

In consideration of the foregoing, FMCSA amends 49 CFR chapter III, part 383 as follows:

PART 383—COMMERCIAL DRIVER'S LICENSE STANDARDS; REQUIREMENTS AND PENALTIES

- 1. The authority citation for part 383 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 49 U.S.C. 521, 31136, 31301 *et seq.*, and 31502; secs. 214 and 215 of Pub. L. 106–159, 113 Stat. 1748, 1766, 1767; sec. 1012(b) of Pub. L. 107–56, 115 Stat. 272, 297; sec. 4140 of Pub. L. 109–59, 119 Stat. 1144, 1746; sec. 32934 of Pub. L. 112–141, 126 Stat. 405, 830; sec. 7208 of Pub. L. 114–94, 129 Stat. 1312, 1593; and 49 CFR 1.87.

- 2. Amend § 383.25 by revising paragraph (c) to read as follows:

§ 383.25 Commercial learner's permit (CLP).

* * * * *

(c) The CLP must be valid for no more than one year from the initial date of issuance without requiring the CLP holder to retake the general and endorsement knowledge tests. CLPs issued for a period of less than one year may be renewed provided the CLP is not valid for no more than one year from the date of initial issuance.

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- 3. Amend § 383.73 by revising paragraph (a)(2)(iii) to read as follows:

§ 383.73 State procedures.

(a) * * *

(2) * * *

(iii) Make the CLP valid for no more than one year from the date of issuance without requiring the CLP holder to retake the general and endorsement knowledge tests. CLPs issued for a period of less than one year may be renewed provided the CLP is not valid for more than one year from the date of initial issuance.

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Issued under authority delegated in 49 CFR 1.87.

Raymond P. Martinez,
Administrator.

[FR Doc. 2018–27779 Filed 12–20–18; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 635

[Docket No. 120627194–3657–02]

RIN 0648–XG606

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species; North Atlantic Swordfish Fishery

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

ACTION: Temporary rule.

SUMMARY: NMFS is adjusting the Swordfish General Commercial permit retention limits for the Northwest Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and U.S. Caribbean regions for January through June of the 2019 fishing year, unless otherwise later noticed. The Swordfish General Commercial permit retention limits in each of these regions are increased from the regulatory default limits (either two or three fish) to six swordfish per vessel per trip. The Swordfish General Commercial permit retention limit in the Florida Swordfish Management Area will remain unchanged at the default limit of zero swordfish per vessel per trip, as discussed in more detail below. These adjustments apply to Swordfish General Commercial permitted vessels and to Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Charter/Headboat permitted vessels with a commercial endorsement when on a non-for-hire trip. This action is based upon consideration of the applicable inseason regional retention limit adjustment criteria.

DATES: The adjusted Swordfish General Commercial permit retention limits in the Northwest Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and U.S. Caribbean regions are effective from January 1, 2019, through June 31, 2019.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rick Pearson or Randy Blankinship, 727–824–5399.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Regulations implemented under the authority of the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA; 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.*) and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act; 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*) governing the harvest of North Atlantic swordfish by persons and vessels subject to U.S. jurisdiction are found at 50 CFR part 635. Section 635.27 subdivides the U.S. North Atlantic swordfish quota recommended by the International Commission for the

Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and implemented by the United States into two equal semi-annual directed fishery quotas; an annual incidental catch quota for fishermen targeting other species or catching swordfish recreationally, and a reserve category, according to the allocations established in the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan (2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP) (71 FR 58058, October 2, 2006), as amended, and in accordance with implementing regulations. NMFS is required under ATCA and the Magnuson-Stevens Act to provide U.S. fishing vessels with a reasonable opportunity to harvest the ICCAT-recommended quota.

