

gear on board cannot possess more than a total of 1,000 hooks, and no more than 750 hooks can be rigged for fishing at any given time.

Industry representatives have indicated that a total of 1,000 hooks is not enough on long trips to compensate for hook losses due to sharks' biting hooks off and other general reasons. Under the current total possession limit, if more than 250 hooks are lost, a vessel either has to fish with fewer than 750 hooks or acquire additional hooks from other vessels to maintain the maximum number of hooks in the water. A third option is for the vessel to end the trip and return to port; however, that reduces the vessel landings. Observer data indicates an average of over 250 hooks were lost per trip from 2011 through 2016; however, despite the total hook limit and the average hook loss, average landings of reef fish per longline trip increased over that time.

The proposed rule would allow a vessel with a longline endorsement to possess an unlimited number of hooks, but it would not change the maximum number that can be rigged for fishing. Any bottom longline vessel that would increase the total number of hooks it possesses beyond 1,000 would do so only if there were an economic benefit of doing so. Removing the limit on the number of unrigged hooks that can be onboard is expected to improve fishers' ability to maintain the maximum number of rigged hooks over the duration of a trip. There is insufficient information to estimate the number of vessels that may benefit from possessing more than 1,000 hooks and the magnitude of such a benefit.

NMFS expects this proposed rule would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities, and an initial regulatory flexibility analysis is not required and none has been prepared.

No duplicative, overlapping, or conflicting Federal rules have been identified. In addition, no new reporting, record-keeping, or other compliance requirements are introduced by this proposed rule. Accordingly, this proposed rule does not implicate the Paperwork Reduction Act.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 622

Bottom longline gear, Fisheries, Fishing, Gulf of Mexico, Reef fish.

Dated: October 24, 2017.

Samuel D. Rauch, III,

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

For the reasons set out in the preamble, 50 CFR part 622 is proposed to be amended as follows:

PART 622—FISHERIES OF THE CARIBBEAN, GULF OF MEXICO, AND SOUTH ATLANTIC

■ 1. The authority citation for part 622 continues to read as follows:

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

■ 2. In § 622.35, revise the first sentence of paragraph (b)(3) to read as follows:

§ 622.35 Gear restricted areas.

* * * * *

(b) * * *

(3) Within the Gulf EEZ east of 85°30' W. long., a vessel for which a valid eastern Gulf reef fish bottom longline endorsement has been issued that is fishing bottom longline gear or has bottom longline gear on board cannot possess more than 750 hooks rigged for fishing at any given time. * * *

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 660

[Docket No. 170627602-7602-01]

RIN 0648-BG98

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; Fisheries Off West Coast States; Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery; Pacific Whiting; Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan; Amendment 21-3; Trawl Rationalization Program

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

ACTION: Proposed rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes this interim measure to change the management of the Pacific whiting at-sea sectors' (*i.e.*, the Mothership (MS) and Catcher/Processor (C/P) sectors) allocations for darkblotched rockfish and Pacific ocean perch (POP) by managing the allocations as set-asides rather than as total catch limits. This rule also proposes

regulations in accordance with Amendment 21-3 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (PCGFMP) (see electronic access under **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**). The proposed action would revise regulations so that higher than anticipated harvest of darkblotched rockfish or POP that exceeds a sector's initial distribution of those species would not require automatic closure of one or more of the Pacific whiting at-sea sectors. This action is intended to reduce the risk of those sectors not attaining their respective Pacific whiting allocations based on the incidental catch of darkblotched rockfish or POP, when allowing the sector(s) to remain open would not exceed their respective annual catch limit (ACLs). This action would not change or increase the risk of exceeding darkblotched rockfish or POP ACL, as the proposed rule would also allow NMFS to close one or both of the MS and C/P sectors via automatic action if the species-specific set-aside amounts plus the available reserve for unforeseen catch events, known colloquially as the "buffer," are anticipated to be exceeded.

DATES: Comments on this proposed rule must be received no later than November 27, 2017.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2017-0102 by any of the following methods:

- *Electronic Submission:* Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to www.regulations.gov / `#!/docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2017-0102`, click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.
- *Mail:* Barry A. Thom, Regional Administrator, West Coast Region, NMFS, 7600 Sand Point Way NE., Seattle, WA 98115-0070, Attn: Miako Ushio.

