

Dated: March 31, 2000.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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 660

[ID. 032700A]

Fisheries Off West Coast States and in the Western Pacific; Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery; Renewal of Exempted Fishing Permit

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

ACTION: Renewal of Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) for monitoring incidental catch of salmon and groundfish in the Washington-Oregon-California (WOC) shore-based Pacific whiting fishery.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces the receipt of an application, and NMFS' intent to renew EFPs for vessels participating in an observation program to monitor the incidental take of salmon and groundfish in the shore-based component of the Pacific whiting fishery. These EFPs are necessary to allow trawl vessels fishing for Pacific whiting to delay sorting their catch, and thus to retain prohibited species and groundfish in excess of cumulative trip limits until the point of offloading. These activities are otherwise prohibited by Federal regulations.

DATES: The EFPs will be effective no earlier than April 1, 2000, and would expire no later than May 31, 2001, but could be terminated earlier under terms and conditions of the EFPs and other applicable laws.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the EFP are available from Becky Renko or Katherine King Northwest Region, NMFS, 7600 Sand Point Way NE., Bldg. 1, Seattle, WA 98115-0070.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Becky Renko or Katherine King 206-526-6140.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This action is authorized by Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act provisions at 50 CFR 600.745 which state that EFPs may be used to authorize fishing activities that would otherwise be prohibited.

NMFS received an application requesting renewal of these EFPs from

the States of Washington, Oregon, and California at the March 6-10, 2000, Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting in Sacramento California. An opportunity for public testimony was provided during the Council meeting. The Council recommended that NMFS issue the EFPs, as requested by the States.

Renewal of these EFPs, to about 40 vessels, would continue an ongoing program to collect information on the incidental catch of salmon and groundfish in whiting harvests delivered to shoreside processing facilities by domestic trawl vessels operating off WOC. Because whiting deteriorates rapidly, it must be handled quickly and immediately chilled to maintain the quality. As a result, many vessels dump catch directly or near directly into the hold and are unable to effectively sort their catch.

The issuance of EFPs will allow vessels to delay sorting of prohibited species and groundfish caught in excess of cumulative trip limits until offloading. Delaying sorting until the vessel offloads will allow state biologists to collect incidental catch data for total catch estimates while maintaining whiting quality. Without an EFP, groundfish regulations at 50 CFR 660.306(b) require vessels to sort out prohibited species and return them to sea as soon as practicable with minimum injury. To allow state biologists to sample unsorted whiting, it is also necessary to include provisions for potential overages of groundfish trip limits which would be otherwise prohibited by regulations at 50 CFR 660.306(h).

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

Dated: March 31, 2000.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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 660

[Docket No. 990430113-913-01; I.D. 032700C]

Fisheries off West Coast States and in the Western Pacific; West Coast Salmon Fisheries; Inseason Adjustments From Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain, OR

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

ACTION: Inseason adjustments; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the commercial and recreational fisheries for all salmon except coho, in the areas from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain, OR, will open April 1, 2000, and continue through dates to be determined in the 2000 management measures for 2000 ocean salmon fisheries in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ). This action is necessary to conform to the 1999 announcement of management measures for year 2000 salmon seasons opening earlier than May 1, 2000, and is intended to ensure conservation of chinook salmon.

DATES: Effective April 1, 2000, until the effective date of the year 2000 management measures, which will be published in the **Federal Register** for the west coast salmon fisheries. Comments will be accepted through April 20, 2000.

ADDRESSES: Comments on this action must be mailed to William Stelle, Jr., Regional Administrator, Northwest Region, NMFS, NOAA, 7600 Sand Point Way NE., Bldg. 1, Seattle, WA 98115-0070; or faxed to 206-526-6376; or Rodney McInnis, Acting Regional Administrator, Southwest Region, NMFS, NOAA, 501 W. Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA 90802-4132; or faxed to 562-980-4018. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or the Internet. Information relevant to this document is available for public review during business hours at the Office of the Regional Administrator, Northwest Region, NMFS.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: William Robinson, 206-526-6140, or Svein Fougner, 562-980-4030.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In the 1999 annual management measures for ocean salmon fisheries (64 FR 24078,