In 2017, ICCAT Recommendation 17–02 specified that the overall North Atlantic swordfish total allowable catch (TAC) be set at 9,925 metric tons (mt) dressed weight (dw) (13,200 mt whole weight (ww)) through 2021. Consistent with scientific advice, this was a reduction of 500 mt ww (375.9 mt dw) from previous ICCAT-recommended TACs. However, the United States' baseline quota remained at 2,937.6 mt dw (3,907 mt ww) per year. The Recommendation (17–02) also continued to limit underharvest carryover to 15 percent of a contracting party's baseline quota. Thus, the United States may carry over a maximum of 440.6 mt dw (586.0 mt ww) of underharvest. Absent adjustments, the codified baseline quota is 2,937.6 mt dw for 2019. At this time, given the extent of expected underharvest in 2018, NMFS anticipates carrying over the maximum allowable 15 percent (440.6 mt dw), which would result in a final adjusted North Atlantic swordfish quota for the 2019 fishing year equal to 3,378.2 mt dw (2,937.6 + 440.6 = 3,378.2 mt dw). As in past years we anticipate allocating 50 mt dw from the adjusted quota to the Reserve category for inseason adjustments/research and allocating 300 mt dw to the Incidental category, which includes recreational landings and landings by incidental swordfish permit holders, consistent with § 635.27(c)(1)(i)(D) and (B). This would result in an adjusted quota of 3,028.2 mt dw for the directed fishery, which would be split equally (1,514.1 mt dw) between the two semi-annual periods in 2019 (January through June, and July through December). Landings attributable to the Swordfish General Commercial permit will count against the applicable semi-annual directed fishery quota.

Adjustment of Swordfish General Commercial Permit Vessel Retention Limits

The 2019 North Atlantic swordfish fishing year, which is managed on a calendar-year basis and divided into two equal semi-annual quotas for the directed fishery, will begin on January 1, 2019. Landings attributable to the Swordfish General Commercial permit are counted against the applicable semi-annual directed fishery quota. Regional default retention limits for this permit have been established and are automatically effective from January 1 through June 31 each year, unless changed based on the inseason regional retention limit adjustment criteria at § 635.24(b)(4)(iv). The default retention limits established for the Swordfish General Commercial permit are: (1) Northwest Atlantic region—three swordfish per vessel per trip; (2) Gulf of Mexico region—three swordfish per vessel per trip; (3) U.S. Caribbean region—two swordfish per vessel per trip; and, (4) Florida Swordfish Management Area—zero swordfish per vessel per trip. The default retention limits apply to Swordfish General Commercial permitted vessels and to HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels with a commercial endorsement when fishing on non-for-hire trips. As a condition of these permits, vessels may not possess, retain, or land any more swordfish than is specified for the region in which the vessel is located.

Under § 635.24(b)(4)(iii), NMFS may increase or decrease the Swordfish General Commercial permit vessel retention limit in any region within a range from zero to a maximum of six swordfish per vessel per trip. Any adjustments to the retention limits must be based upon a consideration of the relevant criteria provided in § 635.24(b)(4)(iv), which include: (A) The usefulness of information obtained from biological sampling and monitoring of the North Atlantic swordfish stock; (B) the estimated ability of vessels participating in the fishery to land the amount of swordfish quota available before the end of the fishing year; (C) the estimated amounts by which quotas for other categories of the fishery might be exceeded; (D) effects of the adjustment on accomplishing the objectives of the fishery management plan and its amendments; (E) variations in seasonal distribution, abundance, or migration patterns of swordfish; (F) effects of catch rates in one region precluding vessels in another region from having a reasonable opportunity to harvest a portion of the overall swordfish quota; and, (G) review

of dealer reports, landing trends, and the availability of swordfish on the fishing grounds.

NMFS has considered these criteria as discussed below and their applicability to the Swordfish General Commercial permit retention limit in all regions for January through June of the 2019 North Atlantic swordfish fishing year. We have determined that the Swordfish General Commercial permit retention limits in the Northwest Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and U.S. Caribbean regions applicable to persons issued a Swordfish General Commercial permit or HMS Charter/Headboat permit with a commercial endorsement (when on a non-for-hire trip) should be increased from the default levels that would otherwise automatically become effective on January 1, 2019, to six swordfish per vessel per trip from January 1 through June 31, 2019, unless otherwise later noticed. These are the same limits that were implemented through an inseason adjustment for the period July 1 through December 31, 2018 (83 FR 30884, July 2, 2018). Given the rebuilt status of the stock and the availability of quota, increasing the Swordfish General Commercial permit retention limits in three regions to six fish per vessel per trip will increase the likelihood that directed swordfish landings will approach, but not exceed, the available annual swordfish quota, and increase the opportunity for catching swordfish during the 2019 fishing year.

