

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT ON BIENNIAL
HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES
FOR 2017-2018 GROUND FISH FISHERIES

This report presents the results of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping and a schedule for regulation deeming and FMP transmittal.

NMFS would like to acknowledge the tremendous amount of work done by the GMT and Council staff in drafting the integrated alternatives and the preliminary new management measures analysis since the November Council meeting. Progress on the integrated alternatives analysis to date gives NMFS some confidence that a January 1, 2017, start date is achievable if the Council keeps the range of new management measures narrow.

Results of NEPA Scoping

NMFS conducted NEPA scoping on the 2017-2018 harvest specifications and management measures and has preliminarily determined that an Environmental Assessment is the proper level of NEPA for the 2017-2018 harvest specifications and routine management measures. Because scoping was conducted in January without the preliminary new management measures analysis this determination did not include the full suite of new management measures forwarded by the Council in November.

The 2017-2018 biennium is the first cycle with access to the long-term analysis completed in the 2015-2016 EIS. To evaluate the level of NEPA needed for the 2017-2018 harvest specifications and management measures, NMFS used the long term analysis in the 2015-2016 EIS to assess whether or not the 2017-2018 harvest specifications and routine management measure adjustments are within the range analyzed in the 2015-2016 EIS. If the item is within the previously analyzed range, the item was determined not to need further NEPA analysis for 2017- 2018. If the item was determined to not be within the range, we evaluated what level of further NEPA analysis was necessary. All of the routine management measure adjustments in the 2017- 2018 integrated alternatives analysis were within the range analyzed in 2015-2016 EIS and three items were determined to need further NEPA analysis. The three items needing further NEPA are: 1. Reclassifying big skate as in the fishery; 2. Widow rockfish harvest specifications; 3. Black rockfish harvest specifications in California. Because new management measures were not covered in the 2015-2016 analysis and NMFS has not fully evaluated the new measures, we will be conducting a final scoping meeting with the new management measures analysis and reporting those results and advice for the April Council meeting.

Deeming/FMP transmittal schedule

As in past harvest specification and management measure cycles, NMFS will work closely with Council staff to review regulations before publication in the proposed rule. To allow this collaboration, the schedule below includes delivery dates for draft regulations followed by several weeks of review and editing between NMFS and Council staff.

Preliminary schedule:

- 7/25/2016 – NMFS sends Council staff draft regulations for preliminary deeming review
- 8/5/2016 – NMFS sends final proposed regulations to Council staff
- 8/29/2016 – Council sends NMFS final proposed regulations, deeming letter, and transmits FMP Amendment 27
- FMP Notice of Availability, Proposed rule public comment period, final rule drafting and publication by NMFS – Fall/Winter 2016

Summary

In conclusion, NMFS believes that focusing on the harvest specifications, allocations, and routine management measures would lead to the greatest chance of meeting the January 1, 2017, implementation target date. Inclusion of all of the new management measures forwarded by the Council in November does create a significant workload that could impact timely implementation. Consistent with the Council's recommendation to prioritize a January 1, 2017, implementation date, NMFS recommends that the Council narrow its proposed new management measures at the April Council meeting to facilitate timely implementation of the 2017-2018 harvest specifications and management measures. Measures not included in the 2017-2018 biennial cycle can be scheduled in other Council discussions.