

for any incidental groundfish species that they may catch while fishing for GB cod. In addition, participating vessels would be required to call the Sector Manager prior to leaving port. There would be no trip limit for GB cod for participating vessels. All legal-sized cod caught would be retained and landed and counted against the Sector's aggregate allocation. Participating vessels would not be allowed to fish with or have on board gear other than jigs, non-automated demersal longline, or handgear. Participating vessels would be limited to using 4,500 hooks within the inshore gear restriction area, but may use an unlimited number of hooks in the rest of the Sector Area. NE multispecies DAS used by participating vessels while conducting fishery research under an Exempted Fishing Permit during the 2005 fishing year would be deducted from that Sector member's individual DAS allocation. Similarly, all GB cod landed by a participating vessel while conducting research would count toward the Sector's allocation of GB cod TAC. Participating vessels would be exempt from the GB Seasonal Closure Area during the month of May.

The EA prepared for the Sector operations concludes that the biological impacts of the Sector will be positive because the hard TAC and the use of DAS will provide two means of restricting both the landings and effort of the Sector. Implementation of the Sector would have a positive impact on essential fish habitat and bycatch by allowing a maximum number of hook vessels to remain active in the hook fishery, rather than converting to (or leasing DAS to) other gear types that have greater environmental impacts. The analysis of economic impacts of the Sector concludes that Sector members would realize higher economic returns if the Sector were implemented. The EA asserts that fishing in accordance with the Sector Agreement rules enables more efficient harvesting of GB cod with hook gear than would be possible if the vessels were fishing in accordance with the common pool (non-Sector) rules. The social benefits of the Sector would accrue to both Sector members as well as the Chatham/Harwichport, MA, community, which is highly dependent upon groundfish revenues and is likely to be negatively affected by the reduced cod trip limit that was implemented under Amendment 13. The EA concludes that the self-governing nature of the Sector and the development of rules by the Sector enables stewardship of the cod resource by Sector members. The cumulative impacts of the Sector

are expected to be positive due to a positive biological impact, neutral impact on habitat, and a positive social and economic impact. In contrast, the cumulative impact of the no action alternative is estimated to be neutral, with negative social and economic impacts.

Should the Regional Administrator approve the Sector Agreement as proposed, a Letter of Authorization would be issued to each member of the Sector exempting them, conditional upon their compliance with the Sector Agreement, from the GB cod possession restrictions and the requirements of the Gulf of Maine trip limit exemption program, limits on the number of hooks, and the GB Seasonal Closure Area, as specified in §§ 648.86(b), 648.80(a)(4)(v), and 648.81(g), respectively.

Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) require publication of this notification to provide interested parties the opportunity to comment on proposed TAC allocations and plans of operation of sectors.

Dated: March 29, 2005.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 031105C]

International Whaling Commission; 57th Annual Meeting; Announcement of Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: This notice announces the date and location of the public meeting being held prior to the 57th annual International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting.

DATES: The public meeting will be held May 10, 2005, at 1:30 pm.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held in the NOAA Science Center Room, 1301 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Cheri McCarty, 301-713-2322, Extension 114.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Secretary of Commerce is charged with the responsibility of discharging the obligations of the United States under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, 1946. The U.S. Commissioner has primary responsibility for the preparation and negotiation of U.S. positions on international issues concerning whaling and for all matters involving the IWC. He is staffed by the Department of Commerce and assisted by the Department of State, the Department of the Interior, Marine Mammal Commission, and by other agencies.

Once the draft agenda for the annual IWC meeting is completed, it will be posted on the IWC Secretariat's website at <http://www.iwcoffice.org/meetings/meeting2005.htm>.

Each year NOAA holds a meeting prior to the annual IWC meeting to discuss the tentative U.S. positions for the upcoming IWC meeting. Because the meeting discusses U.S. positions, the substance of the meeting must be kept confidential. Any U.S. citizen with an identifiable interest in U.S. whale conservation policy may participate, but NOAA reserves the authority to inquire about the interests of any person who appears at a meeting and to determine the appropriateness of that person's participation.

Persons who represent foreign interests may not attend. These stringent measures are necessary to protect the confidentiality of U.S. negotiating positions and are a necessary basis for the relatively open process of preparing for IWC meetings.

The meeting will be held at 1:30 pm at the NOAA Science Center Room, 1301 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to the Cheri McCarty, 301-713-2322 by May 2, 2005.

Dated: March 28, 2005.

Laurie K. Allen,

Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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