Instructions: Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NMFS. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (*e.g.*, name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in

Microsoft Word, Excel, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Miako Ushio, phone: 206–526–4644, or email: miako.ushio@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Electronic Access

This proposed rule is accessible via the Internet at the Office of the Federal Register Web site at <https://www.federalregister.gov>. Background information and documents are available at the NMFS West Coast Region Web site at <http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/groundfish/index.html> and at the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Web site at <http://www.pcouncil.org/groundfish/fishery-management-plan/groundfish-amendments-in-development/>. On September 27, 2017, NMFS published a notice of availability of Amendment 21–3 to the PCGFMP (82 FR 44984). Consistent with requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), NMFS must make a decision to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the amendment by December 26, 2017. Comments on the approvability of the amendment must be submitted to NMFS by November 26, 2017.

Background: Fishery

Bycatch of rockfish species in the Pacific whiting fishery occurs at very low rates, but sporadically and unpredictably. Regulations at 50 CFR 660.55 address the allocation of these groundfish. Darkblotched rockfish and POP are caught almost exclusively by vessels in the shorebased Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) and at-sea Pacific whiting sectors of the groundfish fishery. NMFS declared both species overfished in 2000 and 1999, respectively, and both stocks are currently managed under rebuilding plans as a result. Populations of both species have shown dramatic improvement in recent years. Darkblotched rockfish was declared rebuilt in June 2017, and a draft 2017 stock assessment indicates that POP may be rebuilt. They are currently managed as allocations, and NMFS automatically closes a fishery sector when it has reached its allocation of either species.

In recent years, both at-sea sectors of the Pacific whiting fishery have exceeded their initial annual allocation of darkblotched rockfish (C/P sector in 2011, and the MS sector in 2014). The latter resulted in an emergency Pacific

Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting in order to re-open the fishery. The risk of an inseason closure of these sectors remains high, although the rebuilding ACLs of these rockfish are far from being reached. For example: The most recent fishing mortality estimates by NMFS' Northwest Fisheries Science Center indicate that 44 and 38 percent of the darkblotched rockfish and POP ACLs, respectively, were caught in 2015. While harvest of these species at a level below the ACL may rebuild stocks more quickly, there is a negative socioeconomic impact from preventing harvest of Pacific whiting, as intended in the PCGFMP.

Background: Current Allocations Under Amendment 21

The Council established allocations of darkblotched rockfish and POP for the at-sea sectors in Amendment 21 to the PCGFMP. When the Council considered allocation of these species, the analysis only incorporated data on catch through 2005, and took the overfished status of the species into account when they set up the allocation structure. Ten years of additional data on bycatch in the at-sea sectors are now available. Additionally, six full years of the Shorebased IFQ Program (which was implemented in 2011, 75 FR 60868) fishery information is available. This new information indicates that the stocks of both species are currently much healthier than they were at the time Amendment 21 was implemented.

The Council's Amendment 21 allocation recommendation was based, in part, on the idea that the C/P and MS sectors could avoid early closures by moving to areas of lower rockfish encounter rates if they were approaching a bycatch allocation. However, experience has shown that this assumption was likely too simplistic. Despite the mitigating measures enacted by the C/P and MS coops, darkblotched rockfish bycatch remains particularly variable with the potential for rapid accumulation. The 2014 closure of the MS sector provides an illustration; closure occurred after six hauls caught 4.5 mt of darkblotched rockfish, nearly 75 percent of their 2014 allocation, with the bulk coming from three of the hauls. Some of the largest hauls were delivered to motherships so closely in time that feedback on the size of the catches from observers came too late for the MS coop to effectively respond. Prior to this "lightning strike" event, the sector had made 969 hauls and caught only 2.5 mt of darkblotched rockfish. After the sector was re-opened by an emergency meeting of the Council, the sector made 330 additional

hauls that brought in over 14,500 mt of Pacific whiting and only 0.1 mt of additional darkblotched rockfish. The C/P sector has experienced even more rapid accumulations of darkblotched rockfish bycatch, and would have been closed late in the 2011 season if unused allocation had not been available from the MS sector, which had already completed fishing. These events indicate that the current management structure may be adversely impacting the at-sea sectors to a greater degree than was anticipated when the Council adopted the current allocation structure under Amendment 21, due to unpredictability and high volume of bycatch events.