In 2018, a six swordfish per vessel trip limit was in effect for Swordfish General Commercial permit holders in the Northwest Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and U.S. Caribbean regions for the entire fishing season. As of November 30, 2018, this limit resulted in total annual directed swordfish landings of approximately 686.8 mt dw, or 22.7 percent of the 3,028.2 mt dw annual adjusted directed quota for 2018.

Among the regulatory criteria for inseason adjustments to retention limits, and given the rebuilt status of the stock and availability of quota, is the requirement that NMFS consider the “effects of the adjustment on accomplishing the objectives of the fishery management plan and its amendments.” See § 635.24(b)(4)(iv)(D). A consideration in deciding whether to increase the retention limit, in this case, is the objective of providing opportunities to harvest the full North Atlantic directed swordfish quota without exceeding it based upon the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP goal to, consistent with other objectives of this FMP, “manage Atlantic HMS fisheries for continuing optimum yield

so as to provide the greatest overall benefit to the Nation, particularly with respect to food production, providing recreational opportunities, preserving traditional fisheries, and taking into account the protection of marine ecosystems.” This action will help preserve a traditional swordfish handgear fishery (rod and reel, handline, harpoon, bandit gear, and greenstick). Although this action does not specifically provide recreational fishing opportunities, it will have a minimal impact on the recreational sector because recreational landings are counted against a separate incidental swordfish quota.

NMFS has examined dealer reports and landing trends and determined that the information obtained from biological sampling and monitoring of the North Atlantic swordfish stock is useful. See § 635.24(b)(4)(iv)(A). Regarding the estimated ability of vessels participating in the fishery to land the amount of swordfish quota available before the end of the fishing year, § 635.24(b)(4)(iv)(B), NMFS reviewed electronic dealer landings data, which indicates that sufficient directed swordfish quota will be available for the January through June 2019 semi-annual quota period if recent swordfish landing trends continue. The directed swordfish quota has not been harvested for several years and, based upon current landing trends, is not likely to be harvested or exceeded in 2019. Based upon recent landings rates from dealer reports, an increase in the vessel retention limits to six fish for Swordfish General Commercial permit holders and Charter/Headboat permit holders with a commercial endorsement (when on a non-for-hire trip) in three regions is not likely to cause quotas for other categories of the fishery to be exceeded. See § 635.24(b)(4)(iv)(C). Similarly, regarding the criteria about the effects of catch rates in one region precluding vessels in another region from having a reasonable opportunity to harvest a portion of the overall swordfish quota, § 635.24(b)(4)(iv)(F), we expect there to be sufficient swordfish quota for the entirety of the 2019 fishing year. Thus, increased catch rates in these three regions as a result of this action would not be expected to preclude vessels in the other region (e.g., the buoy gear fishery in the Florida Swordfish Management Area) from having a reasonable opportunity to harvest a portion of the overall swordfish quota.

In making adjustments to the retention limits NMFS must also consider variations in seasonal distribution, abundance, or migration patterns of swordfish, and the

availability of swordfish on the fishing grounds. See § 635.24(b)(4)(iv)(G). With regard to swordfish abundance, the 2018 report by ICCAT's Standing Committee on Research and Statistics indicated that the North Atlantic swordfish stock is not overfished ($B_{2015}/B_{msy} = 1.04$), and overfishing is not occurring ($F_{2015}/F_{msy} = 0.78$). Increasing retention limits for the General Commercial directed fishery is not expected to affect the swordfish stock status determination because any additional landings would be within the ICCAT-recommended U.S. North Atlantic swordfish quota allocation, which is consistent with conservation and management measures to prevent overfishing on the stock. Increasing opportunities by increasing retention limits from the default levels beginning on January 1, 2019, is also important because of the migratory nature and seasonal distribution of swordfish. In a particular geographic region, or waters accessible from a particular port, the amount of fishing opportunity for swordfish may be constrained by the short amount of time that the swordfish are present in the area as they migrate.

