

setting specifications for the tilefish fisheries to prevent overfishing from occurring. The comment notes that specification-setting is also economically important for the industry which utilizes the resource.

Response: NMFS agrees. This action approves 2025 specifications for blueline and golden tilefish and projects 2026 and 2027 golden tilefish specifications.

Classification

NMFS is issuing this rule pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1855(d)). In a previous action taken pursuant to section 304(b) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1854(b)), the FMP and implementing regulations created the process by which specifications are developed through a NMFS rulemaking process distinct from that of 304(b). See 50 CFR 648.292. As such, NMFS is issuing this rule pursuant to section 305(d). The NMFS Assistant Administrator has determined that this final rule is consistent with the Tilefish FMP, other provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other applicable law.

There is good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) to waive the 30-day delay in effective date. The 2025 fishing year began on January 1, 2025, operating under a rollover provision using specifications from the prior fishing year. This is a routine specifications action that occurs every year, and stakeholder and industry groups have been involved with the development of this action and have participated in public meetings throughout its development. Further delay in the date of effectiveness would be contrary to the public interest as it could increase confusion in the tilefish industry around current quotas. The 2025 fishing year quotas are slightly lower than the quotas from the prior year that are currently in effect, so continued delay in the effectiveness of this rule could increase the risk of overages that may result in overfishing. Furthermore, regulated parties do not require any additional time to come into compliance with this rule and a 30-day delay before the final rule becomes effective does not provide any benefit. Unlike actions that require an adjustment period, tilefish fishing vessels will not have to purchase new equipment or otherwise expend time or money to comply with these management measures. Rather, complying with this final rule simply means adhering to the new catch limits set for the 2025 fishing year. Finally, fishery stakeholders have also been involved in the development of this action and are anticipating this rule. For

these reasons, there is good cause not to delay the effective date of this final rule, consistent with 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), and to implement this action upon publication in the **Federal Register**.

This final rule is exempt from review under Executive Orders 12866 and 14192.

NMFS has determined that this action would not have a substantial direct effect on one or more Indian Tribes, on the relationship between the Federal Government and Indian Tribes, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities between the Federal Government and Indian Tribes; therefore, consultation with Tribal officials under E.O. 13175 is not required, and the requirements of sections (5)(b) and (5)(c) of E.O. 13175 also do not apply. A Tribal summary impact statement under section (5)(b)(2)(B) and section (5)(c)(2)(B) of E.O. 13175 is not required and has not been prepared.

The Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration during the proposed rule stage that this action would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. The factual basis for the certification was published in the proposed rule and is not repeated here. No comments were received regarding this certification. As a result, a regulatory flexibility analysis was not required and none was prepared.

This final rule contains no information collection requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

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

Dated: June 23, 2025.

Samuel D. Rauch III,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 250623–0108; RTID 0648–XE702]

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Northeast Multispecies Fishery; 2025 Small-Mesh Multispecies Specifications

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: NMFS is finalizing specifications for the 2025 small-mesh multispecies fishery, including an annual catch limit (ACL) and total allowable landings (TAL) limit. This action is necessary to fully implement previously projected allowable small-mesh multispecies harvest levels that will prevent overfishing and allow harvesting of optimum yield (OY). This action is intended to establish the allowable 2025 harvest levels, consistent with the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

DATES: Effective July 28, 2025.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Shannah Jaburek, Fishery Policy Analyst, (978) 282–8456.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) manages the small-mesh multispecies fishery within the Northeast Multispecies FMP. The small-mesh multispecies fishery is made up of three species of hakes that are managed as five stocks: (1) Northern and southern silver hake; (2) northern and southern red hake; and (3) offshore hake. Southern silver hake and offshore hake are often grouped together for management purposes and collectively referred to as “southern whiting.” Amendment 19 to the FMP (April 4, 2013, 78 FR 20260) established a process for specifying catch limits for the small-mesh multispecies fishery stocks, including values for an overfishing limit (OFL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), ACL, and TAL. The FMP requires that this specifications process be implemented on an annual basis for up to 3 years at a time with each fishing year running from May 1 through April 30. Prior to the start of fishing year 2024, the Council recommended specifications for the 2024–2026 fishing years (table 1).

The Council’s recommendations for the 2024–2026 small-mesh multispecies fishery specifications are based on the most recent assessments of the small-mesh multispecies stocks conducted in September 2023 and the recommendations from the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee. The southern red hake stock remains under a rebuilding plan established in Framework Adjustment 62 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP (87 FR 3694, January 25, 2022), and we will continue to implement the 25-percent

reduction on the Council-recommended ABC in accordance with the rebuilding plan. We continue to maintain the position that we do not anticipate the 25-percent reduction to have a

meaningful impact on industry. The fishery has landed approximately 19 percent of the TAL for the 2024 fishing year as of the end of February 2025 and is not anticipated to have substantially

higher landings for the remainder of the year based on fishing trends over the last three years.