Background: Amendment 21–3

The Council has discussed a variety of solutions to reducing the risk of closure of the Pacific whiting at-sea sectors prior to attainment of their Pacific whiting allocations, such as allowing transfer of rockfish quota between sectors, but it determined that those solutions are too complex to be analyzed and implemented in a timely manner. At its September 2016 meeting, the Council recommended the interim measure of amending the PCGFMP and implementing revised regulations, so that the amounts of darkblotched rockfish and POP allocated to the C/P and MS sectors are managed as set-asides rather than as total catch limits. The Council also recommended giving NMFS inseason authority to automatically close one or both of the C/P and MS sectors in the event the species-specific set-aside amounts plus the available reserve for unforeseen catch events, known colloquially as the "buffer," are anticipated to be exceeded.

This action would not revise allocations between sectors, which were set by Amendment 21 to the PCGFMP, and is intended to be an interim solution to address the immediate needs of the C/P and MS sectors. Long-term solutions are being reviewed by a Council-appointed Community Advisory Board as part of the 5-year review of the trawl rationalization program. A long-term solution to address the needs of the C/P and MS sectors will focus specifically on fairly and equitably revising the allocation between the trawl sectors, and among all the groundfish fishery sectors, while leaving any applicable stock rebuilding plans unaffected.

Intent of the Action

This proposed action is intended to substantially reduce the risk of the Pacific whiting at-sea sectors not attaining their respective Pacific whiting

allocations based on the incidental catch of darkblotched rockfish or POP, when allowing the sector(s) to remain open would not exceed ACLs for these rebuilding stocks. It would revise regulations so that higher than anticipated harvest of darkblotched rockfish or POP that exceeds the initial distribution of those species to the at-sea sectors will not require automatic closure of one or more of the at-sea sectors.

The proposed rule would also allow NMFS to close one or both of the C/P and MS sectors of the Pacific whiting fishery via automatic action when the set-aside for that sector, plus the available reserve for unforeseen catch events, is reached or is expected to be reached for either darkblotched rockfish or POP. Because of near real-time monitoring by the C/P and MS Coop Programs, and the ability of those programs to respond quickly to changing fishery conditions, closures would occur before allocations to other fisheries or the ACLs are reached, thus limiting the potential effects and precluding potential negative biological and socioeconomic impacts of the proposed action.

Classification

Pursuant to section 304 (b)(1)(A) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, NMFS has preliminarily determined that this proposed rule is consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other applicable law, subject to further consideration after public comment. In making its final determination, NMFS will take into account the complete record, including the data, views, and comments received during the comment period.

NMFS has determined that the proposed action would not have a significant effect, individually or cumulatively, on the human environment and does not involve any extraordinary circumstances listed in The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Policy and Procedures for Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and Related Authorities (NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216-6A and the Companion Manual for NAO 216-6A). For purposes of review under the National Environmental Protection Act, the proposed action is not part of any larger action, and can be reviewed independently. Furthermore, NMFS determined that the proposed action may appropriately be categorically excluded from the requirement to prepare either an environmental assessment or environmental impact

statement, in accordance with the Companion Manual for NAO 216-6A.

Under the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), an agency does not need to conduct an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis or Final Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis if a certification can be made that the proposed rule, if adopted, will not have a significant adverse economic impact on a substantial number of small entities, as defined below (5 U.S.C. 601). The Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration that this proposed rule, if adopted, would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities as described in this document.

The Small Business Administration has established the following size criteria for entities classified under North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). Standards are expressed either in number of employees or annual receipts in millions of dollars. The number of employees or annual receipts indicates the maximum allowed for a concern and its affiliates to be considered small (13 CFR 121.201). A fish and seafood merchant wholesaler primarily engaged in servicing the fishing industry is a small business if it employs 100 or fewer persons, on a full-time, part-time, temporary, or other basis, at all its affiliated operations worldwide (NAICS 424460). A business primarily engaged in seafood product preparation and packaging is a small business if it is independently owned and operated, not dominant in its field of operation, and employs 750 or fewer persons on a full time, part time, temporary, or other basis, at all its affiliated operations worldwide (NAICS 311710). For purposes of this action, NMFS West Coast Region is applying the seafood processor standard to C/Ps and MS processor ships, which earn the majority of their revenue from selling processed seafood product. Under SBA size standards, a nonprofit organization is determined to be a small entity if (1) it is not dominant in its field of operation; and (2) for environmental, conservation, or professional organizations if combined annual receipts are \$15 million or less (NAICS 813312, 813920), and for other organizations if combined annual receipts are \$7.5 million or less (NAICS 813319, 813410, 813910, 813930, 813940, 813990). For RFA purposes only, NMFS has established a small business size standard for businesses, including their affiliates, whose primary industry is commercial fishing; a business primarily engaged in