Finally, another consideration, consistent with the FMP and its amendments, is to continue to provide protection to important swordfish nursery areas and migratory corridors. Therefore, NMFS has determined that the retention limit for the Swordfish General Commercial permit will remain at zero swordfish per vessel per trip in the Florida Swordfish Management Area at this time. As discussed above, NMFS considered consistency with the 2006 HMS FMP and its amendments, and the importance for NMFS to continue to provide protection to important swordfish nursery areas and migratory corridors. As described in Amendment 8 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP (78 FR 52011, August 21, 2013), the area off the southeastern coast of Florida, particularly the Florida Straits, contains oceanographic features that make the area biologically unique. It provides important juvenile swordfish habitat, and is essentially a narrow migratory corridor containing high concentrations of swordfish located in close proximity to high concentrations of people who may fish for them. Public comment on Amendment 8, including from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, indicated concern about the resultant high potential for the improper rapid growth of a commercial fishery, increased catches of undersized swordfish, the potential for larger numbers of fishermen in the area, and the potential for crowding of fishermen, which could

lead to gear and user conflicts. These concerns remain valid. NMFS will continue to collect information to evaluate the appropriateness of the retention limit in the Florida Swordfish Management Area and other regional retention limits. This action therefore maintains a zero-fish retention limit in the Florida Swordfish Management Area.

The directed swordfish quota has not been harvested for several years and, based upon current landing trends, is not likely to be harvested or exceeded during 2019. This information indicates that sufficient directed swordfish quota should be available from January 1 through June 31, 2019, at the higher retention levels, within the limits of the scientifically-supported TAC and consistent with the goals of the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP as amended, ATCA, and the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and are not expected to negatively impact stock health.

Monitoring and Reporting

NMFS will continue to monitor the swordfish fishery closely during 2019 through mandatory landings and catch reports. Dealers are required to submit landing reports and negative reports (if no swordfish were purchased) on a weekly basis.

Depending upon the level of fishing effort and catch rates of swordfish, NMFS may determine that additional retention limit adjustments or closures are necessary to ensure that the available quota is not exceeded or to enhance fishing opportunities. Subsequent actions, if any, will be published in the **Federal Register**. In addition, fishermen may access <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/2019-atlantic-swordfish-landings-updates> for updates on quota monitoring.

Classification

The Assistant Administrator for NMFS (AA) finds that it is impracticable and contrary to the public interest to provide prior notice of, and an opportunity for public comment on, this action for the following reasons:

The regulations implementing the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP, as amended, provide for inseason retention limit adjustments to respond to changes in swordfish landings, the availability of swordfish on the fishing grounds, the migratory nature of this species, and regional variations in the fishery. Based on available swordfish quota, stock abundance, fishery performance in recent years, and the availability of swordfish on the fishing grounds, among other considerations,

adjustment to the Swordfish General Commercial permit retention limits from the default levels of two or three fish to six swordfish per vessel per trip as discussed above is warranted, while maintaining the default limit of zero-fish retention in the Florida Swordfish Management Area. Analysis of available data shows that adjustment to the swordfish retention limit from the default levels would result in minimal risk of exceeding the ICCAT-allocated quota.

