerel gillnet fishery.

(a) *Seasonal closure of the gillnet component for Gulf migratory group king mackerel.* The gillnet component for Gulf migratory group king mackerel in or from the southern zone is closed each fishing year from July 1 until 6 a.m. eastern standard time on the day after the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal holiday. During the closure, a person aboard a vessel using or possessing a gillnet with a stretched-mesh size of 4.75 inches (12.1 cm) or larger in the southern zone may not fish for or possess Gulf migratory group king mackerel. (See § 622.369(a)(1)(iii) for a description of the southern zone.)

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[FR Doc. 2023–19253 Filed 9–6–23; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 2021–27773; RTID 0648–XD333]

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Scup Fishery; Adjustment to the 2023 Winter II Quota

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; in-season adjustment.

SUMMARY: NMFS adjusts the 2023 Winter II commercial scup quota and per-trip Federal landing limit. This action is necessary to comply with regulations implementing Framework Adjustment 3 to the Summer Flounder,

Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan that established the rollover of unused commercial scup quota from the Winter I to Winter II period. This notification is intended to inform the public of this quota and trip limit change.

DATES: Effective October 1, 2023, through December 31, 2023.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Laura Deighan, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 281–9184; or Laura.Deighan@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS published a final rule for Framework Adjustment 3 to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan in the **Federal Register** on November 3, 2003 (68 FR 62250), implementing a process to increase the Winter II (October 1 through December 31) commercial scup quota by the amount of the Winter I (January 1 through April 30) under-harvest and to adjust the Winter II possession limits consistent with the amount of the quota increase, based on the possession limits established through the annual specifications-setting process.

For 2023, the initial Winter II quota is 2,233,194 lb (1,012,960 kg). The best available landings information through June 28, 2023, indicates that 804,630 lb (364,974 kg) remain of the 6,319,911 lb (2,866,663 kg) Winter I quota. Consistent with Framework 3, the full amount of unused 2023 Winter I quota is being transferred to Winter II, resulting in a revised 2023 Winter II quota of 3,037,824 lb (1,377,934 kg). Because the amount transferred is between 0.5 and 1 million lb (226,796 and 453,592 kg), the Federal per-trip possession limit will increase from 12,000 lb (5,443 kg) to 13,500 lb (6,123 kg), as outlined in the final rule that established the possession limit and quota rollover procedures for this year, published on January 3, 2023 (88 FR 11). The new possession limit will be effective October 1 through December 31, 2023. The possession limit will revert back to 12,000 lb (5,443 kg) at the start of the next fishing year, which begins January 1, 2024.

Classification

NMFS issues this action pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This action is required by 50 CFR 648.122(d), which was issued pursuant to section 304(b), and is exempted from review under Executive Order 12866.

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), there is good cause to waive prior notice and an opportunity for public comment on this action, as notice and comment

would be contrary to the public interest. This action transfers unused quota from the Winter I Period to the Winter II Period to make it accessible to the commercial scup fishery and increase fishing opportunities. If the implementation of this in-season action is delayed to solicit prior public comment, the objective of the fishery management plan to achieve the optimum yield from the fishery could be compromised. Deteriorating weather conditions during the latter part of the fishing year may reduce fishing effort, and could also prevent the annual quota from being fully harvested. If this action is delayed, it would reduce the amount of time vessels have to realize the benefits of this quota increase, which would result in negative economic impacts on vessels permitted to fish in this fishery. Moreover, the rollover process being applied here is routine and formulaic and was the subject of notice and comment rulemaking, and the range of potential trip limit changes were outlined in the final 2023 scup specifications that were published on January 3, 2023, which were developed through public notice and comment. The benefit of soliciting additional public comment on this formulaic adjustment would not outweigh the benefits of making this additional quota available to the fishery as quickly as possible. Based on these considerations, there is good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) to waive the 30-day delayed effectiveness period for the reasons stated above.

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

Dated: September 1, 2023.

Jennifer M. Wallace,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[RTID 0648–XC845]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Snow Crab Rebuilding Plan in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

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

ACTION: Notice of agency decision.

SUMMARY: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announces the approval of Amendment 53 to the Fishery Management Plan for Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King and Tanner Crabs (Crab FMP). Amendment 53 adds a new rebuilding plan for snow crab (*Chionoecetes opilio*) to the Crab FMP. The objective of this amendment is to rebuild the snow crab stock. In order to comply with provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), this action is necessary to implement a rebuilding plan prior to the start of the 2023/2024 fishing season. Amendment 53 is intended to promote the goals and objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Crab FMP, and other applicable laws.

DATES: The amendment was approved on August 31, 2023.

ADDRESSES: Electronic copies of Amendment 53 and the Environmental Assessment (referred to as the “Analysis”) prepared for this action may be obtained from <https://www.regulations.gov>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Megan Mackey, 907–586–7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that each regional fishery management council submit any FMP amendment it prepares to NMFS for review and approval, disapproval, or partial approval by the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary). The Magnuson-Stevens Act also requires that NMFS, upon receiving an FMP amendment, immediately publish a notice in the **Federal Register** announcing that the amendment is available for public review and comment.

