

the FMP was approved and implemented by NMFS under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) in March of 1983. Currently, the Council is preparing draft FMP Amendment 14 and a DSEIS as an integrated part of the Amendment. The DSEIS will discuss the proposed Amendment 14 management measures in conjunction with reasonable alternatives. Each alternative will be assessed in relation to the environmental consequences with a no-action alternative considered as one of the options.

The Council is considering the use of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) as a management tool to protect overfished stocks and maintain the sustained existence of healthy stocks in the snapper grouper complex. MPAs serve as geographical areas with various degrees of protection from harvest including prohibition of specific gear types, seasonal spawning area closures, complete closure from fishing, and combinations of the aforementioned. Anticipated benefits from the MPAs include the protection of critical life stages, physical habitats, age structure, genetic diversity of the stock, and biodiversity. In addition to ensuring the long-term ecological viability of the fish stock and introducing a provision of insurance against uncertainty, MPAs have the potential to provide opportunities for education and research.

In Amendment 14, the Council is considering using MPAs as an additional management tool to supplement traditional management measures and promote its ultimate goal of conservation and management of fish stocks in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone. The high species diversity and complex life history of fish within the snapper grouper management group supports a greater ecosystem approach to resource management of the stock. The Council intends that Amendment 14 center on establishing MPAs in critical habitat for overfished deepwater species including speckled hind, warsaw grouper, misty grouper, yellowedge grouper, snowy grouper, golden tilefish, sand tilefish, and blueline tilefish.

A scoping meeting to determine the scope of significant issues to be

addressed in the DSEIS and the associated Amendment 14 will be conducted at the Council's March 4-8, 2002, meeting in Savannah, GA.

Following consideration of public comments, the Council intends to finalize and approve draft Amendment 14 to the FMP and the DSEIS for two rounds of public hearings, one in 2002 and one early in 2003. These documents are expected to be released for public comment and filed with the Environmental Protection Agency following the June 2003 Council meeting.

Authority: 6 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: January 25, 2002.

Jonathan Kurlund,

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 697

[Docket No. 010918229-1229-01; I.D. 022301A]

RIN 0648-AP15

American Lobster Fishery

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

ACTION: Proposed rule; extension of the comment period.

SUMMARY: In a document published in the Federal Register on January 3, 2002, NMFS requested comments on proposed regulations to implement proposed management measures for the American lobster fishery in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from Maine through North Carolina on or before February 19, 2002. This proposed rule document considers revisions to Federal American lobster regulations that are designed to be compatible with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Lobster. The intent of this document is to announce an extension of the public

comment period from February 19, 2002, to February 28, 2002.

DATES: Receipt of comments on the proposed rule is extended from February 19, 2002, to February 28, 2002.

ADDRESSES: Comments on the proposed rule should be sent to, and copies of supporting documents, including a Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Regulatory Impact Review and an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, are available from the Director, State, Federal and Constituent Programs Office, NMFS, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or the Internet. Comments regarding the collection-of-information requirements contained in the proposed rule should be sent to Harry Mears at the above address, and the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget, Washington, DC 20503 (ATTN: NOAA Desk Officer).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Robert Ross, NMFS, Northeast Region, 978-281-9234.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: As announced in the Federal Register on January 3, 2002 (67 FR 282), NMFS requested comments on proposed regulations to implement proposed management measures for the American lobster fishery in the EEZ from Maine through North Carolina on or before February 19, 2002. In a letter to the NMFS Northeast Regional Administrator dated January 7, 2002, the Commission requested an extension of the public comment period to allow for full discussion and public comment on the proposed Federal American lobster regulations at a public meeting of the Commission's American Lobster Board scheduled to occur during the week of February 18, 2002. Therefore, by this document, NMFS is extending the public comment period from February 19, 2002, to February 28, 2002. There were no changes from the proposed rule previously published.

Dated: January 25, 2002.

Jon Kurland,

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

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