NMFS provides notification of retention limit adjustments by publishing the notice in the **Federal Register**, emailing individuals who have subscribed to the Atlantic HMS News electronic newsletter, and updating the information posted on the "News and Announcements" website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/news-and-announcements> (filter by "Atlantic Highly Migratory Species" under "Topic"). Delays in temporarily increasing these retention limits caused by the time required to publish a proposed rule and accept public comment would adversely and unnecessarily affect those Swordfish General Commercial permit holders and HMS Charter/Headboat permit holders with a commercial endorsement (when on a non-for-hire trip) that would otherwise have an opportunity to harvest more than the otherwise applicable lower default retention limits of three swordfish per vessel per trip in the Northwest Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions, and two swordfish per vessel per trip in the U.S. Caribbean region. Limiting opportunities to harvest available directed swordfish quota may have negative social and economic impacts for U.S. fishermen. Adjustment of the retention limits needs to be effective on January 1, 2019, to allow Swordfish General Commercial permit holders and HMS Charter/Headboat permit holders with a commercial endorsement (when on a non-for-hire trip) to benefit from the adjustment during the relevant time period, which could pass by for some fishermen who have access to the fishery during a short time period because of seasonal fish migration, if the action is delayed for notice and public comment. Furthermore, the public was given an opportunity to comment on the underlying rulemakings, including the adoption of the North Atlantic swordfish U.S. quota, and the retention limit adjustments in this action would not have any additional effects or impacts since the retention limit does not affect the overall quota. Thus, there would be little opportunity for

meaningful input and review with public comment on this action. Therefore, the AA finds good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment. For all of the above reasons, there is also good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(d) to waive the 30-day delay in effectiveness.

This action is being taken under 50 CFR 635.24(b)(4) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.* and 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: December 18, 2018.

Karen H. Abrams,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 2018-27666 Filed 12-18-18; 4:15 pm]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 180209147-8509-02]

RIN 0648-XG674

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Small-Mesh Multispecies Fishery; Inseason Adjustment to the Southern Red Hake Possession Limit

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

ACTION: Temporary rule; inseason adjustment.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the commercial per-trip possession limit for southern red hake has been reduced for the remainder of the 2018 fishing year. Regulations governing the small-mesh multispecies fishery require this action

to prevent the southern red hake total allowable landing limit from being exceeded. This announcement also informs the public of the reduced southern red hake possession limit.

DATES: Effective December 26, 2018, through April 30, 2019.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Cynthia Ferrio, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 281-9180.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Regulations governing the red hake fishery are found at 50 CFR part 648. The small-mesh multispecies fishery is managed primarily through a series of exemptions from the Northeast Multispecies Fisheries Management Plan. The regulations describing the process to adjust inseason commercial possession limits of southern red hake are described in § 648.86(d)(4) and § 648.90(b)(5). These regulations require the NMFS Regional Administrator, Greater Atlantic Region, to reduce the southern red hake per-trip possession limit from 5,000 lb (2,268 kg) to the incidental limit of 400 lb (181 kg) when landings have been projected to reach or exceed 90 percent of the total allowable landings (TAL), unless such a reduction is expected to prevent the TAL from being reached. The final rule implementing the small-mesh multispecies specifications for 2018–2020 (83 FR 27713; June 14, 2018) set the southern red hake inseason adjustment threshold for the 2018 fishing year as 605,169 lb (274,500 kg); 90 percent of the southern red hake TAL for the year.

Based on commercial landings data reported through December 8, 2018, the southern red hake fishery is projected to reach 90 percent of the TAL on or around December 26, 2018. NMFS is required to reduce the commercial southern red hake possession limit when 90 percent of the TAL is projected to be reached, to prevent the TAL from

being exceeded. We do not anticipate that this reduced possession limit will prevent the TAL from being achieved. Therefore, effective December 26, 2018, no person may possess on board or land more than 400 lb (181 kg) of southern red hake per trip for the remainder of the fishing year (*i.e.*, through April 30, 2019).

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, finds good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) to waive prior notice and the opportunity for public comment because it would be contrary to the public interest. This action reduces the per-trip possession limit for southern red hake to the incidental limit of 400 lb (181 kg) until April 30, 2019, under current small-mesh multispecies fishery regulations. The regulations at § 648.86(d) require such action to ensure that commercial small-mesh multispecies vessels do not exceed the TAL set for the southern red hake stock. If implementation of this reduction was delayed to solicit prior public comment, the southern red hake TAL for this fishing year may be exceeded, thereby undermining the conservation objectives of the Small-Mesh Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. Therefore, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), the Assistant Administrator further finds good cause to waive the 30-day delayed effectiveness period for the reason stated above.

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

Dated: December 18, 2018.

Karen H. Abrams,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 2018-27689 Filed 12-18-18; 4:15 pm]

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