commercial fishing (NAICS 11411) is classified as a small business if it is independently owned and operated, is not dominant in its field of operation (including affiliates), and has combined annual receipts not in excess of \$11 million for all its affiliated operations worldwide (50 CFR 200.2).

For the purposes of the RFA, small governmental jurisdictions such as governments of cities, counties, towns, townships, villages, school districts, or special districts are considered small jurisdictions if their populations are less than 50,000 (5 U.S.C. 601).

A description and estimate of the number of small entities to which the rule applies and economic impacts on small entities, by entity size and industry.

Four companies own seven permitted mothership vessels. Each year, three to six MS vessels participate in the Pacific whiting fishery. The average number of crew on each MS vessel is 104 individuals. When considering operations in Alaska, none of the MSs would be considered small businesses.

The 17 catcher vessels that participated in the mothership coop spend about 30 percent of their total annual fishing days processing in the Pacific whiting fishery. The majority of their time is spent in the Alaska Pollock fishery. Almost 90 percent of the overall round weight taken by these vessels is taken in Alaska, and approximately 11 percent is taken in the Pacific whiting fishery.

Three companies own nine permitted C/P fleet vessels. C/Ps are large vessels with an average crew of 131 individuals.

Vessels in the C/P fleet spend about 20 percent of their total days fishing in the Pacific whiting fishery and 80 percent in the Alaska Pollock fishery. About 90 percent of the total round weigh taken by the C/Ps is taken in Alaska, and approximately 10 percent is taken in the Pacific whiting fishery. When considering operations from Alaska, none of the C/Ps would be considered small businesses.

An explanation of the criteria used to evaluate whether the rule would impose "significant impacts" on small entities.

The proposed action is primarily administrative in nature, as it does not change the ACLs for either the Pacific whiting at-sea sectors or the allocations levels of darkblotched rockfish and POP. This action is not expected to significantly reduce profit for a substantial number of small entities, because there are no associated compliance requirements or costs.

An explanation of the criteria used to evaluate whether the rule would impose

impacts on “a substantial number” of small entities.

Two MS permit/processor owning companies self-identified on the most recent (2016) permit renewal as small businesses, and the other two identified as not being small businesses. All three companies owning C/P permits and vessels responded as not being small entities on the most recent (2016) permit renewal form. Of the 35 MS catcher vessel permits, 34 were registered to vessels with the MS catcher vessel endorsement. 27 MS catcher vessel endorsed permits were owned by 22 companies that self-identified as small entities, and the other 8 were owned by 5 companies that self-identified as not being small entities.

A description of, and an explanation of the basis for, assumptions used.

Data collected from the trawl rationalization program Economic Data Collection was used for this analysis.

No Federal rules have been identified that duplicate, overlap, or conflict with this action. There are no reporting, recordkeeping or other compliance requirements in the proposed rule.

Pursuant to Executive Order 13175, this proposed rule was developed after meaningful consultation and collaboration with tribal officials from the area covered by the PCGFMP. Consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1852(b)(5)), one of the voting members of the Pacific Council is a representative of an Indian tribe with Federally recognized fishing rights from the area of the Council’s jurisdiction.

This proposed rule would not alter the effects on species listed under the Endangered Species Act, or on marine mammals, over what has already been considered for the regulations governing the fishery.

This proposed rule has been determined to be not significant for purposes of Executive Order 12866.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 660

Fisheries, Fishing, Indian Fisheries.

Dated: October 24, 2017.

Samuel D. Rauch III,

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

For the reasons set out in the preamble, 50 CFR part 660 is proposed to be amended as follows:

PART 660—FISHERIES OFF WEST COAST STATES

■ 1. The authority citation for part 660 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*, 16 U.S.C. 773 *et seq.*, and 16 U.S.C. 7001 *et seq.*

■ 2. In § 660.55, (c)(1)(i) introductory text, and (c)(1)(i)(A) and (B) are revised to read as follows:

§ 660.55 Allocations.