TABLE 1—APPROVED 2024–2026 SMALL-MESH MULTISPECIES SPECIFICATIONS

[Metric tons (mt)]

	OFL	ABC	ACL	TAL
Northern Red Hake	Unknown	3,129	2,973	1,274
Northern Silver Hake	79,473	40,868	38,825	31,347
Southern Red Hake	Unknown	** 1,370	1,301	234
Southern Whiting *	35,419	20,149	19,142	13,881

* Southern whiting includes both southern silver hake and offshore hake.

** Includes a 25-percent reduction on the Council-recommended ABC of 1,826 mt in accordance with the rebuilding plan.

On August 29, 2024, NMFS published a final rule implementing the Council-recommended specifications with the required reduction to southern red hake for the 2024 fishing year, effective through April 30, 2025, and projecting the fishery's specifications for 2025 through 2026 (89 FR 70124). At the end of each fishing year, we evaluate catch information and determine if any of the quotas have been exceeded. If a quota is exceeded, the regulations at 50 CFR 648.90(b)(5)(ii) require that in a subsequent year, the in-season adjustment trigger that reduces possession limits be reduced by the same percentage that the ACL was exceeded. In any given year when new specifications are not implemented by May 1, the start of the new fishing year, the previous year's specifications remain in effect until superseded by the final rule implementing the current year's specifications (50 CFR 648.90(b)(1)(iv)(D)).

Specifications for the 2025 Fishing Year

We have reviewed available 2023 and 2024 fishery information against the projected 2025 specifications. At its September 2024 meeting, the Council received the 2023 year-end report and did not make any recommended changes to the 2025 proposed specifications. There have been no quota overages, nor is there any new biological information that would require altering the projected 2025 specifications published in 2024. Based on this information, we are finalizing specifications for fishing year 2025, as projected in the 2024 specifications rule, and outlined above in table 1. These specifications are not expected to result in overfishing and adequately account for scientific uncertainty. NMFS will provide notice of the final 2026 specifications, and any necessary reductions, prior to the start of the 2026 fishing year.

Classification

NMFS is issuing this rule pursuant to the authority at section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to implement management measures necessary to carry out an approved FMP. Small-mesh multispecies specifications are implemented pursuant to the regulations at 50 CFR 648.90 that were approved and implemented by NMFS in Amendment 19 to the FMP (78 FR 20260; April 4, 2013). The NMFS Assistant Administrator has determined that this final rule is consistent with the Northeast Multispecies FMP, the 2024–2026 small-mesh multispecies specifications, and other applicable law. This final rule is exempt from review under Executive Order (E.O.) 12866 and from E.O. 14192.

Pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) (5 U.S.C. 553(c)) and the process described in the small-mesh multispecies regulations (§ 648.90), NMFS provided the public with the opportunity to comment on the proposed rule to implement 2024–2026 small-mesh multispecies fishery specifications (89 FR 59034; July 22, 2024), which included the projected 2025 specifications that are being reaffirmed through this final rule. We received one comment on the proposed rule that requested we correct the northern red hake TAL to reflect the Council's recommendation and acknowledging our requirement to adjust the southern red hake ABC to meet the requirements of the rebuilding plan. We responded to that comment and made the requested correction in the final rule to implement 2024–2026 small-mesh multispecies specifications (89 FR 70124, August 29, 2024). This final rule contains no changes from the projected 2025 specifications that were included in the August 29, 2024, final rule (89 FR 70124). Through both the

proposed rule for the 2024–2026 specifications and the final rule for the 2024 specifications, we alerted the public that we would conduct a review of the latest available catch information in each of the interim years of the multi-year specifications and announce the final quota prior to the May 1 start of the fishing year. Thus, the proposed and final rules that contained the projected 2025 specifications provided a full opportunity for the public to comment on the substance and process of this action. Furthermore, at the September 2024 Council meeting, there was an opportunity for additional public comment following the Whiting Committee report. No comment was received about the proposed 2025 specifications.

The Chief Counsel for Regulation, Department of Commerce, previously certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration (SBA) that the 2024–2026 small-mesh multispecies specifications would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. Implementing the 2025 specifications will not change the conclusions drawn in that previous certification to the SBA. No comments were received regarding this prior certification. As a result, no new regulatory flexibility analysis is required and none has been prepared.

This action does not contain a collection of information requirement for purposes of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) (44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*). NMFS has determined that this action would not have a substantial direct effect on one or more Indian Tribes, on the relationship between the Federal Government and Indian Tribes, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities between the Federal Government and Indian Tribes; therefore, consultation with Tribal officials under E.O. 13175 is not

required, and the requirements of sections (5)(b) and (5)(c) of E.O. 13175 also do not apply. A Tribal summary impact statement under section (5)(b)(2)(B) and section (5)(c)(2)(B) of E.O. 13175 is not required and has not been prepared.

