

EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT – CHILIPEPPER ROCKFISH

Request for an exempted fishing permit (EFP).

Project Title: Evaluation of an epibenthic trolled longline to selectively catch chilipepper rockfish (*Sebastes goodei*).

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Purpose and Goals

Chilipepper rockfish stocks on the west coast are considered healthy. However, because of weak stock management, the OY for this species cannot be taken. In 2004, chilipepper landings were 58.3 mt (http://www.st.nmfs.gov/pls/webpls/MF_ANNUAL_LANDINGS.RESULTS) of a 2000 mt OY. Area closures to protect overfished rockfish species have effectively closed access to this resource.

The long-term objective of this project is to describe and evaluate the effectiveness of a species-selective longline technique, which if proven effective, will allow commercial fishermen access to a relatively abundant species of rockfish, chilipepper, the fishery for which is constrained by the current rockfish area closures (RCA), implemented to protect overfished rockfish species. Despite the generally depressed condition of many west coast groundfish stocks, there are some stocks that remain healthy. These healthier stocks could safely sustain increased harvest levels if they could be fished more cleanly and without bycatch of more depleted stocks. If stronger stocks could be targeted without increasing fishing mortality on depressed stocks, the California commercial fishing fleet would have alternative fishing opportunities that would provide some economic relief to the industry while providing the public with a highly desirable product.

The objective of the research for which we are requesting an EFP would be to establish the performance characteristics of the gear, and to rigorously document the catch and bycatch when deployed under commercial fishing conditions. The location, gear characteristics (number of hooks, length of mainline, etc.), species composition, size distribution, and sex ratio (of chilipepper) of each set of gear will be recorded by onboard observers.

The EFP that we are requesting would allow up to three (3) vessels. Each would be limited to a bimonthly landing as established for 2007 to fish inside the current RCA using otherwise legal open access fixed gear. The gear will consist of a maximum of 500-750 hooks per set. Gear

consists of open access troll fly and vertical hook and line gear that is set and fished in a unique way such that the hooks sink to near, but not hard on bottom. Prior to setting the gear, a test set will be made with vertical gear in which the gear is set vertically. This will be with no hooks closer than 3 fm of the bottom, based on acoustic soundings, to ensure that the target species is present and to minimize the chance of encountering any of the overfished rockfish species. Once the test set establishes the presence of chilipepper rockfish, the gear will be deployed as follows: The vessel moves slowly ahead as the gear is deployed. The gear remains attached to the vessel at all times. Artificial “flies” are used in lieu of bait. The mainline consists of 200-600 lb test monofilament, and may be spooled on a hydraulic drum. One end, with buoy and weight attached in such a way that the gear does not touch the bottom is sent overboard as the boat moves slowly ahead, and the remaining gear is deployed. The weighted buoy line length is adjusted in such a way that does not have bottom contact to reduce the likelihood of bycatch and to prevent the hooks from hanging up on bottom. Hooks are spaced approximately 18-30” apart on 12” monofilament gangions (approximately 60 lb test). Hooks are tied with artificial flies, and no bait is used. This gear is reported by the fisherman to selectively catch chilipepper rockfish when properly deployed (Steve Fosmark, Moss Landing, CA, F/V SeeAdler, Phone: 831-373-5238; cell phones: 831-601-4074; or Boat 831-601-7934 email: FVSeeAdler@aol.com).

The research would be conducted off central California (36 to 37.30 degrees), at depths of approximately 80-120 fm. This depth range is currently within the RCA (60-120 fm February - September and from 30-150 fm the rest of the year) established to protect overfished rockfish species.

To ensure that this experimental fishery has a minimal impact on overfished rockfish species, we are requesting caps on the fishery as follows:

Widow rockfish: 1,440 lb (0.65 mt) annual cap calculated as a maximum 3% by weight of expected chilipepper take

Bocaccio: 7,200 lb (3.27 mt) annual cap calculated as a maximum 15% by weight of expected chilipepper take

Canary: 20 lb bimonthly per vessel, 360 lb annual cap for all vessels

Cowcod: 1 fish annual cap

Yelloweye: 1 fish annual cap

Darkblotched: 50 lb bimonthly per vessel cap, 900 lb annual cap for all vessels

Under the terms of this EFP, each vessel will carry an observer and all species will be retained. Catch of species other than the above are expected to be uncommon although some yellowtail and perhaps other rockfish may be encountered in small numbers. The above caps would apply for each vessel during the two-month cumulative period for the entire EFP and attaining the annual caps for any one species would terminate the EFP for all vessels.

Although the caps specified above are simply recommendations, which we realize may be modified, we provide the following extrapolations to illustrate the maximum potential bycatch of overfished species that could be realized under these caps with the present landing limits in place. We anticipate that fishing as described in this EFP will not be constrained by these caps.

Chilipepper rockfish caught under this EFP will be retained and sold by the permitted vessel. Although we have calculated the maximum weight of overfished rockfish that could be caught

under the suggested caps, we believe this fishery will not be constrained by these caps and will have a smaller bycatch than indicated above.

The initial duration of this EFP is for one year. However, if the results of this experiment are successful, we would request that the EFP be extended.

All vessels participating in this EFP fishery will be required to carry an observer. The observer will record all fish caught and ensure that bycatch caps are not exceeded. Vessel captains will keep records of catch by species by set for all sets under this EFP. As it is possible that the catch and bycatch will change seasonally, we expect participants to fish year round (or in each month that the fishery is permitted).

The applicant, Steve Berkeley, will be responsible for data analysis. Data analysis will consist of statistical analysis of catch and bycatch of all species by set, trip, and month. Catch rates will be expressed as catch per hook, per set, per day, and per trip. Value of the catch will be recorded following sale of the catch. The final report will provide an estimate fishing effort and total catch, absolute and relative species composition summarized by set, trip, and month, size composition of catch and bycatch, and sex ratio, and stage of maturity for chilipepper.

Vessel to participate in this EFP fishery will be chosen on their ability to accommodate an observer and their willingness to maintain detailed catch data and their willingness to fish for an entire year.