* * * * *

(c) * * *

(1) * * *

(i) *Trawl fishery allocation.* The allocation for the limited entry trawl fishery is derived by applying the trawl allocation percentage by species/species group and area as specified in paragraph (c) of this section and as specified during the biennial harvest specifications process to the fishery harvest guideline for that species/species group and area. For IFQ species other than darkblotched rockfish, Pacific ocean perch, and widow rockfish, the trawl allocation will be further subdivided among the trawl sectors (MS, C/P, and IFQ) as specified in §§ 660.140, 660.150, and 660.160 of subpart D. For darkblotched rockfish, Pacific ocean perch, and widow rockfish, the trawl allocation is further subdivided among the trawl sectors (MS, C/P, and IFQ) as follows:

(A) *Darkblotched rockfish.* Distribute 9 percent or 25 mt, whichever is greater, of the total trawl allocation of darkblotched rockfish to the Pacific whiting fishery (MS sector, C/P sector, and Shorebased IFQ sectors). The distribution of allocation of darkblotched rockfish to each of these sectors will be done pro rata relative to the sector’s allocation of the commercial harvest guideline for Pacific whiting. Darkblotched rockfish distributed to the MS sector and C/P sector are managed as set-asides at Table 2d, subpart C. The allocation of darkblotched rockfish to the Pacific whiting IFQ fishery contributes to the Shorebased IFQ allocation. After deducting allocations for the Pacific whiting fishery, the remaining trawl allocation is allocated to the Shorebased IFQ Program.

(B) *Pacific Ocean Perch (POP).* Distribute 17 percent or 30 mt, whichever is greater, of the total trawl allocation of POP to the Pacific whiting fishery (MS sector, C/P sector, and Shorebased IFQ sector). The distribution of POP to each sector will be done pro rata relative to the sector’s allocation of the commercial harvest guideline for Pacific whiting. POP distributed to the MS sector and C/P sector are managed as set-asides, at Table 2d, subpart C. The allocation of POP to the Pacific whiting

IFQ fishery contributes to the Shorebased IFQ allocation. After deducting allocations for the Pacific whiting fishery, the remaining trawl allocation is allocated to the Shorebased IFQ Program.

* * * * *

■ 3. In § 660.60, add paragraph (d)(1)(vii) to read as follows:

§ 660.60 Specifications and management measures.

* * * * *

(d) * * *

(1) * * *

(vii) Close one or both the MS or C/P sector when the set-aside for that sector, described in Table 2d, subpart C, plus the available reserve for unforeseen catch events, described in Table 2a, subpart C, combined, is reached or is expected to be reached for either darkblotched rockfish or Pacific ocean perch.

* * * * *

■ 4. In § 660.150, revise paragraphs (c)(1)(i) and (ii) to read as follows:

§ 660.150 Mothership (MS) Coop Program.

* * * * *

(c) * * *

(1) * * *

(i) Species with formal allocations to the MS Coop Program are Pacific whiting, canary rockfish and widow rockfish;

(ii) Species with set-asides for the MS and C/P Coop Programs, as described in Table 2d, subpart C.

* * * * *

■ 5. In § 660.160, revise paragraphs (c)(1)(i) and (ii) to read as follows:

§ 660.160 Catcher/processor (C/P) Coop Program.

* * * * *

(c) * * *

(1) * * *

(i) Species with formal allocations to the C/P Coop Program are Pacific whiting, canary rockfish, and widow rockfish;

(ii) Species with set-asides for the MS and C/P Programs, as described in Table 2d, subpart C.

* * * * *

■ 5. In § 660 Subpart C, revise Tables 2b and 2d to read as follows:

* * * * *

Table 2b. to Part 660, Subpart C – 2018, and Beyond, Allocations by Species or Species Group (Weight in Metric Tons)

