

Dated: December 9, 2002.

Laurie K. Allen,

Acting Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 02-31982 Filed 12-18-02; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 121102A]

Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee; Public Meetings

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

ACTION: Notice of public meetings.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given of meetings of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) from January 7 through 10, 2003.

DATES: The meetings are scheduled as follows:

January 7, 2003, 8 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
January 8, 2003, 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
January 9, 2003, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
January 10, 2003, 8 a.m. - 12 noon

ADDRESSES: The meetings will be held at Hotel Washington, 515 15th Street, NW, Washington D.C. Requests for special accommodations may be directed to MAFAC, Office of Constituent Services, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Laurel Bryant, Designated Federal Official; telephone: (301) 713-9501 ext. 171.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: As required by section 10(a) (2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, 5 U.S.C. App. (1982), notice is hereby given of meetings of MAFAC. MAFAC was established by the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) on February 17, 1972, to advise the Secretary on all living marine resource matters that are the responsibility of the Department of Commerce. This Committee ensures that the living marine resource policies and programs of the Nation are adequate to meet the needs of commercial and recreational fisheries, and of environmental, state, consumer, academic, tribal, and other national interests.

Matters to Be Considered

January 7, 2003

Orientation and program briefings for new MAFAC members.

January 8, 2003

Overview of NOAA Fisheries, including progress toward regulatory streamlining efforts, agency's assessment of its progress in implementing the Sustainable Fishing Act, and progress toward a national bycatch strategy. The key challenges and priorities for 2003 will be discussed along with MAFAC's role in contributing to those priorities. Topics for discussion include reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) and various management components such as individual fishing quotas, overcapacity and the national standards under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. In addition, MAFAC will receive a report on a draft technical guidance document for implementing ecosystem management approaches for marine resource management.

January 9, 2003

Committee will review its operation, policy and structure and address any operational and organizational modifications as well as conduct subcommittee work on identified issues.

January 10, 2003

Committee will make final reports to NOAA Fisheries and adjourn.

Time will be set aside for public comment on agenda items.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to MAFAC (see **ADDRESSES**).

Dated: December 16, 2002.

John Oliver,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Operations, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 02-31981 Filed 12-18-02; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 120302A]

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; Atlantic Highly Migratory Species; Exempted Fishing and Scientific Research Permits

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

ACTION: Issuance of 2003 Exempted Fishing and Scientific Research Permits; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces the intent to issue Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) and Scientific Research Permits (SRPs) for the collection of Atlantic highly migratory species (HMS). These EFPs/SRPs would authorize collections of a limited number of tunas, swordfish, billfishes, and sharks from Federal waters in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico for the purposes of scientific data collection and public display. Generally, the EFPs will be valid through December 31, 2003. NMFS also announces the intent to issue EFPs upon receiving applications from U.S. fishermen whose vessels fish for Atlantic HMS while operating under contract within the Exclusive Economic Zone of other nations. These EFPs would allow a U.S. fishing vessel to fish so as to be consistent with another country's regulations without violating U.S. regulations, and would ensure that such vessels report to the proper authorities.

DATES: Written comments on these collection, research and fishing activities will be considered by NMFS in issuing such EFPs/SRPs if received on or before January 3, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Send comments to Christopher Rogers, Chief, Highly Migratory Species Management Division (F/SF1), NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. The EFP/SRP applications and copies of the regulations under which EFPs/SRPs are issued may also be requested from this address. Comments also may be sent via facsimile (fax) to (301)713-1917. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or Internet.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Heather Stirratt or Sari Kiraly, 301-713-2347; fax: 301-713-1917.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: EFPs and SRPs are requested and issued under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*) and/or the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.*). Regulations at 50 CFR 600.745 and 50 CFR 635.32 govern scientific research activity, exempted fishing, and exempted educational activity with respect to Atlantic HMS.

Issuance of EFPs and/or SRPs may be necessary because possession of certain shark species is prohibited, possession of billfishes on board commercial fishing vessels is prohibited, and because the commercial fisheries for bluefin tuna, swordfish and large coastal sharks may be closed for extended

periods, during which collection of live animals and/or biological samples would otherwise be prohibited. In addition, NMFS regulations at 50 CFR 635.32 regarding implantation or attachment of archival tags in Atlantic HMS require prior authorization and a report on implantation activities.

NMFS seeks public comment on its intention to issue EFPs for the purpose of collecting biological samples under at-sea fisheries observer programs. NMFS intends to issue EFPs to any NMFS or NMFS-approved observer to bring onboard and possess, for scientific research purposes, biological sampling, measurement, etc., any Atlantic swordfish, Atlantic shark, or Atlantic billfish, provided the fish is a recaptured tagged fish, a dead fish prior to being brought onboard, or specifically authorized for sampling by the Director of the Office of Sustainable Fisheries at the request of the Southeast Fisheries Science Center or Northeast Fisheries Science Center. On average, several hundred swordfish and sharks are collected by at-sea observers under such EFPs any given year.

