



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northwest Region
7600 Sand Point Way N.E., Bldg. 1
Seattle, WA 98115

Mr. Donald Hansen, Chair
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place
Portland, OR 97220

RECEIVED

MAR 13 2004

Dear Mr. Hansen:

PFMC

Exempted fishing permits (EFPs) will continue to be used to support a full retention fishery and sampling program in the shorebased sector of the Pacific whiting fishery in 2004. The issuance of EFPs allows vessels to delay sorting of groundfish catch in excess of cumulative trip limits and allows the retention of prohibited species until offloading. Because whiting deteriorates rapidly, it needs to be handled quickly and immediately chilled to maintain the quality. As a result, on most whiting vessels the catch is dumped directly or near directly into the hold, making it difficult to effectively sort the catch. Delaying sorting until offloading allows samplers located at the processing facilities to collect incidental catch data for total catch estimates while allowing whiting quality to be maintained. Without an EFP, groundfish regulations at 50 CFR 660.306 (b) require vessels to sort their prohibited species catch and return them to sea as soon as practicable with minimum injury. Similarly, regulations at 50 CFR 660.306 (f) prohibit the retention of groundfish in excess of the published trip limits.

At this time, NMFS is in the process of developing federal regulations to support activities that have historically occurred under the EFPs and are otherwise illegal. It is our intent to have regulations supporting these provisions in effect before the start of the 2005 primary season for the shorebased sector.

At this time, I would like to inform you of a change in how EFP activities will be monitored in 2004. All EFP participants will be required to carry video cameras for monitoring full retention at sea. It is NMFS intention to provide funding for these cameras. However, because the service contracts needed to support video monitoring may not be in place by June 15, 2004, the start primary season north of 42° N. latitude, EFP participants will be required to carry cameras as soon as they become available. Roughly half a day per vessel will be required for installation. Information gathered from video cameras will be used to assess the effectiveness of video monitoring the shorebased whiting fishery as well as in other full retention monitoring programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William L. Robinson".

William L. Robinson
Assistant Administrator for
Sustainable Fisheries