Species	Area	Fishery HG or ACT	Trawl		Non-trawl	
			Percent	Mt	Percent	Mt
BOCACCIO a/	S. of 40°10' N. lat.	725.6	39	283.3	61	442.3
COWCOD a/b/	S. of 40°10' N. lat.	4.0	36	1.4	64	2.6
DARKBLOTCHED ROCKFISH c/	Coastwide	575.8	95	547.0	5	28.8
PACIFIC OCEAN PERCH d/	N. of 40°10' N. lat.	231.6	95	220.0	5	11.6
YELLOW EYE ROCKFISH a/	Coastwide	14.0	NA	1.1	NA	12.9
Arrowtooth flounder	Coastwide	11,644.9	95	11,062.6	5	582.2
Big skate a/	Coastwide	436.6	95	414.8	5	21.8
Canary rockfish a/e/	Coastwide	1,466.6	NA	1,060.1	NA	406.5
Chilipepper	S. of 40°10' N. lat.	2,461.1	75	1,845.8	25	615.3
Dover sole	Coastwide	48,406.3	95	45,986.0	5	2,420.3
English sole	Coastwide	7,324.2	95	6,958.0	5	366.2
Lingcod	N. of 40°10' N. lat.	2,831.8	45	1,274.3	55	1,557.5
Lingcod	S. of 40°10' N. lat.	1,135.0	45	510.8	55	624.3
Longnose skate a/	Coastwide	1,853.0	90	1,667.7	10	185.3
Longspine thornyhead	N. of 34°27' N. lat.	2,700.2	95	2,565.2	5	135.0
Pacific cod	Coastwide	1,091.0	95	1,036.4	5	54.5
Pacific whiting	Coastwide	TBD	100	TBD	0	TBD
Petrale sole	Coastwide	2,772.1	95	2,633.5	5	138.6
Sablefish	N. of 36° N. lat.	N/A	See Table 2c			
Sablefish	S. of 36° N. lat.	1,939.0	42	814.4	58	1,124.6
Shortspine thornyhead	N. of 34°27' N. lat.	1,639.0	95	1,557.0	5	81.9
Shortspine thornyhead	S. of 34°27' N. lat.	855.7	NA	50.0	NA	805.7
Splitnose rockfish	S. of 40°10' N. lat.	1,750.3	95	1,662.8	5	87.5
Stary flounder	Coastwide	1,271.7	50	635.9	50	635.9
Widow rockfish f/	Coastwide	12,437.3	91	11,317.9	9	1,119.4
Yellowtail rockfish	N. of 40°10' N. lat.	4,972.1	88	4,375.4	12	596.6
Minor Shelf Rockfish a/	N. of 40°10' N. lat.	1,963.2	60	1,181.8	40	781.4
Minor Slope Rockfish	N. of 40°10' N. lat.	1,688.9	81	1,368.0	19	320.9
Minor Shelf Rockfish a/	S. of 40°10' N. lat.	1,576.8	12	192.37	88	1,384.4
Minor Slope Rockfish	S. of 40°10' N. lat.	688.8	63	433.9	37	254.9
Other Flatfish	Coastwide	7,077.0	90	6,369.3	10	707.7

a/ Allocations decided through the biennial specification process.

b/ The cowcod fishery harvest guideline is further reduced to an ACT of 4.0 mt.

c/ Consistent with regulations at §660.55(c), 9 percent (49.2 mt) of the total trawl allocation for darkblotched rockfish is allocated to the Pacific whiting fishery, as follows: 20.7 mt for the Shorebased IFQ Program, 11.8 mt is managed as a set-aside for the MS sector, and 16.7 mt is managed as a set-aside for the C/P sector. The tonnage calculated here for the Pacific whiting IFQ fishery contributes to the total shorebased trawl allocation, which is found at §660.140(d)(1)(ii)(D).

d/ Consistent with regulations at §660.55(c), 17 percent (37.4 mt) of the total trawl allocation for POP is allocated to the Pacific whiting fishery, as follows: 15.7 mt for the Shorebased IFQ Program, 9.0 mt is managed as a set-aside the MS sector, and 12.7 mt is managed as a set-aside for the C/P sector. The tonnage calculated here for the Pacific whiting IFQ fishery contributes to the total shorebased trawl allocation, which is found at §660.140(d)(1)(ii)(D).

e/ Canary rockfish is allocated approximately 72 percent to trawl and 28 percent to non-trawl. 46 mt of the total trawl allocation of canary rockfish is allocated to the MS and C/P sectors, as follows: 30 mt for the MS sector, and 16 mt for the C/P sector.

f/ Consistent with regulations at §660.55(c), 10 percent (1,131.8 mt) of the total trawl allocation for widow rockfish is allocated to the Pacific whiting fishery, as follows: 475.4 mt for the Shorebased IFQ Program, 271.6 mt for the MS sector, and 384.8 mt for the C/P sector. The tonnage calculated here for the Pacific whiting IFQ fishery contributes to the total shorebased trawl allocation, which is found at §660.140(d)(1)(ii)(D).