Collection of bluefin tuna may be authorized for scientific research, age and growth, genetic, and spawning studies. In 2002, five permits for bluefin tuna archival tagging and research were issued.

EFP and SRP applications will also be considered for experiments addressing gear modifications to reduce bycatch in the Atlantic HMS pelagic longline fisheries. In 2002, NMFS issued one EFP allowing commercial fishing vessels to assist NOAA scientists in conducting bycatch reduction experiments in the Northeast Distant Waters of the Grand Banks.

NMFS intends to continue to issue EFPs to vessel operators requesting offloading windows in the Atlantic Swordfish fishery, in the event the swordfish fishery is closed and a vessel is not equipped with a vessel monitoring system (VMS) that would enable it to remain at sea after the announced closure date. NMFS anticipates that commercial EFP applicants would be captains of larger vessels out on extended trips at the time of a closure announcement. These applicants would benefit from delayed offloading by avoiding market gluts and cold storage problems. Based on an October 16, 2002, court order, NMFS expects to re-establish the regulations requiring VMS on HMS vessels with pelagic long line on board. When that occurs, EFPs to allow delayed offloading would no longer be required.

NMFS also seeks public comment on its intention to issue EFPs for distant

water pelagic longline vessels for the purpose of expanding access of U.S. vessels into other markets while continuing to collect information about U.S. fishing effort and landings. NMFS will consider applications from any U.S. Atlantic pelagic longline vessel. NMFS intends to issue such EFPs to any U.S. vessel fishing under contract to another nation, provided its landings and discards are consistent with ICCAT recommendations and, due to the requirements of the contract, those landings are being reported to ICCAT by that other nation or otherwise appropriately accounted for.

NMFS is also seeking public comment on its intention to issue EFPs for the collection of restricted species of sharks for the purpose of public display. In the Final Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish and Sharks (HMS FMP), NMFS established a public display quota of 60 metric tons wet weight for this purpose. NMFS has preliminarily determined that up to 3,000 sharks could be taken with this current quota. NMFS believes that harvesting this amount for public display will have a minimal impact on the stock. In 2002, eight EFPs, which authorized the collection of 695 sharks for display purposes, were issued. Of these authorized collections, only 42 sharks have been reported taken to date.

Generally, the authorized collections or exemptions would involve activities otherwise prohibited by regulations implementing the HMS FMP and Amendment 1 to the Atlantic Billfish Fishery Management Plan. The EFPs, if issued, may authorize recipients to fish for and possess tunas, billfishes, swordfish, and sharks outside the applicable Federal commercial seasons, size limits and retention limits, or to fish for and possess prohibited species.

NMFS is in the process of restructuring the procedures for issuing Federal EFPs/SRPs for highly migratory species. NMFS initiated this process by publishing a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Amendment 1 to the Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish and Sharks on November 15, 2002 (64 FR 69236). While the Amendment is anticipated to focus primarily upon shark management measures, consideration will be given to revising the EFP/SRP issuance procedures for all Atlantic HMS. NMFS intends to publish an Issues and Options paper summarizing the different permitting options under consideration and will announce the availability of this document at a later date.

Additionally, on December 6, 2002 (64 FR 72629), NMFS published a proposed rule that suggests modification of existing regulations to improve accountability of exempted fishing activities involving Atlantic HMS. If the proposed changes are implemented, permits would be issued under the current regulations and would be valid until the new regulations become effective, at which time revised permits may be issued.

Final decisions on the issuance of any EFPs/SRPs will depend on the submission of all required information about the proposed activities, NMFS' review of public comments received on this notice, consistency with conclusions in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) contained in the Final HMS FMP (64 FR 13575; March 19, 1999) and any subsequent Environmental Assessments (EAs) and any consultations with any appropriate Regional Fishery Management Councils, states, or Federal agencies. NMFS does not anticipate any environmental impacts from the issuance of these EFPs other than impacts already assessed in the Final HMS FMP and subsequent EAs.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.* and 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: December 13, 2002.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 02-31983 Filed 12-18-02; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

COMMITTEE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TEXTILE AGREEMENTS

Request for Public Comments on Commercial Availability Request under the United States-Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act (CBTPA)

December 17, 2002.

AGENCY: Committee for the Implementation of Textile Agreements (CITA).

ACTION: Request for public comments concerning a request for a determination that two patented fusible interlining fabrics, used in the construction of waistbands, cannot be supplied by the domestic industry in commercial quantities in a timely manner under the CBTPA.

SUMMARY: On December 12, 2002 the Chairman of CITA received a petition from Levi Strauss and Co. alleging that a certain ultra-fine Lycra crochet material cannot be supplied by the