

EFP Proposal By United Catcher Boats

a. Date of application.

October 16, 2015

b. Applicant's names, mailing addresses, and telephone numbers.

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c. A statement of the purpose and goals of the experiment for which an EFP is needed, including a general description of the arrangements for the disposition of all species harvested under the EFP.

Proposals prioritized at the Pacific Fishery Management Council would eliminate the prohibition against at-sea processing in the Pacific whiting fishery South of 42° N. latitude in order to provide expanded opportunity for harvesters to fish in areas with concentrations of target catch and lower bycatch. The current prohibition is in the regulations at 50 CFR § 660.131(e). Due to the regulatory restriction there has been little harvest South of 42° N. latitude in the at-sea sectors since 1992, thus, there is little current data available by which to assess the impacts of the proposal. This EFP would suspend the application of 50 CFR § 660.131(e) for mothership vessels participating in the EFP in order to allow such data to be collected to inform the Council's analysis.

d. Valid justification explaining why issuance of an EFP is warranted.

An EFP is warranted in this case because of the need to collect accurate, current information to support the Council's decision making process. Since the regulatory restriction was put in place more than twenty years ago, there is a lack of information that would inform the analysis of the impacts for a proposed regulatory change. The EFP would allow for such data to be collected and analyzed.

e. A statement of whether the proposed experimental fishing has broader significance than the applicant's individual goals.

The proposed EFP would relieve mothership processors from the prohibition against processing South of 42° N. latitude, but the benefits go beyond this relief. It is expected that expanding the area of operation available to mothership processors would enable catcher vessels delivering to motherships to seek out areas of higher target species catch and lower bycatch of species of concern. The broader

significance of the proposed EFP is to maximize the sector's ability to optimize harvests of target species while minimizing bycatch to the maximum extent practicable.

f. An expected total duration of the EFP (i.e., number of years proposed to conduct exempted fishing activities). Note that EFPs are considered every other year for the following two-year management cycle. However, the EFP can be developed to cover only one year of the two-year cycle.

The proposed total duration of this EFP is two years, to allow sufficient data collection for the Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service to develop an analysis sufficient to support a decision on whether to adopt a regulatory amendment to eliminate the prohibition against processing South of 42° N. latitude. If during the course of this EFP it becomes apparent that more information is needed for such analysis a new EFP application would be submitted at that time.

g. Number of vessels covered under the EFP.

All vessels that participate in the Mothership Coop Program under the auspices of an MS Permit issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service are proposed to be eligible to fish under this EFP. At the time of this application, the following vessels have been identified as potential participants in this EFP:

- Arctic Fjord
- Arctic Storm
- Excellence
- Golden Alaska
- Katie Ann
- Ocean Phoenix
- Ocean Rover

Further details of participating vessels will be provided before operations begin under the EFP.

h. A description of the species (target and incidental) to be harvested under the EFP and the amount(s) of such harvest necessary to conduct the experiment; this description should include harvest estimates of overfished species.

a. Target Species

- i. Pacific whiting – Pacific whiting is expected to be harvested and delivered to mothership processors South of 42° N. latitude under this EFP within the amounts already allocated to the mothership sector. No additional amount of Pacific whiting is expected or authorized under the EFP.

b. Incidental Species

i. Overfished Species

1. Rockfish allocations (widow rockfish, darkblotched rockfish, Pacific ocean perch, canary rockfish) – Allocated rockfish species are expected to occur within the existing allocations to the mothership sector. No

additional amounts of rockfish allocations are expected or authorized under the EFP.

2. Overfished species set-asides –Overfished species with set-asides for the at-sea sectors are not anticipated to be significantly greater than currently estimated.
  - ii. Chinook salmon – Incidental take of Chinook salmon is expected to occur within the terms of the existing Incidental Take Statement and consistent with existing salmon protection measures such as the Klamath River salmon conservation zone, ocean salmon conservation zone (shoreward of 100 fathoms), season start date of May 15, etc. Anticipated impacts are expected to be lower than in the absence of this EFP in that the purpose of the EFP is to allow opportunity for at-sea whiting harvesters to have access to fishing grounds with lower rates of salmon bycatch. Moreover, the Whiting Mothership Coop Agreement contains provisions that mandate fleet notifications by motherships of bycatch conditions on a daily basis and as soon as possible for any high bycatch tows as well as fleet relocation rules in the event that bycatch conditions exceed established base rates.

i. A description of a mechanism, such as at-sea fishery monitoring, to ensure that the harvest limits for targeted and incidental species are not exceeded and are accurately accounted.

Catch accounting is to be assured through maintenance of existing at-sea fishery monitoring, both through on-board observer coverage and through shoreside monitoring through fishery cooperative structure.

j. A description of the proposed data collection and analysis methodology.

Proposed data collection is to maintain the observer coverage that applies under current regulations and abide by observer sampling protocols. Collection and analysis of bycatch data is to be consistent with existing bycatch data collection North of 42° N. latitude.

k. A description of how vessels will be chosen to participate in the EFP.

All mothership vessels are proposed to be eligible to participate in this EFP. Individual vessel operators may or may not participate at their discretion.

l. For each vessel covered by the EFP, the approximate time(s) and place(s) fishing will take place, and the type, size, and amount of gear to be used.

As previously described, this EFP would suspend a prohibition on processing only, there is no change to regulations addressing when and where fishing would take place or the fishing gear that would be used. To the extent that fishing in the mothership sector depends on proximity of mothership processors, harvesting activity is expected to increase South of 42° N. latitude during the regular time of the mothership whiting fishery. The timing of the mothership whiting fishery is closely related to the timing

of the Bering Sea pollock fishery. Typically fishing is concentrated in a spring fishery prior to the Bering Sea pollock "B" Season, which starts June 10, and a fall fishery that occurs after the Bering Sea pollock fishery is completed. Some limited fishing may occur throughout the summer. It is unlikely that all motherships would support harvesters fishing South of 42° N. latitude at once as mothership fleets tend to disperse to allow sufficient room on the grounds to work and several mothership companies have expressed a lack of enthusiasm for fishing South of 42° N. latitude due to fuel costs in steaming to and from the grounds. Fishing activity South of 42° N. latitude related to this EFP is thus anticipated to be sporadic and limited.

m. The signature of the applicant.

Brent Paine, Executive Director, United Catcher Boats.