Table 2d. To Part 660, Subpart C - At-Sea Whiting Fishery Annual Set-Asides, 2018 and Beyond

Species or Species Complex	Area	Set Aside (mt)
BOCACCIO	S. of 40° 10 N. lat.	NA
COWCOD	S. of 40° 10 N. lat.	NA
DARKBLOTCHED ROCKFISH a/	Coastwide	28.5
PACIFIC OCEAN PERCH b/	N. of 40° 10 N. lat.	21.7
YELLOWEYE ROCKFISH	Coastwide	0
Arrowtooth flounder	Coastwide	70
Canary rockfish c/	Coastwide	Allocation
Chilipepper	S. of 40° 10 N. lat.	NA
Dover sole	Coastwide	5
English sole	Coastwide	5
Lingcod	N. of 40° 10 N. lat.	15
Lingcod	S. of 40° 10 N. lat.	NA
Longnose skate	Coastwide	5
Longspine thornyhead	N. of 34° 27 N. lat.	5
Longspine thornyhead	S. of 34° 27 N. lat.	NA
Minor Nearshore Rockfish	N. of 40° 10 N. lat.	NA
Minor Nearshore Rockfish	S. of 40° 10 N. lat.	NA
Minor Shelf Rockfish	N. of 40° 10 N. lat.	35
Minor Shelf Rockfish	S. of 40° 10 N. lat.	NA
Minor Slope Rockfish	N. of 40° 10 N. lat.	100
Minor Slope Rockfish	S. of 40° 10 N. lat.	NA
Other Fish	Coastwide	NA
Other Flatfish	Coastwide	20
Pacific cod	Coastwide	5
Pacific Halibut d/	Coastwide	10
Pacific Whiting	Coastwide	Allocation
Petrale sole	Coastwide	5
Sablefish	N. of 36° N. lat.	50
Sablefish	S. of 36° N. lat.	NA
Shortspine thornyhead	N. of 34° 27 N. lat.	20
Shortspine thornyhead	S. of 34° 27 N. lat.	NA
Starry flounder	Coastwide	5
Widow Rockfish c/	Coastwide	Allocation
Yellowtail rockfish	N. of 40° 10 N. lat.	300

a/ Darkblotched rockfish will be managed as set-asides for the MS and C/P sectors based on pro-rata distribution described at §660.55(c)(1)(i)(A), resulting in a set-aside of 11.8 mt for the MS sector, and a set-aside of and 16.7 mt for C/P sector.

b/ POP will be managed as set-asides for the MS and C/P sectors based on pro-rata distribution described at §660.55(c)(1)(i)(B), resulting in a set-aside of 9.0 mt for the MS sector, and a set-aside of and 12.7 mt for the C/P sector.

c/ See Table 1.b., to Subpart C, for the at-sea whiting allocations for these species.

d/ As stated in §660.55 (m), the Pacific halibut set-aside is 10 mt, to accommodate bycatch in the at-sea Pacific whiting fisheries and in the shorebased trawl sector south of 40° 10 N. lat. (estimated to be approximately 5 mt each).

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 665**

[Docket No. 170120106-7999-01]

RIN 0648-XF186

Pacific Island Fisheries; 2017 Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures

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

ACTION: Proposed specifications; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes annual catch limits (ACLs) for Pacific Island crustacean, precious coral, and territorial bottomfish fisheries, and accountability measures (AMs) to correct or mitigate any overages of catch limits. The proposed ACLs and AMs would be effective for fishing year 2017. The proposed ACLs and AMs support the long-term sustainability of fishery resources of the U.S. Pacific Islands.

DATES: NMFS must receive comments by November 14, 2017.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2017-0012, by either of the following methods:

- *Electronic Submission:* Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2017-0012>, click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- *Mail:* Send written comments to Michael D. Tosatto, Regional Administrator, NMFS Pacific Islands Region (PIR), 1845 Wasp Blvd., Bldg. 176, Honolulu, HI 96818.