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

Dated: June 23, 2025.

Samuel D. Rauch III,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 660

[Docket No. 250623–0103]

RIN 0648–BN47

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; Fisheries Off West Coast States; Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery; 2025 Pacific Whiting U.S. Total Allowable Catch, 2025 Tribal Allocation, 2025 Incidental Set-Aside, and Annual Specifications for 2025 Non-Tribal Fisheries

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

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This final rule announces the 2025 U.S. Total Allowable Catch of Pacific whiting and implements the domestic 2025 harvest specifications for Pacific whiting fisheries off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California (collectively, the West Coast), including the 2025 Tribal allocation for the Pacific whiting fishery, the non-Tribal fishery Harvest Guideline and sector allocations, and a set-aside for research activities and incidental mortality in non-groundfish fisheries. These measures are intended to help prevent overfishing, achieve optimum yield, ensure that management measures are based on the best scientific information available, and provide for the implementation of Tribal treaty fishing rights.

DATES: Effective June 26, 2025.

ADDRESSES:

Electronic Access

This final rule is accessible via the internet at the Office of the Federal

Register website at: <https://www.federalregister.gov>.

Background information for this action and analytical documents for the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) are available at the NMFS West Coast region website at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/2025-pacific-whiting-us-total-allowable-catch-2025-tribal-allocation-2025-incidental-set>.

NEPA documents for West Coast groundfish actions are also available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/laws-and-policies/groundfish-actions-nepa-documents> and at the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) website at: <http://www.pcouncil.org>.

Additional background information for the Pacific Hake/Whiting Treaty can be found at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/laws-policies/pacific-hake-whiting-treaty>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Colin Sayre, phone: 206–526–4656, and email: Colin.Sayre@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The final rule announces the U.S. total allowable catch (TAC) for Pacific whiting, which was determined under the terms of the Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Canada on Pacific Hake/Whiting of 2003 (Agreement). This final rule also establishes a Tribal Pacific whiting allocation based on a percentage of the recommended U.S. TAC of Pacific whiting, a 2025 set-aside for research and incidental mortality in non-groundfish fisheries, and the 2025 Harvest Guideline (HG) and sector allocations for the non-Tribal commercial Pacific whiting fishery. NMFS implements these actions under the authority of the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), sections 304(b) and 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the Pacific Whiting Act of 2006 (Whiting Act), and other applicable laws.

The Tribal and non-Tribal commercial Pacific whiting fisheries open on May 1 of each year. The Tribal and non-Tribal commercial sector allocations for Pacific whiting, as well as set-asides, are effective until December 31, 2025.

Pacific Whiting Agreement

The transboundary stock of Pacific whiting is managed through the Agreement. The Agreement establishes

bilateral management bodies to implement the terms of the Agreement. The bilateral bodies include: the Joint Management Committee (JMC), which recommends the annual catch limit for Pacific whiting; the Joint Technical Committee (JTC), which conducts the Pacific whiting stock assessment; the Scientific Review Group (SRG), which reviews the stock assessment; and the Advisory Panel (AP), which provides stakeholder input to the JMC. NMFS issued a proposed rule on April 15, 2025 (90 FR 15675) that further describes the Agreement, the distribution of the Pacific whiting coastwide TAC between the United States (73.88 percent) and Canada (26.12 percent), the bilateral bodies to implement the terms of the Agreement, including the JMC, and the process used to determine the coastwide TAC under the Agreement.

2025 TAC Recommendation and Approval

The Treaty's AP and the JMC met in Victoria, British Columbia on March 11–13, 2025, to develop advice on a 2025 coastwide TAC. The AP provided its 2025 TAC recommendation to the JMC on March 12, 2025. The JMC reviewed the advice of the JTC, the SRG, and the AP, and agreed on a TAC recommendation for transmittal to the United States and Canadian Governments.

The Agreement directs the JMC to base the catch limit recommendation on the F–40 default harvest rate, unless scientific evidence demonstrates that a different harvest rate is necessary to sustain the offshore Pacific whiting resource. The F–40 default harvest rate is a fishing mortality rate that would reduce the spawning biomass of Pacific whiting to 40 percent of the estimated unfished level. After consideration of the 2025 stock assessment and other relevant scientific information, the JMC did not use the default harvest rate, and instead agreed on a more conservative approach. There were 4 primary reasons for choosing a TAC below the default harvest rate: (1) the last available survey biomass estimate (from 2023) was the third lowest in the time series; (2) the proportion of fish in Canadian waters was at an all-time low; (3) catch attainment for both countries declined in the last two years reaching all-time lows relative to their respective TAC levels in 2024; and (4) the biomass of whiting has shifted south in both 2023 and 2024 resulting in lower observed biomass off Washington and Oregon, and higher biomass off of California waters. Further, long-term trends in acoustic survey biomass show lower