The Notice of Availability (NOA) for Amendment 53 was published in the **Federal Register** on June 15, 2023 (88 FR 39216) with a 60-day comment period that ended on August 14, 2023. NMFS received one comment during the public comment period on the NOA. NMFS summarized and responded to this comment under Comments and Responses, below.

NMFS determined that Amendment 53 is consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable laws, and the Secretary of Commerce approved Amendment 53 on August 31, 2023. The June 15, 2023 NOA contains additional information on this action. No changes to Federal regulations are necessary to implement the Amendment.

NMFS manages the crab fisheries in the exclusive economic zone under the

Crab FMP. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared the Crab FMP under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*). Regulations governing U.S. fisheries and implementing the FMP appear at 50 CFR parts 600 and 680.

Through the Crab FMP, the State of Alaska (the State) is delegated management authority over certain aspects of the Eastern Bering Sea (EBS) snow crab fishery. This authority is limited by the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the FMP. For EBS snow crab, the State has established a harvest strategy to set total allowable catch (TAC) and announce season or area closures when the TAC is reached. The State’s Bering Sea *C. opilio* Tanner (snow crab) harvest strategy applies during rebuilding and is provided in the Alaska Administrative Code (AAC) at 5 AAC 35.517. The State harvest strategy is more conservative than the Crab FMP’s control rule parameters for EBS snow crab because, under the harvest strategy, a higher level of biomass is required to open directed fishing than under the overfishing level (F_{OFL}) control rule.

On October 19, 2021, NMFS determined and notified the Council that the EBS snow crab stock was overfished. To comply with provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Council developed a rebuilding plan to be implemented prior to the start of the 2023/2024 fishing season.

In February 2023, the Council chose a rebuilding plan for EBS snow crab that will allow bycatch removals and an opportunity for directed harvest during rebuilding if estimates of stock biomass are sufficient to open the fishery under the State’s snow crab harvest strategy. The rebuilding plan is consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and with National Standard 1 Guidelines on time for rebuilding, specifically rebuilding within a time (T_{target}) that is as short as possible, taking into account the status and biology of any overfished stocks of fish, the needs of fishing communities, recommendations by international organizations in which the United States participates, and the interaction of the overfished stock of fish with the marine ecosystems. This rebuilding plan will allow directed fishing pursuant to the State harvest strategy and may provide important economic opportunities for harvesters, processors, and Alaska communities. Maintaining this economic opportunity for a limited directed commercial fishery under the State harvest strategy is important for harvesters, processors, and communities, particularly during this time when the majority of commercial

crab stocks are in a state of decline and future openings are likely to be limited.

Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the time period specified for rebuilding a fishery generally should not exceed 10 years unless the biology of the stock or environmental conditions dictate otherwise. The projected time for rebuilding the EBS snow crab stock, taking into account the biology of the species and current environmental conditions, is 6 years. The main driver in the speed of rebuilding is likely related to recruitment and the ecosystem conditions that allow for increased recruitment into the population. Uncertainty surrounding recruitment and mortality under current ecosystem conditions is expected to heavily influence the rate at which the stock is able to rebuild under the projection parameters. Fishing mortality under the State’s current harvest strategy is expected to have only insignificant or minimal impacts on the rate of rebuilding.

Amendment 53 adds Section 6.2.3 to the Crab FMP to include the rebuilding plan for EBS snow crab. Under the rebuilding plan, ecosystem indicators developed for the stock will be monitored during rebuilding. The NMFS EBS bottom-trawl survey provides data for the annual assessment of the status of crab stocks in the BSAI, including EBS snow crab, and will continue throughout rebuilding. The Council’s BSAI Crab Plan Team will report stock status and progress towards the rebuilt level in the Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report for the King and Tanner Crab Fisheries of the BSAI. Additionally, the State and NMFS monitor directed fishery catch and bycatch of snow crabs in other fisheries. When the fishery is open, the State requires full observer coverage (100 percent) for catcher/processors and partial coverage (30 percent) for catcher vessels participating in the crab fishery. Observers monitor harvest at sea and landings by catcher vessels and shoreside processors. The State reports the total harvest from the commercial crab fishery, and that report will be included annually in the SAFE Report. The contribution of the rebuilding plan’s assessment and monitoring to stock recovery will be additive to measures already in place that limit the effects of fishing activity on EBS snow crab.

In addition, Amendment 53 will remove rebuilding plans from the Crab FMP for stocks that have since been rebuilt or that have been replaced with new rebuilding plans, including rebuilding plans for Bering Sea Tanner

crab (declared overfished on March 3, 1999), Bering Sea snow crab (declared overfished on September 24, 1999), and St. Matthew blue king crab (declared overfished on September 24, 1999).

Comments and Responses

During the public comment period for the NOA for Amendment 53, NMFS

received one unique comment from one member of the public. NMFS's response to this comment is presented below.

Comment 1: One commenter expressed general support for this action.

Response: NMFS acknowledges this comment.

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

Dated: September 1, 2023.

Samuel D. Rauch, III,

*Deputy Assistant Administrator for
Regulatory Programs, National Marine
Fisheries Service.*

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