Instructions: NMFS may not consider comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible.

NMFS prepared environmental analyses that describe the potential impacts on the human environment that would result from the proposed ACLs and AMs. Copies of the environmental analyses and other supporting documents are available at www.regulations.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Sarah Ellgen, NMFS PIR Sustainable Fisheries, 808-725-5173.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Fisheries in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ, or Federal waters) around the U.S. Pacific Islands are managed under archipelagic fishery ecosystem plans (FEPs) for American Samoa, Hawaii, the Pacific Remote Islands, and the Mariana Archipelago (Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)). A fifth FEP covers pelagic fisheries. The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) developed the FEPs, and NMFS implemented them under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

Each FEP contains a process for the Council and NMFS to specify ACLs and AMs; that process is codified at Title 50, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 665.4 (50 CFR 665.4). The regulations require NMFS to specify, every fishing year, an ACL for each stock and stock complex of management unit species (MUS) in an FEP, as recommended by the Council and considering the best available scientific, commercial, and other information about the fishery. If a fishery exceeds an ACL, the regulations require the Council to take action, which may include reducing the ACL for the subsequent fishing year by the amount of the overage, or other appropriate action.

NMFS proposes to specify ACLs for the crustacean and precious corals MUS in American Samoa, Guam, the CNMI, and Hawaii, and the bottomfish MUS in American Samoa, Guam, and the CNMI for fishing year 2017. The fishing year for each fishery began on January 1 and ends on December 31, except for precious coral fisheries, which began July 1 and ends on June 30 next year.

In this action, NMFS is not proposing to specify 2017 ACLs for Hawaii Kona crab and non-Deep 7 bottomfish, or coral reef ecosystem MUS in all island areas. This is because NMFS has new information for those MUS that may require additional environmental analyses to support the Council's recommendations. NMFS would propose those ACL specifications in a separate action(s). In addition, NMFS specified the 2017-2018 ACL and AM

for Hawaii Deep 7 bottomfish in June 2017 (82 FR 29778, June 30, 2017).

NMFS based the proposed specifications for crustacean, precious coral, and territorial bottomfish MUS on recommendations from the Council at its 164th meeting held October 21-22, 2015, its 166th meeting held June 6-10, 2016, and its 170th meeting held June 19-22, 2017. For this action, the Council recommended 36 ACLs: Seven each in American Samoa, Guam, and the CNMI, and 15 in Hawaii. The Council also recommended that NMFS specify multi-year ACLs and AMs in fishing years 2015-2018. NMFS proposes to implement the specifications for each year separately, prior to each fishing year. NMFS previously implemented the 2016 specifications for bottomfish, crustacean, precious coral, and coral reef ecosystem MUS (82 FR 18716, April 21, 2017). All of the proposed 2017 ACLs in this action would be the same as those specified in 2016 (82 FR 18716, April 21, 2017). NMFS also proposes to specify the same AMs as it did in 2016.

Data from these fisheries for fishing year 2016 indicate that catches from each fishery in 2016 did not exceed the fishery's ACL, with the exception of the CNMI slipper lobsters. NMFS proposes to specify an ACL of 60 lb for CNMI slipper lobsters, which is the same ACL that NMFS implemented in 2016, even though the average three-year catch for this fishery exceeded the ACL. For CNMI slipper lobsters, there is no OFL or maximum sustainable yield (MSY) estimate. Prior to 2016, there were only three years (2007-2009) of available catch information for slipper lobsters in the CNMI. Therefore, in 2014, at its 116th meeting, the SSC recommended a proxy for calculating the ACL for the CNMI slipper lobster stock complex. Using a catch-to-habitat-based proxy comparing data from the Hawaii slipper lobster fishery (the only area that has specifically documented harvesting of slipper lobster), the Council recommended setting an ACL for the CNMI slipper lobsters for 2016-2018 at a level equal to ABC, that is, 60 lb.

In 2015, NOAA started a pilot program to improve commercial vendor reporting in the CNMI. The Territory Science Initiative was designed to improve the data vendors submit to commercial receipt books, which track, among other stocks, the slipper lobster fishery. NMFS staff trained vendors to complete receipt books and incorporate the process into their day-to-day business routines. The program proved to be effective, and in 2016, the CNMI commercial receipt book program documented 304 lb of slipper lobsters sold by local fishermen. In comparison,